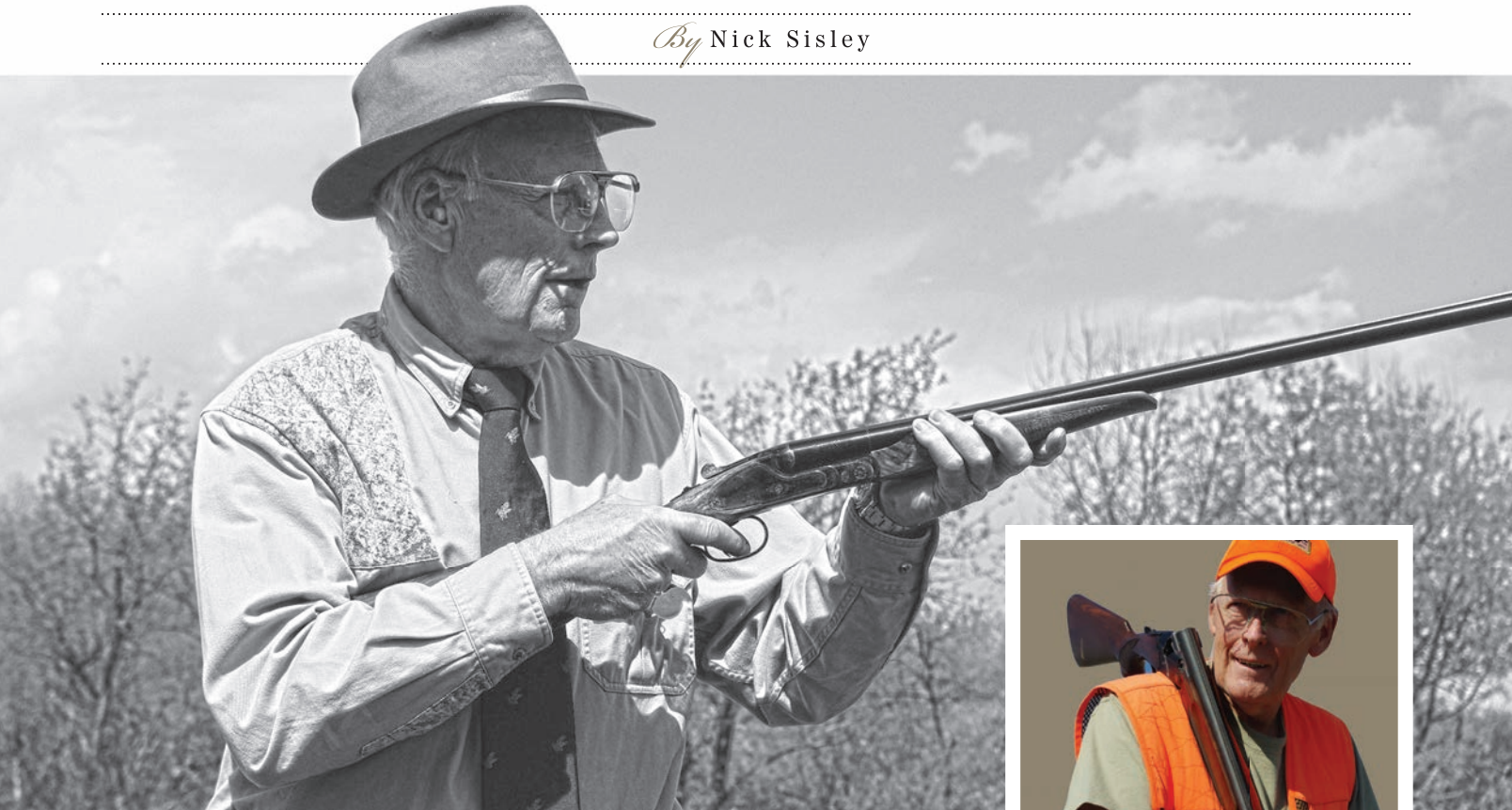


SHOTGUN GAMES TO IMPROVE YOUR GROUSE SHOOTING

By Nick Sisley



Successfully shooting in thick cover is tough. Competitive and recreational shooting in the shotgun games of skeet, trap, sporting clays, 5-Stand and F.I.T.A.S.C. are good grouse woods practice, but certain shotgun practice can help even more. Further, what can significantly help are drills you can practice at home. This home-based practice is also free – doesn't cost a cent. Maybe that's why so few are willing to do it (I'm being facetious). Here are some suggestions, first at home, and free.

Since I have no youngsters around, I keep a grouse gun handy to my desk 24/7. If youngsters do come around that gun is put in a gun safe. So you have to decide and adhere to your own gun safety considerations. What you need to do for free over and over is practice your gun mount. I practice mounting a shotgun about 10 to 15 times – working on smoothness and proper technique. Then I go back to whatever I was doing. Maybe an hour later, I pick up the gun again for 10 to 15 more practice gun mounts.

This normally happens most every day. With this approach it's easy to get in 100 gun mounts a day.

But there's more to a proper gun mount than meets most eyes. Try this. Buy a Maglite with two AA batteries. For an open-choke 12 gauge it takes a wrap or two of cellophane tape around the light to keep it snugly in the open-choked barrel. A super-tight fit is not necessary. Did I mention that the gun **MUST** be unloaded? (Pretty obvious but necessary to say so.) The Maglite should be adjusted to its most narrow beam. Insert the light into the gun's muzzle.

Now center the light beam on a wall/ceiling corner. With the gun down and light beam still on that wall corner to mount, but keep the light beam on the wall corner throughout. Move slowly to get the hang of it. You will find this is not easy. Initially you will see the light beam move downward – away from the wall corner. Don't let that happen. Keep practicing until you can repeatedly keep the light beam on the wall corner – form the start of the mount to the finish. When the light beam moves

downward that means you are using too much right hand in your mount. This flashlight drill teaches you to get both hands working in unison.

Also most guys and gals are more intent on getting the gun to their shoulder, which is a mistake. So the next drill - same gun, same light beam - is to move the beam across the wall ceiling seam. With the gun down in a ready position; you do this by starting the muzzle moving first along the wall/ceiling juncture - only then blending in the gun mount. This allows the muzzle to properly move right along the target line - grouse or clay - not away from the target path.

If a shooter mounts the gun first and then starts the gun moving along the target line, guess what happens? The bird gets ahead of the gun. On most grouse flushes, the gun is already behind the bird as you start the gun. So if the gun is mounted first the muzzle(s) ends up being even further behind. The bird is still killable but not as killable. Many of us have trouble shooting behind, and this improper technique can be one of the reasons why. The flashlight drill of starting the muzzle moving first - only then blending in the gun mount - will not only result in the muzzle staying ahead of the bird (or at least not as far behind). There's also the smoothness of the proper move with the muzzle not bobbing around.

Further, (from prehistoric times when man was killing for food and especially trying to avoid being killed) our eyes are programmed to go to the faster movement, especially our peripheral vision. It's a survival thing. If the gun moves appreciably faster than the bird, especially away from the bird's line of flight, our eyes naturally go to that faster movement, thus away from sharp focus on the bird. The muzzle dip caused by getting the right hand more involved than the left - that's where our eyes go with that new fast muzzle movement when we need to be having full focus on the escaping ball of brown feathers.

So now let's move to a clay target field. It's easiest to use station 7 and station 6 on a skeet field, but similar going away and quartering away targets can be set up with a portable trap or on a sporting clays course. These two clay presentations tend to be typical of a grouse escape.

On station 7 skeet - the low target - that's straightaway. So here, starting with a low gun as when hunting, just re-practice what you did with the light beam at the corner of the wall/ceiling. Place the muzzle as close as possible to the expected escaping clay's path. Call for the bird. As it comes out get both hands working together so the muzzle stays right on the expected bird's flight path. Hit the trigger immediately upon the stock touching you face. Don't move around to another shooting position. Just keep shooting this low 7 over and over. You're teaching your brain to make this move with both hands working in unison. While this might sound unimportant to successful shotgun shooting, please believe me that this is critically important.

Next move to station 6, again working on the low target - this time a quartering away bird and one so often found in grouse shooting. Here you are going to work on the flashlight drill where you started with a low gun, began your muzzle movement first

- blended in the gun mount - all the time keeping the light beam moving exactly along the wall/ceiling seam. You have practiced this at home over and over until you can make this move very quickly - although you had to start very slow in mastering this move.

Once you've accomplished this at home, you are now ready for the low 6 practice. Believe me, the low 6 quartering target is going to be fast. But so is a grouse. Place the muzzle at the approximate height of the clay's flight path - maybe about half way between the low house and the center stake. Call for the bird. Using the technique you learned with the flashlight drill, start the muzzle moving along the flight path (no muzzle dipping - so both hands working in unison), and then blend in the gun mount. Hit the trigger as the stock hits your face.

Adjust the muzzle-start position as needed - in closer or further out. As mentioned several paragraphs back, most grouse are going to be ahead of your gun at the flush. But if you mount the gun first, before moving the muzzle, you will be even further behind. So it's easy to practice this on station 6 - move the muzzle slightly back toward the house so the clay will get the jump on your muzzle. Now you will be shooting with the swing-through technique, but continue to rely on moving the muzzle first and then blending in the gun mount. Thus you'll overtake the bird sooner which is always critical in thick cover.

These concepts of getting both hands to work in unison and starting the muzzle first before blending in the gun mount are simple basics of consistent and successful shotgun shooting - just as keeping your head down in golf, watching the football all the way into your hands, a proper follow through in bowling, etc. All sports have their basics.

Can you practice the flashlight drill 100 times and significantly improve your grouse shooting? Certainly not. Michael Jordan didn't improve his nothing-but-net stuff with 100 tries. He did it over and over and over - for hours at a time, days at a time, weeks at a time, months at a time, years at a time. And he had a heck of a lot of talent to begin with.

No - the flashlight drill should be practiced over and over - not until you've mastered the

technique - but way beyond - just keep up this easy practice. It's fun. You can do it all your life. You're handling your favorite shotgun - getting ever more familiar with its handling qualities. It's free! The low 6 and low 7 target stuff isn't free, but it's not that costly. And it's also great fun. 🐾



Sisley's new book *Shooter's Guide to Shotgun Games* includes the techniques discussed in this article and more shotgun shooting instruction.

*Some of the ideas in this shotgun column have been taken from Nick's latest book **Shooter's Guide to Shotgun Games**. That book is loaded with information on the how-to of becoming a better shotgunner - as Nick has taken over 50 shooting lessons - always from the best instructors in the game. The book also concentrates on individual shotguns - shotguns from virtually all the popular manufacturers. The book is available from www.amazon.com, all the top-selling book houses, from the publisher Digest Books (www.gundigestbookstore.com) or phone 855-840-5120 - product #T5657 - \$19.95.*