By Brian Grossman

Most of us were taught growing up that practice makes perfect. For most things in life that is pretty sound advice, but when it comes to bowhunting, not all practice is equal.

There was a time, not too long ago, when archery practice consisted of a couple of square bales of straw and a paper plate or pie pan. We would strategically place our bales safely in the yard, attach our target, and proceed to step off twenty yards to begin a marathon practice session. Standing in perfect form, we would launch arrow after arrow into our bales, occasionally moving forwards or backwards to shoot at distances equal to those of the pins on our sights. This would go on until our arms got tired or we finally had a group that we were proud of. For many archers today, the quality of the targets has greatly improved, but the routine remains the same.

Don't get me wrong - there is absolutely nothing wrong with this type of practice. In fact it is an excellent way to solidify one's form and to train the muscles so that the shooting routine becomes second nature. It should be a part of every archer's practice schedule. When it comes to preparing oneself for bowhunting, though, this type of practice has its limitations. The biggest being that it fails to cover many of the shooting variables that can come into play under actual hunting conditions. Only when we recognize how these variables can effect our shot, can we effectively work them into our practice routine. And with practice come preparedness and confidence to make that shot-of-a-lifetime when it comes our way.

Distance

I would dare say that more opportunities at deer are blown due to misjudging distance than for any other single reason. Even with the blazing speeds of today's bows, it still only takes a small

miscalculation to send your arrow into parts unknown, or even worse, into a non-vital area of the deer.

Many of today's well-equipped hunters have offset this problem with the purchase of a laser rangefinder. With just the touch of a button, you can know within a yard just how for away a critter is. If such a purchase fits into your budget, then I highly recommend it. However, owning a rangefinder is not a replacement for being able to estimate yardage on your own. Batteries can fail, or deer can slip in without giving a bowhunter the opportunity to get a reading with a rangefinder. Because of this, every bowhunter should be proficient at judging yardage out to their maximum shooting range. To do so requires regular practice.

There are several ways that you can work on this, and you don't always have to have your bow in hand. Improving your rangefinding can be as simple as picking out an object in the yard, guessing how far away it is, then stepping it off to see how close your guess was. You can do this whether you are out in the yard working, walking in the park, or out scouting your favorite hunting spot. Just be sure to practice in both wooded and open areas, because there can be a real difference in distance perception between the two.

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