

The Evolution of B.E.S.T.

by Robert deBondt

IN MY PREVIOUS ARTICLE IN THE LAST ISSUE, I DISCUSSED with you, the *Stance*, the *Set-Up*, *Drawing*, and *Loading/Anchor* and concluded with discussing *Transfer*, which is a particularly important step, more often than not bypassed by a majority of archers. I will briefly recap this step to refresh your memory.

Transfer

What does ‘transfer’ mean? When you pull back the bow you will have to use a certain amount of hand and forearm, as you just can not pull the string back with your back muscles alone. To be able to come to ‘Holding’ we need to transfer the tension in the hand and forearm. We can achieve this by visualizing that the draw fingers are connected to the draw elbow via chains.

“In front of line is bad; in line is good and beyond line is better.”

Further, if we divide the body in two halves parallel to the shooting plane, then the tension in the front half needs to be transferred as much as possible to the core muscles in the back. Without this transfer we can never come to Holding or be able to go from a linear to an angular movement. On the whole, Transfer can be seen as a phase or a step in commitment to the shot.

Therefore, the basic steps to come to ‘Holding’ are: Set-up → Loading → Anchoring → Transfer → Holding

These are the crucial steps which, when taught correctly and learned correctly, will allow you to perform better under competitive pressure, especially Match Play. Coach Lee coached one particular female archer who shot 1340 regularly in practice, but struggled to even shoot 1300 in competition. The reason? No holding! As this archer had been shooting for many years, it took a considerable time and effort to successfully teach this step, which allowed her to achieve more closely her practice scores in competition.

Holding

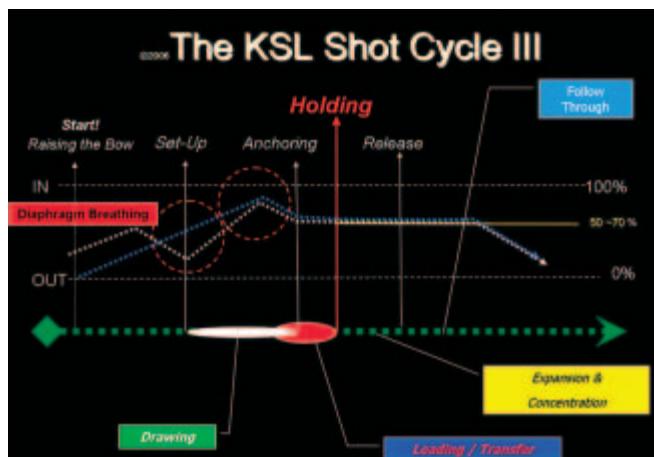
As I have already highlighted, Holding is a crucial step in the process. It therefore should be clear by now that the teaching method of “continuous linear external movement” is flawed, as Holding can never be reached and as such becomes an obstacle to shooting consist-

tently high scores. Holding is crucial for angular expansion and is fundamental for consistency.

Aiming

Having achieved Holding we are now ready to start the Aiming and Expansion phases. Do not check your clicker position again, as it will shift your focus and you will lose the mental connection with your back muscles. Total focus must be on the expansion and the execution of the shot; aiming is only secondary. I would guess that 95% of all archers put too much focus on aiming and as such lose the connection with their core muscles to execute the shot. Further, you must allow your sight pin to float around, as your subconscious will always bring it back to your aiming spot. You can compare it a bit to driving a car on a straight road; you will continually move the steering wheel to keep it in a straight line, whilst focussing on the road ahead.

At this stage I would also like to touch on breathing. It is recommended that at the commencement of the draw a Zen in-breath is taken to create a natural feeling of gaining strength. Prior to anchoring, the breath must be let out slowly in a natural and relaxed manner until the lungs reach about 70%-50% of their capacity. This exhalation will allow the sight to naturally settle on the gold or aiming mark. The breath must be held from anchoring till the Followthrough is completed, as shown on the KSL Shot Cycle III.



Note The difference between the blue and white dotted line in the diagram is that the white breathing line is recommended for developing archers and the blue for the more experienced archers.

The time span between Holding and release should ideally be not more than three seconds, as after three seconds your brain will start to wander and stray thoughts start entering your mind. Also, due to muscular strain, body oscillations will start to increase, adversely affecting the shot.

Expansion

The expansion is achieved by bringing the draw elbow behind in conjunction with the draw and bow arm scapula being squeezed towards the spine. In doing this step, Coach Lee has found that most archers lose the connection between the draw hand and draw scapula, as the main focus has gone to the muscles controlling the scapula movement. To prevent this happening Coach Lee now has archers focus on a spot, which he has called Lan2 (*see photo below*), to push this spot behind, which at the same time will bring the draw elbow behind the line of force and the scapula towards the spine. This angular movement will open up the chest creating a linear movement, sufficient for the arrow point to travel the last few millimetres



through the clicker. The notion that the point of the draw elbow, when viewed from above, should be in line with the arrow and not beyond is therefore a fallacy. For that reason, in front of line is bad; in line is good and beyond line is better.

Release

The string must push the drawing fingers out of the way and the draw fingers must not be consciously opened, as this is not possible to do within the time frame. The draw fingers should basically maintain the hook formed as when drawing the bow, then only the fingers are relaxed on release. The position of the little finger should be kept in the same position as when at anchor and that position must be maintained throughout the release. Any change in position or tension of the little finger will affect the tension in the actual drawing fingers.

In addition the back of the draw hand must remain in the same position/plane throughout the followthrough and must not be turned or allowed to drop on the shoulder.

Archers who exhibit straight fingers of the draw hand after release have tried to open their fingers consciously and as such their focus has shifted from their back muscles to their draw fingers, resulting in loss of back tension and control of the shot.

Length of Release The length of release is recommended to be longer, rather than shorter. As the length of the release is dictated by back tension, the longer release will facilitate and generate more back tension throughout the shot.

On release the 50/50 balance in the shot needs to be maintained. If on release the draw side overpowers the front side, the bow arm will move to the right and vice versa to the left (right-handed archer), or the body will move forward or backward. As such, the release hand needs to be synchronised with the bow hand. A detailed description, too long to reproduce here, is on our website, refer to FAQ/Question 49.

Relaxation & Feedback

At the conclusion of the Followthrough the body and mind need to get ready for the next shot and must let go of any tension and/or anxiety. It is also time for unemotional analytical feedback to recognize corrective action, if any, to be taken on the next shot. At this stage Zen breathing is also advocated.

Basically this concludes the various steps in the B.E.S.T. method. Obviously, it is impossible in a few articles to go into every detail, as we do in our book Total Archery and on our website. However, I hope these few articles have given you a better appreciation and insight into the B.E.S.T. method. Obviously, there are always disbelievers, but I do think that Coach Lee's successful record over the past 25 years speaks volumes for itself.