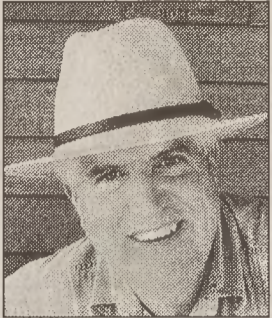


# SPORTS

## The worst kind of henpecking is on the shotgun range

### OFF THE PORCH



DICK JONES  
Outdoor Columnist

I'm in a terrible slump on clay targets. A little over a year ago, I was shooting clays better than I ever had in my life. I shot several 25 out of 25s on five stand and wobble trap, I was shooting like a natural shotgunner and feeling very good about myself. Now, I'm not sure I could hit my own foot if it had a clay target on it.

It's a most frustrating situation and it happens to everyone who participates in anything that requires practice and effort. I'm kind of ashamed of it, though I know that it's temporary because I've been through it before. The comeback will require effort, but I have a reasonable expectation I'll come back strong.

The fact is, though, I'm not a natural shotgunner. I'm an uncoordinated spaz who can't walk and chew chewing gum at the same time. The main reason I got interested in shooting in my youth was because I stunk at regular sports. I won my class at the first pistol match I ever shot and the first time I ever shot an M14 rifle in a High Power rifle match, I

won first Marksman in the 1984 North Carolina State Championship.

When it comes to holding a gun steady and keeping it on target while pulling the trigger, I'm a natural. Shooting a pistol or rifle is easy for me for some reason. Shooting a shotgun is a whole different ballpark. I struggle with it because it requires hand/eye coordination. The problem is, I love shooting shotguns, too.

For some reason, my slump isn't affecting my ability to shoot real birds. I've been hunting a lot lately to get the most out of the ending game preserve season and I've been slaying ducks, pheasants, and chukars with regularity. I make long shots, shots in tight places, and shots that are a total surprise with equal ease. Clay targets are, for some reason, another matter.

For me to shoot a shotgun well, I have to really work at it and I haven't been doing that enough. My psyche is suited to focusing on the target, making everything as perfect as possible and allowing my finger to break the trigger and fire the gun. Adding movement to that equation complicates things for me, but I can manage provided I don't think too much. When I was shooting well, I was shooting a lot. I was in the groove and confident. Confidence makes one able to block out negative thoughts and negative thoughts make a spaz even more inept.

I know why I have the problem; I just have to shake it by shooting

enough to get back my confidence. What makes this especially difficult is that my wife, Cherie, was going through a slump, too, but she's recovering much faster than I am. Only those of us lucky enough to have a spouse who shoots knows the misery involved in being outshot by the woman we encouraged to learn to shoot.

The last few times we've shot together, Cherie's outshot me. In fact, last fall, she taught my friend, Terry Pickett's wife, Sara, to shoot and the last time I shot with Sara, she outshot me, too.

My affliction with clay targets comes from a lack of confidence. To those who have great hand/eye coordination, this may seem strange but to a life-

long spaz, it's not funny.

Shooting a shot gun well requires a smooth, confident swing that tracks the target and allows the trigger finger to do its work at the most opportune moment. If the shooter lacks confidence, his swing is jerky and the shot just doesn't break at the right time. This allows the little clay disk to continue its flight unimpeded and damages the confidence of the poor jerk even more. The reason I'm shooting at real birds so well is because I don't have time to think about failure when a chukar, pheasant, or duck tries to wing its way to the next county. In most situations, I'm thinking more about Larry, my lab, and what he's doing and the shot

just comes reflexively.

Thinking about what's going to happen when the gun goes off breaks down the ability to let the shot happen naturally and I, and anyone else afflicted with self doubt, tend to stop my swing and second guess my lead which causes a miss. In other words, I have everything I need to break the target, I'm just analyzing it too much.

Russell Jones, a shooting buddy of mine who won the 1989 Wimbledon Match, (the long range shooting equivalent of the Daytona 500,) said this after the match. "It

was the easiest match I ever shot, I didn't think about having problems so I didn't have any problems. Shooting a good score is easy, everything goes right. Shooting a bad score is hard, everything goes wrong and you're struggling to deal with it."

This happens to everyone from time to time; I know that, by shooting regularly, I'll get back in the groove. Right now, I'm struggling with it and the women who are outshooting me aren't making it any easier.

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Eliot,  
I just wanted to take a few minutes to thank you for your coverage of the Lady Eagles over the last 3 years. I appreciate your support and kind words so much. I have kept a scrapbook for Elizabeth for each of her 4 years as an EDHS athlete. I have so many great articles in it, thanks to you, Zach, and the Times. I know she will treasure all of the wonderful memories and share them with her own children and grandchildren someday.

Susan Merritt  
proud mom of #43

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