



Coach's Corner

By Larry Wise

Release Aid Training

I am guessing the first release aid was invented one day after the bow was invented. It was probably invented because that first archer had sore fingers. It wasn't a fancy device; maybe it was a smooth curved stick, a strap of rawhide or a bone ring of some sort. The first archer found a device of some kind to hook onto and draw the bowstring and his fingers weren't sore anymore.

The release aid solves some problems but opens the door to others. With the increase in accuracy that the release aid can give comes the possibility that you or someone you know will develop some form of snap shooting, trigger punching or freezing off the spot. These are all forms of release-aid dysfunction or "target panic." All of them produce high levels of frustration and can drive people crazy and out of archery forever. They can also cause bowhunters to miss or, worse, wound game animals.

There's a way to get through this problem, especially the problem of "punching" the trigger. It takes some work but I have helped many archers, both target shooters and bowhunters, to aim steadier and to better control the release process. Following is a method that you will be able to pass along to your customers if they are hampered by less-than-ideal release aid management skills and want to do better.

The real story, however, has to be about proper training with release aids. That takes an understanding of how the body works and how the release aid operates. More importantly, bowhunters need to know how the two can function best with each other. The following information will help you, the dealer, convey that to your customers.



Using a back-tension release like the T.R.U. Ball Sweet Spot to train and then your favorite trigger to hunt is what I recommend to all bowhunters. Learning to load and hold with your back muscles is essential to long-term, problem-free shooting. This is as close as you can get to a guarantee to making one shot count.

EXAMINING TRIGGER-STYLE RELEASE AIDS

INDEX TRIGGERS: The index-finger trigger release is the most popular release on the market. Just look around at the next local 3-D tournament you go to or at the local indoor club shoots you attend. That release is about all I see when I go bowhunting or watch bowhunting shows on television.

It is easy to understand why it is so popular; it is easy to use. The trigger feels like the trigger on a gun and the release straps onto your wrist so you can draw the bow without using your fingers to hold anything. You can wear a glove on your release hand if you want. Besides, everyone else is using one so it follows that they must be good and, in fact, they are good. It is not the device that is in question here; it is how the device is managed that is the issue.

To manage the index trigger properly, you must hold it properly. That means surrounding the trigger with your index finger so the second crease is contacting the trigger. I will say more about this later.

THUMB TRIGGERS: The thumb-trigger release aid also works great for any application. Many like the idea of holding the "T" handle style that makes it easy to draw the bow. I use a pinky trigger, which is shaped just like the thumb-trigger release, for hunting.

One advantage these releases give me is the ability to hook them onto the bowstring D-loop and let them hang there, ready to draw. Another is the ability to grab them with your fingers and use them to pull the bowstring with ease.

Like the index trigger, you have to manage these "T"



Here is a selection of some good index triggers. From left to right are the Tru-Fire Hurricane, the Cobra Trophy, the T.R.U. Ball Scout, the Spot-Hogg Wiseguy and the Scott Echo. Most triggers come with either a buckle strap or a Velcro strap to fit snugly to a bowhunter's wrist. Many also come with an adjustable shank length to adjust to an individual's finger length.

handles properly. To use them most consistently, the trigger should contact your thumb near the base and on the bone; don't use your thumb tip. (Read more about this in the next section.) Holding it in this manner enables you to use your back muscles to create holding elbow rotation in your effort to cause the release.

HINGE-STYLE AND RESISTANCE-ACTIVATED

Neither the back-tension hinge style release aid nor the similar resistance-activated release aid has a trigger. Instead, they discharge the bowstring as a result of action generated from your back muscles: an action that takes your conscious focus away from the trigger and places it on your back muscles.

The hinge-style release discharges the bowstring when its handle rotates relative to the head, which is hooked to the bowstring D-loop. Resistance-activated release aids discharge the bowstring when the pulling tension within the release mechanism overcomes a spring tension. In either case, the archer must generate this action by transferring their holding effort into their back and then increasing that effort through muscle contraction.

The important part is where you put your conscious focus. Focus on the trigger may lead to release dysfunctions like trigger anticipation or freezing. Focus on your back muscles instead is a far more reliable form of shot execution and what I teach for long-term shooting success.

THE RELEASE HAND

The brain manages the release aid through the hand that holds it. That is quite simple and we all know that. What most people don't know is how to properly use the hand. In

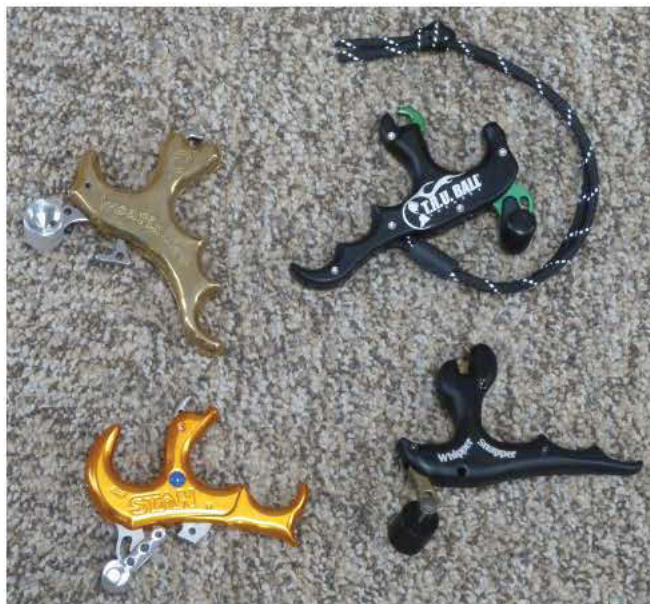
other words, they don't know how to hold the release aid in order to get the best long-term results, so that is where any program to improve release technique must start.

We use our hands all day long to hold, grip, manipulate and touch nearly everything we contact. The human hand with its opposable thumb is what enabled our ancestors to make and use tools. That is what our hands are designed to do: feel things and control them so we can use our tools. However, in archery, that can be our downfall if we do not use our hands to their best advantage.

The bow hand is a good example of the contradiction that archery presents; controlling the bow with the gripping bow hand actually produces poorer results. The more



Using the bow hand correctly means that it is relaxed, with the knuckles at a 45 degree angle and the thumb pointed to the target. Tightening the fingers and gripping are what we do with tools but should not do with the bow handle. If you allow it, the bow will consistently repeat its action; relax your bow hand.



Here are some popular thumb-trigger release aids that I recently pulled from the display at Weaver's Archery in Middleburg, Pennsylvania. Clockwise from the bottom left are the Stan SX-3, the Carter Insatiable, the T.R.U. Ball T-Rex and the Spot-Hogg Whipper Snapper. Most are available in two sizes, medium and large, to fit most hands. Many also feature an adjustable trigger position and length to fit most thumb shapes.



Some common back-tension and resistance-activated releases are shown here. Clockwise from the left are the Stan Perfex-R, a resistance (pull tension) release; the T.R.U. Ball Sweet Spot (with safety); the Tru-Fire Sear; the T.R.U. Ball Fulcrum and the Scott Anchor. I use and recommend these styles of release aids for training; many top professionals use them for all of their shooting. I use my back-tension hinge all year long to train my mind and back and then switch to a pinky-trigger for hunting.

you control the bow, the less likely it is you will produce repeatable performance and the less likely it is you will hit the target. You must learn to relax your bow hand fingers and thumb, join with the bow and allow the bow to freely repeat its mechanical action. The relaxed bow hand is more consistent.

Just as the bow hand must be used differently than you would first think, so must the release hand be used differently. Most archers/bowhunters I know want to hold the mechanical trigger release in their hand so only the index fingertip or thumb tip touches the trigger. After all, this is how they learned to shoot a gun; this is how you have total control. What they don't realize is that by using their finger- or thumb tip the way they do with the tools of their trade or profession, they are setting themselves up for some degree of failure.

A different approach has to be taken. The fingertips have a high density of tactile receptors in the dermis, which is the layer under the epidermis (outer skin layer). These receptors are linked by nerve fibers to the brain, where sensory impulses are processed, making our fingertips highly sensitive and sophisticated, much more so than the remaining parts of the finger or hand.

When the fingertip or thumb tip is placed on a trigger, the conscious brain is made aware of this "touching" sensation: more aware than if some other part of the finger or hand were touching the trigger. This high degree of awareness can become a problem. This "noticed" touching will distract the archer from focusing on the most important part of the shot process. It makes the trigger far more important than it should be. For some unlucky souls, the "trigger thought" becomes consuming until it is all they can think about. Believe me, as a coach, this is not a fun thing to watch and it is even worse to experience.

One way to avoid falling into this "release dysfunction" is to avoid placing your fingertip or thumb tip on the trigger. Instead of using the most sensitive part of your finger or thumb on the trigger, use a less sensitive part. To hold the

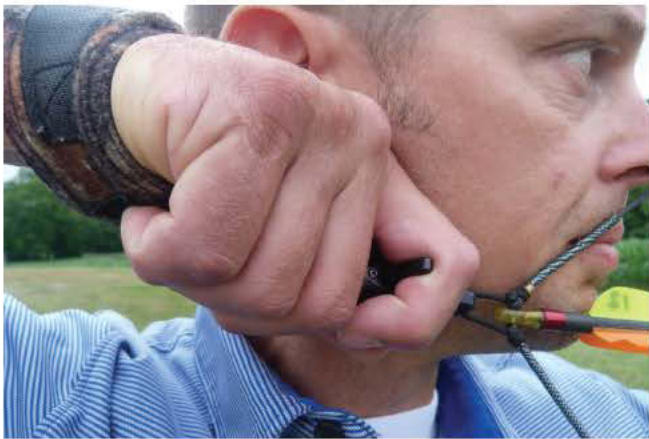
index trigger release properly, use the second joint of the index finger curled around the trigger. For a thumb trigger, extend the trigger length so it rides against the base of the thumb, thus avoiding your thumb tip.

Set the trigger tension to medium-heavy and surround it with the finger or thumb and you will be better able to avoid the problems that lead to target panic. What you want to do is create contact and light pressure between your finger and the trigger so you are not afraid to touch it. Many who want their trigger tension set lightly become afraid to touch it and become controlled by it. Besides, while you draw your hunting bow, you don't want a light bump on the trigger to set it off.

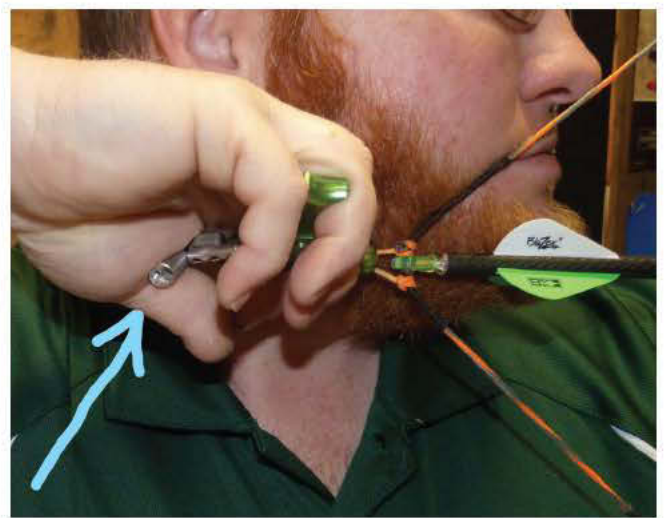
The ability to touch the trigger as you anchor allows you to easily move through the final phase of transfer of holding into your back muscles. You will not be focused improperly on the trigger or releasing. As you come to learn that back-holding is the most important part of the shot process, you will make it your point of conscious focus when shooting any scoring arrow. For sure, shooting at a game animal is shooting a scoring arrow.

My good friend and top professional Jack Wallace II just won the first ASA 3-D tournament of 2018 in Foley, Alabama. Jack shoots the Execute index trigger by T.R.U. Ball, so I asked him how he uses it. "I curl my finger around so the second segment is flat on the trigger," he answered. "I then try to create a one-to-one balance between the pressure in my back and the pressure in my finger. This results in that surprise release." Take Jack's advice here and incorporate it into your own shooting.

Sharon Wallace, Jack's wife, won the women's Pro class at the same tournament, using a thumb trigger. She adjusts her Stan Perfex release so the trigger contacts the middle segment of her thumb. This method of release holding allows Sharon to manage the high holding weight she prefers on her 3-D bow. Obviously, it is working well.



Surrounding the trigger with the index finger will place a much less sensitive part of the finger on the trigger. In this position, the conscious mind will be less likely interrupted from feeling your back muscles making the shot and better shooting will result. From this position, all fingers can be tightened once your back muscles are engaged.



The trigger on a thumb-style release aid should be extended so the trigger reaches the base of the thumb, as Jason from Weaver's Archery is demonstrating. In this position, your back contraction and elbow rotation will roll the release into the thumb base. This is far better than pushing the highly sensitive thumb tip into the trigger.



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THE BOW ARM

Your bow arm can be another problem source for shot execution. Many people do not extend the bow arm so the arm bones resist the force of the bow. Instead, they bend the arm at the elbow and recruit all of their arm muscles to hold the bow at full draw, thereby exposing themselves to inconsistency and muscle fatigue. Simply stated, the bent bow arm is held with lots of muscles and lowers your ability to repeat your shot process.

A fatigued bent arm can collapse. If that collapse is at the instant of release, then good groups in the target become impossible. Remember that your bow arm is attached to the same brain as your release arm/hand, which means a conscious action in one hand/arm can lead to a matched action in the other hand/arm; one anticipates the other and reacts to it. This is why a sensitive fingertip on a trigger works against you.

Here is a scenario I have seen far too often. An archer both holds their bow with a bent bow arm and touches the trigger with their fingertip. This combination marries two potential problems; the conscious brain sends a signal to the index trigger finger to activate the trigger and since the bow arm is not isolated from this conscious thinking, it collapses at the same time as or before the trigger is activated or before the trigger is "punched" in the worst cases.

The best bow arm is one that is extended so the lower arm bones are in line with the upper arm bone. It only takes a few small muscles to keep them in line and once they are in line, the bones will resist the force of the bow without fatiguing or collapsing. Your aligned leg bones do this all day long as they keep your butt off the floor.

LEARNING HOW TO SHOOT CONSISTENTLY

This is what everyone wants to do: shoot consistently. However, the price you have to pay is steep and not everyone is willing to pay that price. Making yourself better requires practice but not just any practice; you must commit to doing the right practice.

Shooting more arrows only reinforces the bad habits you already have, so you must change how and what you practice. Here is the most important part of the change you have to make: while drawing, you must learn to transfer your drawing effort into holding effort in your back muscles. Then, while holding, use that holding tension/contraction to execute the release. Holding with your back muscles allows for the relaxation of your drawing arm during the "hold and

Your bow arm should be extended so the arm bones align to resist the force of the bow. Bending the elbow to hold the bow recruits all of your arm muscles, resulting in fatigue and unsteadiness. To understand this, just try standing with your knees bent for a few minutes.



Here is top 3-D and PSE professional Jack Wallace II winning the first ASA tournament of 2018 in Foley, Alabama. Jack practices with an HBC back-tension hinge style release and most often uses his T.R.U. Ball Execute trigger in tournaments. He uses both to stay at his peak level of performance.

Sharon Wallace used the Stan Perflex thumb trigger to shoot and win in the women's ASA Unmarked 3-D division. She also won again in Foley, Alabama recently. Sharon trains with her Stan Perflex-R resistance release and then uses the Perflex, which has the very same handle but is a thumb model, for competition. Note that she surrounds the trigger with her thumb, utilizing the thumb base and her back muscles to create pressure on the trigger.



release" phase, which results in your release hand and arm escaping in the exact opposite direction of the arrow. Your hand won't fly out to the side, away from your face or drop down or move toward the target. The properly placed and relaxed release wrist and arm will perform consistently and correctly and exhibit a proper follow-through while yielding accuracy.

Now comes the hard part: learning how to hold your bow with your back. To do this, you have to actually use a back tension or resistance-activated release aid. You cannot learn to swim by watching from the riverbank; you have to get into the water. To learn how to use your back muscles, you have to draw the bow with a back-tension release aid in your hand and then learn to execute with proper technique.

Once learned, that correct process can then be transferred to another release aid for hunting. The tough part for many archers is making the commitment to learning the process and then relearning how to hold an old release with

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the proper bow arm and release hand, transferring the hold into the back, maintaining that hold and then and only then executing the release. I know it is easier to do it some other way and many do but no other method is more consistent in making that first shot count in high-value situations.

PROPER HOLDING POSITION . . . AGAIN

Proper posture when you are holding your bow is essential to good release technique. I have written about it in at least 50 articles and a book, "Core Archery." Your head, shoulders, release hand and bow arm must be held in the most biomechanically efficient position if you want to shoot with your highest level of consistency. That is to say the archer must stand with the proper full-draw holding position. If you don't stand with the correct posture to shoot archery, then you can practice until your arms fall off and you won't reach your full potential.

When is a person correctly at full draw? How do you know for sure when your customer is holding their bow properly? What are the visual clues to full-draw position or holding position? To answer these questions, you need to know the standard model that defines a biomechanically efficient holding position.

DEFINITION: Full-draw position or holding position is formed when you draw the bowstring and place your shoulder blade and back muscles in the most effective location for executing back tension.



From the front, holding position will show the drawing elbow at least as high as the arrow nock. Slightly higher is good as well because of the related shoulder blade position and its ability to move when back tension is executed.

This picture below right shows a good example. What you should notice most about the archer in the picture is her drawing forearm. You should see that from a top view, her drawing forearm is in direct line with the arrow shaft. This tells you and me that her drawing shoulder is positioned so that her left-side back muscles – the rhomboid muscles – can have maximum leverage on her scapula (shoulder blade). In short, in this position, she can transfer her holding power out of her arms and into her back muscles; she is able to relax most of her arm muscles. In this position, she can aim steadier, execute the shot more consistently and have proper follow-through.

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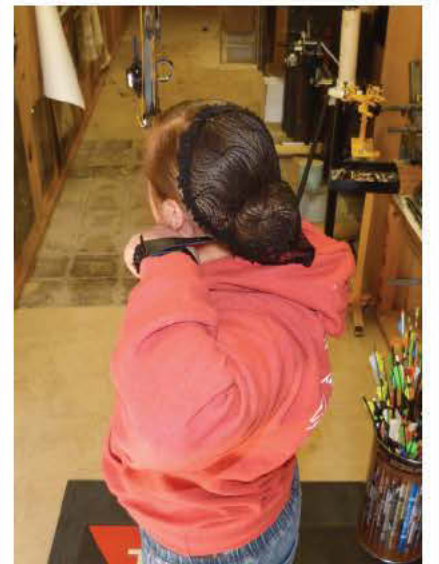
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Learning how to stand at full draw is essential to executing the archery shot with back tension. Here, Sherry from Weaver's Archery demonstrates upright posture, with the chin level, the shoulders set back and down, an extended bow arm and a holding forearm that is in line with the arrow shaft. Only after the drawing arm is in line with the arrow shaft can she transfer "holding" into her back muscles, creating the best chance for consistent shot execution.

The full-draw front view should show either the archer's drawing arm level with the arrow shaft or their elbow slightly elevated. Their drawing arm should never be below the shaft, as this would push their scapula too close to their spine and significantly reduce the ability of their back muscles to hold and to complete the shot process. It is all about leverage in the back muscles.

From behind the shooter, you should see that their drawing



An archer's follow-through indicates proper back-muscle tightening between the spine and the shoulder blade. Prior to release activation, the force on the holding elbow is trying to rotate it around the shoulder joint. This rotation occurs while the arrow remains stationary on the arrow rest. The elbow is actually moving perpendicular to the arrow in a plane that is tilted about 30 degrees from horizontal, as shown by the follow-through. Pulling the bowstring away from the target does not make the back-tension release discharge the bowstring; rotation does.



Your follow-through should show that your elbow has rotated around your shoulder for a short distance in a tilted plane, as shown.

ing elbow aligns directly behind the arrow shaft. If it is rotated too far around, then they have drawn too far and the drawlength of the bow is too long. If their elbow has not rotated far enough to align with the arrow, then the draw length of their bow may be too short. Reset the draw length of the bow until the shooter can stand correctly in

full-draw position and align their drawing forearm with the arrow shaft.

Your shoulder alignment is also important. From a front view, your shoulders should be held level with each other. Raising either shoulder recruits unneeded muscles and produces a weaker bone alignment.

From a top view, the shoulder line should be rotated to be parallel to the arrow. Again, the focus here is to establish a bone alignment that will efficiently resist the force of the bow. A bow that is set too short will prevent you from establishing proper shoulder alignment.

Shooting archery well is all about body position. It is all about maximizing the use of your skeleton and minimizing muscle use. It is about relaxing as much muscle as possible and that happens when the force you need to draw the bow is transferred into your back and out of your arms. Fitting customers to this standard is the first big step on the path to consistency.

USING A BACK-TENSION RELEASE AID

Once your "hold" has been transferred into the back muscles (the rhomboids), finishing the shot requires a subtle increase in that holding tension/muscle tightness. This tightening in the back muscles causes the upper arm/holding elbow to rotate around the shoulder joint; the elbow does not move directly away from the target, as many try to do. The elbow rotates a microscopic amount in a slightly tilted plane (tilted about 40 degrees to the horizontal) and this rotational force is what causes the back-tension hinge-style

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release aid to discharge the bowstring.

You can pull directly away from the target all you want but the hinge-style release will not discharge until the handle has a rotational force applied to it; that is the way that sort of release works. Most of my first-time students work really hard at pulling the back-tension release directly away from the target as though they are pulling more of the arrow across the rest and have to learn there is an easier way that takes finesse instead of brute force. Once they learn to rotate their holding elbow around their shoulder joint, their execution process gets easier and their groups get tighter.

The pressure-activated or resistance-activated release works slightly differently. These releases do activate internally when a pulling force is applied: a pulling force directly away from the target. Most pressure-activated releases require a safety to be in place when drawing the bow. Once you are in the holding position, you can release the safety and then use your back-tension and chest expansion effort to apply a pulling pressure on the release aid. Some elbow rotation will also result.

When set properly, this release aid will activate internally and discharge the bowstring in a four to eight second time frame. Be advised that this method is more dynamic than the back tension used with the hinge-style release, so a little more physical effort and movement are involved.

USING THE BACK-TENSION AND TRIGGER IN PRACTICE: To build and maintain good shooting skills, you need to practice with both kinds of release aid. That is no problem for me, as I use a back-tension hinge all year while shooting my target bows. When hunting season comes, I use my old favorite Pinky Boss trigger, for which I use the same hand/wrist position. However, if I stay on the trigger for any length of time, I find my form slipping as my back gets a little lazy and "trigger thoughts" begin to creep into my mind.

Practice with the hinge-style (or resistance-style) back tension release is a must every week if you want peak accuracy, even during hunting season.

Getting started is the challenge, so practice the following steps.

PRACTICE REGIMEN FOR BACK TENSION

STEP 1: The first step to practicing with a back-tension release aid is learning how to operate it. I teach beginners how to do this without the bow. Instead of a bow, I have them use either a rope loop or a Saunders Firing Line



A simple rope loop made of any kind of cord can be used as a portable practice bow. Other, more sophisticated devices can be used, like the Saunders Firing Line. These devices can be used anytime and anywhere to get in a little practice without being at the archery range. I use all of these aids for my coaching and teaching because they are highly effective.

practice aid. To further remove the fear element from the learning process, I recommend your students use a release aid with a safety on it.

STEP 2: Use the practice apparatus often. By "often," I mean three or four times a day. Short, frequent learning sessions will bring a higher retention level for the skill being learned. The rope loop and the release aid can be carried with you during the day and when you get a break, you can make three or four practice shots. You don't have to make many practice shots but the ones you do make have to be done correctly; it is about quality, not quantity. Remember, you are trying to rebuild your conscious thought process as well as the physical action needed to shoot consistently with back tension. You are trying to tighten back muscles in order to hold the bowstring and to cause a rotation of the holding elbow that will cause the release aid to discharge.

STEP 3: After three weeks of using the practice apparatus, you can begin using your bow at the blank bale. Stand close, 5 yards, to the bale. Remove any target face from the bale. In fact, it is best to close your eyes for this practice so your conscious thinking can be totally focused on control-

ling the back-muscle action needed to set off the release aid.

Most people do not listen to me and keep their eyes open. As I watch them shoot, I can see them aiming the second arrow at the first arrow they shot into the target butt and instantly I know that their conscious mind is focused on aiming and not on building a new muscle action. Keeping your eyes closed and your mind focused on the back-muscle action is the quickest way to getting results.

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with the apparatus. Do not ever stop this important practice. It is important to reinforce the proper back-muscle action in order to overcome any previous release-aid dysfunctions. Remember, some of those problems took years to create and will take months to overcome.

STEP 4: After three weeks of shooting both the practice apparatus and the bow, you can begin shooting a few shots at a target face. First shoot 10 shots at the blank bale, then shoot 10 shots at a target face at 10 yards. Then go back to the blank bale for more practice. Always begin and end at the blank bale, where you can consciously focus on the muscle process.

STEP 5: After five practice sessions, repeat step 4 but move back to 15 yards and take 15 shots. Always begin and end at the blank bale. After five successful practices, move back to 20 yards and take 20 shots at the target face. After that, you can move to varied distances from the target face but always begin and end at the blank bale in order to reinforce the proper back-muscle action.

STEP 6: You are now ready to practice with both releases. Be sure to adjust the trigger release so you can hold it properly. As mentioned earlier in this article, you need to surround the trigger with the second crease of your index finger or extend the thumb trigger to contact the base of your thumb.

Begin at the blank bale to establish good transfer into your back muscles while using the trigger. Set your trigger tension to medium-heavy. As you establish anchor, be sure to surround the trigger with your finger (or thumb) and learn to be comfortable with your finger touching the trigger; this is important, as the trigger must feel as though it is a part of you and not a separate entity to be overcome.

Next, be sure to complete the transfer of holding into your back muscles. Once this is completed, you can elevate this contraction (tension) to produce the same rotational force on your upper arm and the elbow that you use with the back-tension release. With this force continuing to work, you must then begin to slowly tighten all your release-hand fingers. The joining of these two forces will eventually cause the release to discharge the bowstring.

With your conscious mind focused on the work of your muscles, you will not know when the release is going to discharge. This is a “surprise” release. Focus on the feel of your working muscles and you will learn to enjoy proper shooting technique. With practice, you will become efficient and your shot technique will reach its highest level of repetition.

STEP 7: Move to other distances with a target, being sure to execute each shot according to step 6’s routine. Do not deviate. If you find yourself cheating on a shot, go back to your hinge or resistance release for a few shots. Do not take shortcuts and do not expect overnight results. Practice.

CONCLUSION

There are lots of back-tension release aids on the market that will help anyone/everyone build the skills necessary to shoot a mechanical release aid properly. Learning to transfer the “hold” into the back muscles is essential to developing the best technique for shooting archery and those releases do that. The biggest problem for the dealer and for me as a

coach is getting our customers/students to commit to learning that technique because it seems they just don’t want to give up their old “trigger” in order to get better at shooting.

As a dealer, you can plant the seeds for learning back tension in your customers’ minds and hope they take the idea seriously. Unfortunately, most wait until their release aid dysfunction is so bad that they are ashamed to admit it, they quit archery or they finally give in to the inevitable and ask someone like you what they should do to fix the problem. The ones that come to you for help can follow what I have outlined in this article and get better at shooting; it will be a start.

It is the ones that do not come in for help that really hurt archery because they just quit and we never see them again. Regardless, we have to keep getting the word out that there is a way to deal with the release aid dysfunctions called “target panic” and learn to shoot accurately for lots of years.

Keep well; shoot straight.

Larry

Editor’s Note: Larry Wise is available to conduct one and two day CoreArchery Academies on shooting form. Reach him by email at larry@larrywise.com or give him a call at (717) 436-9168. Wise has a DVD title: “Core Archery Back Tension: Defined and Demonstrated.” The DVD is available at www.larrywise.com for \$19.95. Check out past articles by Wise at the twin websites of *ArrowTrade*. Use arrowtrademag.com for high-speed connections or see arrowtrademagazine.com for PDF downloads of articles.

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