



BEGINNERS TO WINNERS

Putting it into practice

Over the last few years, we've looked at many things in our Beginners to Winners series. I've gained a lot from writing it and I hope you've learned a bit from it too. The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating and it's now time to put what we've learnt into practice so this month Beginners to Winners is a diary of my thoughts and experiences at this year's World Championships at the Kelmarsh Game Fair.

As I sit here at my PC, it's Friday the 29th March and Kelmarsh is two days away. My preparation for the weekend starts now and the nerves have all ready begun to kick in. The first thing that I have had to do is check the weather sites like Metcheck and the BBC. They've told me that this weekend will be cold and dry, but even though these sites are fairly accurate, it's always a good idea to pack some extra clothes just in case it's wet.

I have a checklist to remind me of everything I need for a major competition and also a place in my car

for everything I need. The last thing you want is to be running around trying to find pellets or a glove when you should be walking out on to a course.

For me, though, this year is special because I'm representing my country and as part of the six-man Team England, I can feel the weight of expectation on my shoulders and this goes along with a huge amount of pride in wearing my country's colours.

Outside in my garden it's about two degrees and this will be very similar to the sort of weather that we'll be shooting in at the weekend, so it's time to get my final practice in and also check the rifle through my chronograph. I need to make sure that I'm all legal and everything is running correctly.

Saturday

We've now arrived at our hotel and the rooms are warm and comfortable. I have the new series of Doctor Who on the telly and a cup of tea in my hand; however, the nerves are starting to get to me. I've never really suffered with them before,

Above: Dutch team member Mirjam Stark takes a shot with a very British airgun

but they're starting to kick in. I've sorted out my kit and made sure my gun bag is stocked for the following day with pellets, glove, water and muesli bars.

Sunday Day 1

Well it's cold, the ground is frozen, but that could be an advantage. As it begins to thaw, it's going to become a quagmire. I've been to the zero range and the gun is perfect. I only shot 10 pellets, three at 15 yards, three at 30 yards and four at 40 yards and they all hit where they should, so there's no need to spend any more time there.

I'm shooting with Welsh team member, Andy Jones, and Rivi shooter Andy Wilson. They're both great guys and I know that I'll have a lot of fun over the next few days. My only concern is that it will be too much fun and I will not concentrate on the job at hand.

I've had a few people come up to me and wish me luck as I'm now wearing my England team jacket and the pressure has just jumped up a notch. It's an honour to wear it, but as I've never shot in



before, I'm going to make the hard decision to leave it in the car and shoot in my Swedteam gear. I know that my Swedteam jacket will keep me warm and dry and this is very important.

There are six nations taking part this year, Holland, Wales, Scotland, Poland, the Czech Republic and England and I've no doubt the competition will be fierce. The klaxon for the competition has just sounded and we're off. We're shooting Alpha course and this has been set by Ian Bainbridge. I know that it will be long and tough, and looking at the first target, I know it will be a test. The wind is starting to build and as I look around me there is a great mixture of happy and serious faces.

Well, I have just missed my first shot, a simple 15mm target six feet up a tree at 20 yards. I don't know what I did, but I missed it an inch high. I'm standing here angry with myself, because this isn't a shot that I should miss, but the important thing now, is to put it behind me and get on with the next target. So often when you miss a shot, this can set up a chain reaction and you then start to miss and miss. I'm putting my dictaphone away now, as I need to concentrate.

OK, back in the car now and day 1 is finished. I've shot a 54 and realistically, I'm now out of the running for the individual title. Team England has done OK, but we're now in third place behind the Polish team and the Scots. I'm going to grab a cup of tea and go out and take some pictures and do a bit of marshalling,

Above: Gary preferred to shoot in his tried and tested Swedteam blaze orange suit instead of the England team colours

Above Right: Victorious Team England with their trophies

Below: Six nations were present at this year's World's held at Kelmah Game Fair



I have to do better tomorrow.

I've been back at the hotel now for about an hour and we're going off to dinner in a bit. I've just spent the last 30 minutes with my head down the loo throwing up, as I had a massive attack of the nerves. I know what I have to do tomorrow and I must admit I'm finding the pressure hard to take. I know that tonight, I should be eating sensibly, but I need to wind down, so I'm going to find the largest lump of lamb I can get and have a great night with my friends.

Monday Day 2

Well, last night was a blast. I had a lovely meal with my mates and today I'm relaxed and happy. The nerves are under control and it's time to get out there and do my bit for Queen and country.

Bravo course was set by Pete Sparkes, so it should be mid-range and deceptive and I'm hoping that the howling wind will at least be readable. We've now been shooting for 10 lanes and the two Andys have been a riot. I'm enjoying my shooting and so far I've not missed a target, but, we're now heading outside into the wind.

OK, two targets missed in the open section; a supported kneeler and the flaming spider's web from quarry that I always miss. The first one I wobbled off the target and the second took more wind than I thought. I just wasn't brave enough, but onwards and upwards.



Down three now and really annoyed with myself. The kneeling shot was a full size kill at 25 yards. This is an easy shot; however, as I got down I slipped on the bean bag and fell over. I was OK, but a bit embarrassed, so I rushed the shot and missed, a schoolboy error and one I shouldn't have made; I just hope it doesn't cost us a place.

The course is now finished and I dropped four. A 56 is an OK score but it could have been better. As I fire my last shot, it feels like an enormous weight is being removed from my shoulders and now it's just a matter of waiting for the scores to come in.

I've just walked passed the stats tent and a fellow England shooter has given me the thumbs up. England have managed to retain the title with a score of 450 points, Poland are second, with Scotland third. The Welsh are fourth with the Czechs and the Dutch in fifth and sixth place.

I'm elated, but I must hide it as it wouldn't be fair on those other teams who do not know the result yet. This year has been amazing, terrifying, and a fantastic experience.

I've just collected my team trophy, as I looked out onto the faces of everyone, for the briefest of seconds, I could imagine what an Olympic athlete must feel like standing there getting his gold. There aren't many sports where a fairly rotund middle-aged man can represent his country. It's amazing what HFT and shooting has done for me.

I hope you've enjoyed this diary of a World Championship. I've tried to be honest and I hope it hasn't scared any of you off. I now intend to go to bed and sleep for a week.

If you fancy having a go at HFT then find a local club or contact the UKAHFT at <https://sites.google.com/site/ukahft/> ■