

A BOWHUNTER'S FAVORITE WORDS

Bow season is coming.

Four words every bowhunter loves to hear. And the closer we get to October 1st the more the anticipation builds. We start thinking about things like food plots and favorite places to hunt. We spend money on equipment and accessories to enhance our hunting experience, boost our confidence and, hopefully, seal the deal on a successful hunt. We watch hunting videos and The Outdoor Channel to get ourselves pumped up. But what about when that day you've waited eight or nine months for finally comes? You're up in your tree. You have been patiently watching black dark slowly turn to daylight and enjoying the woods coming to life with birds and maybe a tree limb shaking as a squirrel hurries from tree to tree to start his day. Suddenly, as you look where only seconds ago there was nothing, now there stands the first deer of the season. This is it. This is what you're here for. Your heart rate instantly increases. You can't do anything yet because the deer, although it doesn't see you, is looking in your direction. The anticipation has your heart pounding so hard in your chest you actually hope the deer doesn't hear it and spook. Then, after what seemed like enough time for your beard to grow

STORY & PHOTOS
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some, the deer turns its head to look in the opposite direction, providing you with the opportunity you've been waiting for. Not wasting a second you draw your bow. You come to full draw. You're on it. It looks good. You release and your arrow takes off like a guided missile. Now, press pause here and let me ask you, what did you do to prepare for this moment? How did you practice?

Through the years practicing for bow season has included many options and methods. When I was a kid back in the 60's and 70's the popular thing to do was buy two or three bales of hay, stack them one on top of the other, stick a paper plate on the middle of them and shoot from whatever distance felt comfortable. When I was in high school in the late 70's I developed my own method of practicing. We had several large pine trees in our back yard so there was always an annoying abundance of pine cones. We also had a large patio with a flat and slightly sloping roof over it. I would get on the roof and shoot pine cones. It was always an unknown distance and I would never shoot at the same pine cone twice in a row. Being an instinctive shooter even during the sixteen years I shot a compound was how I taught myself the importance of making that first shot count. I also learned another very important concept with this method that I still pass along to people I am introducing to archery. Practice on tiny targets in addition to the larger ones. Tiny targets like pine cones, ping pong balls, etc. will narrow your focus down so that the smaller the target the smaller the miss. I always

felt if I could hit a pine cone or even hit within a couple inches of it a deer should be no problem.

Keep in mind that I am a traditional archer so it's not likely that I will be drilling any ping pong balls at fifty or sixty yards like a compound shooter. But compound shooters need to practice too. You still need a rock steady bow arm to get the smoothest release possible.

In the early 90's I was introduced to another method of practice. This was when I fell in love with 3D competition. I began participating

in every 3D competition I could get myself to. Walking a trail through the woods and shooting a variety of thirty animal targets was so much fun I found myself unsure of which I enjoyed more, bowhunting or 3D competition. After all, I could spend a whole weekend bowhunting and not see a thing. But I could spend one day at a competition and shoot thirty different animals and not have to skin any of them. Not to mention the wonderful fellowship with friends and the new friendships that were born on a 3D range.



Robert Daley

I could not believe that so many people were enjoying 3D competition, but this had become a big deal. It seemed like everyone was doing it and so many have told me over the years that this helps them prepare for bow season. When I was at Enid Lake the third weekend in May for Southern Traditional Archery's Jerry Pierce Memorial Shoot I spoke with some people about this and all of them said 3D competition through the spring and summer months is what hones their skill and gets them ready for bow season.

So while backyard practice can get you ready for 3D competition what is it about the 3D range that is so much better for bow season preparation? It's really very simple. First, many of the targets may be set up to resemble actual hunting situations. You may have to pick an opening to shoot through or you may have to shoot between two trees to hit the kill zone, which can be very distracting and intimidating. But is that not the same kind of situation one might have to deal with when bowhunting? So, on the range you may experience

shots that are not impossible, but challenging. Second is a variety of different animals which also means targets of various sizes. This way you're not shooting the same thing thirty times. And third is the distance to the targets. It's going to be different for each one. We don't measure yardage when we set up a range so the distance is just whatever it is, just like when you're hunting.

I feel a need to add something here. Don't avoid 3D competition because you lack confidence. Don't worry about first, second, or third place, or about being able to shoot as good as everyone else. Instead, concentrate more on becoming the best you can be. The 3D range is a great place to do that. So if you feel intimidated by competition then maybe you should make your purpose not about competing with other shooters but rather about competing against yourself. At each shoot strive to shoot better than you did at the last one.

Another advantage to 3D competition is learning to make that first shot count because one shot per target is all you're gonna get. It's frustrating to take a shot thinking it looks so good and then watch your arrow hit too far to either side, too high or too low or, worst of all, miss the target completely.

In August of 2017 I was at a shoot in Carthage, Mississippi. I had gotten there too late to shoot the whole range with my group of traditional shooters so I had to go back and shoot the first eight targets with a group of compound shooters. At each of those targets, without exception, at least one and sometimes two compound



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shooters missed the whole target because they misjudged the distance and used the wrong pin. I'm not a compound shooter so I have to wonder if practicing more at unknown distances could have prevented that. I'll have to let the compound shooters educate me by being the ones to answer that one. I do know that shooting with sights requires them to either know distance by the use of a range finder or be better skilled at judging yardage. How many of those targets did I miss, you may ask? Well, I think I will gladly answer that one in private conversation outside of this article. I will say that I chose to shoot from the same stake as the compounders and had a wonderful time shooting with them as they graciously welcomed me into their group.

Recently, someone asked me if I thought 3D competition was on its way out. I hope the answer to that is no. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be as much participation as there was ten or more years ago. I'm not qualified to say exactly why that is. Maybe it's a combination of reasons. I know for some their jobs have required more of their time, including having to work on weekends.

I do believe we need to continue promoting and supporting 3D competition to keep it alive. We need to get more kids involved in archery so there will be a younger generation to take over and keep it going. So many of the people who have been doing this for the past twenty-five or thirty years are not as physically able to set up a range as they used to be. Let me tell you, setting up a range and taking it down is work and the summer heat doesn't make it any easier. Let's face it, the future of our sport is in the hands of our youth. We need more archers.

In closing I want to remind you that 3D competition is a wonderful way to get you prepared for the upcoming bow season. Oh, by the way, remember the hunting scenario that I was describing at the beginning of the article where I had you up in a tree and you had just drawn down and released on, not a target this time, but the real thing? Congratulations, great shot and a very nice deer! Now, aren't you glad you practiced and prepared yourself for this moment? My friends and fellow archers, bow season is coming. Get ready.



Jonathan Wright