

Linda Thom: Psyched!

Linda Thom was born in Hamilton, Ontario on Dec. 30, 1943. At age 8, she was taught to shoot by her father. In the 1970, she competed at the World Championships in Phoenix, Arizona and finished in the Top 10. Despite Linda's achievements, she decided to focus her attentions elsewhere, taking a 7 year break from shooting. In 1982, it was announced that the Ladies' 25 metre Pistol Match would be an Olympic event at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. She came back to the sport with a single goal in mind: win the Olympic Gold medal. She did just that and became the first woman to win the Ladies' 25m Pistol Gold Medal.

What makes this even more special is that Thom's win also marked the first gold medal by a Canadian since 1968 and the first female gold-medallist since 1928. She became a Member of the Order of Canada in 1985 and retired from the sport in 1987. In 1992, Linda was elected to the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame.

The following article (used with Dr. Orlick's permission) is an excerpt from PSYCHED: Inner Views of Winning, written by Dr. Terry Orlick and John Partington. The text, as well as several other interviews, is available at Dr. Orlick's website for The Zone of Excellence (<http://www.zoneofexcellence.com/>)



LINDA THOM
1984 OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALLIST - SHOOTING

I know why I have been successful. First is the support and total commitment of my husband, Don. He was very quiet in the background, but he encouraged me at every step. Even when I was away a month at a time he never complained. I know he missed me very much and he often felt like a single parent, but he never made me feel guilty. Quite the opposite, in fact he made a point of making sure I was guilt-free. He would even hide difficult things that were happening to him at work, so that they wouldn't affect me.

Our children were quite young but were encouraging, as well as being proud and tremendously positive. They were both convinced I would succeed. All during May and June of 1984, eight-year-old Samantha would tell anyone who would listen that her mother was going to win an Olympic Gold Medal.

There are three other factors which, combined with family support, formed the fabric of my success: first class coaching, funding from Sport Canada, and positive psychology.

In the days before government funding a shooter saved money to attend one major international match a year, or maybe one every two years. Shooting clinics and training camps were either very few and far between, or out of the country. Now that we have some funding from Sport Canada, training camps; although sparse, are held and the team can get to them; the team can also occasionally afford help from experts in the sport sciences.

For me those developments made the difference between standing in the crowd and standing on the podium. Now I can structure my annual training and competition plan using international matches at carefully spaced intervals. Shooting at these matches helps me to test and fine-tune my

preparation and shooting routines, coping strategies and ability to adapt to different circumstances, to gain invaluable experience and insights from world-class competition, and to get to know other coaches and athletes and compare notes with them.

It really helps to be there and to see other shooters get nervous too and blow their shots. You realize they aren't invincible. A big green light goes on, you realize you can win. Then when you do win, you are confirming what you felt, and gain even more confidence.

Coaches are so important. You can win at the provincial or in some sports perhaps at the national level without a coach, but these days you don't break world records or win Olympic Gold without one. And not just any coach. It takes world-class talent to produce world winners. It's hard to believe that a decade and a half ago we didn't have shooting coaches in Canada. Joe Liota, who is head coach of the pistol team, did a great deal to change that. He learned all he could from other coaches and still reads every book he can get his hands on. I think he's the best on-line pistol coach in the world.

Joe deserves the greatest credit for my victories. He taught other coaches I worked with and got sport science experts, including Jack Leon to share their knowledge with us. He pushed hard for training camps and trials and funding for international matches to season us. His dreams and goals were just as big or bigger than mine. Joe was like the hub of a wheel, all the spokes led to him.

The big thing that really helped me when I came back to shooting after raising my family, was that I had a national coach, Ed Kelly, at my home range, the R.A. Gun Club in Ottawa. I knew Ed from years before, and we quickly re-established our friendship. In fact we found we could rag each other really hard, which is a wonderful stress release valve in situations where concentration and effort become so intense.

When I started to work with him I made a conscious effort to listen to him instead of fighting him; to unlock a door somewhere in my brain and allow everything that I had previously learned about shooting to pour out, and let pour in everything he might tell me. Each thing he asked me to do I gave an honest try. I knew that if it didn't work, he would be the first to agree to drop it and try something else. I was very aware that we had so little time, less than two and a half years, to the Olympics.

We worked together for over a year, and made tremendous strides. All his help, the hours he devoted to training me, was strictly voluntary. I wanted to give back something for what he'd given me. However, Ed Kelly, unlike most other human beings, didn't operate on praise. I kept on, mostly unsuccessfully, trying to find what might work. I kept on training and competing, and slowly making progress, although it seemed to me that for every step forward there were several dunkings that went with it.

One day, at last, I won an international medal a year after I had come back to shooting. The medal was small and thin compared to some, but I cried. It meant so much to me.

"That's bloody fine," Ed managed to whisper as his jaw clenched and unclenched with emotion when I showed it to him on my return. That was it, the only way I could thank him was to bring home heavy metal. I don't think I could have had a more powerful motivator.

I broke through to gold in Zurich that year, and then added a bronze and a silver at the Pam Am Games in August in Caracas. On December 7 1983, seven months before the Olympics, Ed died of cancer. The only regret I have is that I didn't get to share the Olympic medal with him.

Positive psychology is so powerful in enhancing performance. Since I'm a convert to positive thinking, I get evangelical about it. People who have always operated that way wonder what the fuss is all about, to them it's 'part of', not an 'add-on'.

Before the Olympics I put in as many hours doing the various aspects of mental training, including reading books and thinking about how I was going to perform as I did in everything else combined, range training, aerobic training, stretching, and weight training.

I have wanted to be on the Olympic team since I was eight. I promised myself that I would train so very hard if I could ever be good enough at anything to have a possibility of making the team. My possibility came along thirty years later, almost too late, as one television commentator mentioned after I had won. I told Don about my childhood dream, and was about to ask what he thought. Without waiting for me to finish, he said, "Do it, you've got to do it!"

My goal was to win the gold medal. I said to myself, "If I'm going to win a gold medal, what kind of score am I going to have to shoot, and what can I realistically feel I can do?" I had set myself a score of 594 out of 600. I had my intermediate goals and short-term goals all planned out as to what progress I would have to make to achieve that in the end. I was getting there, my average was coming up. But it still wasn't high enough.

The second last competition before the Olympics I shot a 590, which is my highest score in an international match, and it's a Canadian record. At last I felt I belonged to what you might call the "590 Club", or in my terms, that's a lifetime world ranking score. It was reassuring to know the world record was only two points above that, 592. It is now 594. I really wanted the world record but the primary goal was to win the gold medal. But I felt that I could equal the world record or break it.

I felt that I could be more determined than the other competitors might be, and therefore that I would win. Somewhere deep down in the core of Linda Thom existed a belief that I could do it, or I would never have come back to shooting after seven years off. My coach, Joe Liota, who had been Ed Kelly's mentor and who became mine, reminded me, "You were talking about the gold medal right from the beginning."

My determination grew and I became confident, but doing it was not so easy nor so quick! I had to overcome things that I learned in my youth, when I was taught to be self-effacing and humble. It's fine to have humility, and I don't like arrogance. I don't feel I'm arrogant and I hope I don't appear to be. But you have to be determined to win! If you're not determined, you're not going to win. Somebody else is going to win because they've got that much more gumption. It's just as simple as that. You have to believe in yourself.

You train and strain and compete for a whole gamut of reasons. The first that always springs to my mind is to see the Maple Leaf go up the centre pole and hear them play 'O Canada!' Of course I did it for my country, but I also did it because I thought that I could, and I wanted to. You have to start out with yourself.

My mother was the positive force in the family. She's the one who sustained us and said, "You can do it! It can be done. Yes, you can!" There were very few things in my childhood that ever were said like, "You can't do that because you're a girl, or because society says you can't."

My Dad was an excellent rifle and pistol shooter, and he taught us to shoot safely and well in a sand quarry, miles from anywhere, but he never wanted to join a club in this country. Only once did he ever shoot with me at a club.

Joe Liota was always saying to look at things from a positive view; look at the things you want to do, and ignore the other things. It took a good six months to understand what he was saying to me. In shooting we had always talked about the "sevens and eights" and the "fliers" and we compared tragic stories; it was sort of a race to see who had the worst thing happen to them. Joe and Tom wouldn't listen to me unless I talked about the tens, and the things that went right. Tom Guinn, a very successful and experienced teammate, loaned me his 'bible' "Inner Tennis". He, Joe, and Bob Todd, Technical Director of the Shooting Federation of Canada recommended other books such as "In Pursuit of Excellence", "The Winner's Edge", "The Inner Athlete", "Psycho-Cybernetics," and Don got me to read "Zen and the Art of Archery". All these books are talking about the same thing - how to use your inner strength, and how to stop blocking yourself and let it come out.

Joe just turned the world upside down for me. I was determined to understand what he was trying to say, such as concentrating on the "tens" and virtually denying the fact that you had ever in your life shot a "seven". Now I see it so clearly. I'm practically fanatical about it because of how much it can help you.

A turning point was a clinic which I attended in February 1983. The clinic was given in Toronto by Lanny Bassham, who is a World Champion rifle shooter from the U.S. Out of his own competitive difficulties, experienced at the 1972 Olympics, he had dug around and developed what he calls, "The tools of mental management." That man really spoke to me.

One thing he said was so important, "You've got to write it out. In this country and the United States too, we don't write our goals out." We're a very literate society otherwise, but we don't seem to write our goals out.

One of the most important things he found useful for himself was to write out the goal in the first person, present tense. "I am the 1984 Olympic Gold medallist in Ladies Match Pistol," in my particular case. And he said, "Write it out in your diary every night, every single night, and one of two things will happen, either you won't believe it and you'll stop writing it, or you'll keep on writing it and you'll succeed." But he said, "It really works."

Although I have a journalism degree, I don't like sitting down and writing and I have to make an effort, but I did make an effort to write my goals in my diary. For 18 months I wrote that I was the Olympic Champion, every single night in my diary, and it came true. It helped me grapple with myself and my image of myself as a champion.

"Imagine yourself on the podium," he said. "You have won. You know it's behind you now. The flag is going up and the anthem is being played. There are the reporters and they're interviewing you. Visualize all of these things, and savour them."

"Act as if you are going back over your life, the gods have given you the chance to relive this. You've won it. It's yours. You've got the gold medal. But the gods are giving you the chance to

relive and savour your experiences." You can say, "Hey, I can enjoy this. I'm not just in a headlong rush." I can also notice the other things in life and enjoy the little steps along the way.

My coach, Joe said, "You know it's just like little stepping-stones across a creek. You're hopping across and every now and then you slip down and get your feet wet, but you get back up on the next stone and you keep hopping across." And then he said, "The last jump is over onto the bank." And then when I won he said that evening, when I saw him, "Now you're safe on the other bank."

You must take things in steps. You couldn't possibly jump the river in one leap. These mental images really helped. Lanny Bassham also told us about the television cameras, and about the crowds at shooting events in Europe. He went through all the things that might shake you up, like having your gun stolen. That happened to him at the 1972 Olympics. Now I take pieces of the gun so that the gun can be replaced, and I also take an extra pair of glasses.

While I was sitting in the chair watching Lanny Bassham talk to us, I realized that I was going to have to make a commitment or I wasn't going to follow through and put to work the tools he had given us in that seminar. So at the end, feeling very shy, very doubtful, I forced myself to walk up to him. I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "You really spoke to me." And I added, "I'm going to be there." And this slow smile came over his face, and I could tell that he knew what I meant, that I was going to be there on the podium, that's what I meant. I didn't have to say anything else. The Shooting Federation paid quite a lot of money to bring him up to Toronto, but it sure was worth it.

I train differently than most shooters, but more and more are now beginning to train like I do. Tom Guinn, who came second in the World Championships, helped me a great deal. He did a lot of aerobic training as well as wall work, which is holding the empty gun against a blank wall and watching the sights while coming through on the trigger, stuff other people only get to dream about. He and Joe, my head coach, got me into what the rifle shooters do, stretching, aerobics, holding the gun, and other work besides just the range work. It used to be quite rare for shooters to do anything else but go to the range and shoot.

I also did mental training of one sort or another every single day of the week. By that I mean reading positive books, thinking of myself as a champion, or thinking about some aspect of shooting. In connection with this, I wrote out my shot plan in detail - how I wanted the trigger to come through, positive and smoother, and break in good time before my eyes and arm got tired, and before I lost confidence.

This is important because eventually your eyes start lying to you. You think that you are seeing the sight sharp and clear. It's not that your eyes are wrong, but that you are waiting for the shot to break, and your brain starts lying and saying, "Yes, it's still good, let it go. But what you are looking at is an image, micro seconds old. While you are fresh, and you've got all that oxygen in your muscles, the best thing is to settle in, "Bang". That's when you want the shot to break, before you start to say, "God, when is it going to go?" Eventually if you raise too often without having a shot break, you are tempted to break the shot yourself, and you don't get away with that too often.

I wrote all of these things that I wanted to happen, the optimum, in my diary.

I would also write down and remind myself of interim score goals. In addition, I wrote about my family and things I wanted to accomplish in my daily life, because you mustn't forget that side of yourself. In spite of the fact that you're really living very much in your sport, that is not the real

world. The real world is out there earning your bread and butter, raising your kids and doing all that kind of thing.

I'm sorry to say this, but it's true. You occasionally have to remind yourself that those things are important too, otherwise you can fall off the edge in sport. Whether you win or whether you don't win, there's a big cliff for the unsuspecting at the end of it all. So I would write things like, "Whether I win or whether I don't win, my family loves me, my husband is going to be there to kiss and hug me." You do have to keep sport in perspective. Maybe it helps knowing that although you are striving for this, and it counts a hell of a lot to you, if by chance it doesn't occur, despite your best efforts, it is not the end of the world.

You have to have control, and you need it all day if you are going to shoot at 9 a.m., 1 p.m. and possibly at 3.30 p.m. in a shoot-off. I predicted that the person who was going to win would be the one with the best control. I resolved to have the best control and proceeded to describe what for me constituted control, but not over-control.

Becoming passive on the line, that's when I really run into trouble, and it takes time to turn it around and get back on track.

I've found out how to detect the distant early warning signs of becoming passive, or losing control. I went through all kinds of mental repetition routines to find out what was the best thing.

Control for precision shooting is not the same as for dueling, these are the two halves of the Sport Pistol course. In precision shooting I have to be determined and I have to really concentrate on my "tens", and accept the fact that the blasted gun, no matter how still I can hold it, is moving. The temptation is to "point shoot", but you can't. You have to "area shoot". The ten ring at 25 metres is so big. Your gun can wander around in that area and you'll still get a ten, whether it's at the top, the bottom, or whatever. Your gun has to float in an even, smooth movement. As soon as you detect corners, then you'll know that you're controlling the gun, so you put the gun down, take a breath, and start over.

Control also means putting distractions out of your mind. I have very good peripheral vision so I wear blinkers. I also wear a hat with flaps which extends the blinkers, and I wear hearing protection. In training I wear a pair of ear-muffs, but when I go into competition I wear ear plugs as well as ear-muffs so that I have double protection against distractions. In competition everything is heightened including your sense of hearing. You are in a vigilant, alert mode.

You also aid yourself by recognizing that there are competitors. You recognize that the crowd is there, the sun is shining, and there are butterflies around the target. Then you say, "Fine, what a wonderful day for shooting, this is where we are going to produce tens, and this is how we are going to do it."

The control is never relaxing totally. I mean, you can relax to a degree. Relaxation is important, but it's important for a shooter not to totally relax or you'll really become passive and that's not a good idea. You want to relax your muscles so they are not tense, but you've got to keep that something inside you, that "This is what I'm here to do" determination. You've got to keep your thoughts in that direction and not let anything interfere.

Imagery is another part of my mental training. I have a good imagination and I can visualize things. I'm told that unlike a lot of women, I am spatially oriented. I can imagine an object like a

car or a rock, and in my mind walk all the way around it, or turn it as if it was on a turntable, and see all the facets of it.

Even so, when Tommy Guinn introduced me to mental training, which involved visualizing sharp sight alignment against fuzzy targets, I could see the rear sight, but I couldn't see the front sight, or the target was clear and the sights were fuzzy.

"Visualize this, and train," he said. "At first it may not come, but persist with it and it will slowly come, and the sights will clear up." At first it was as if I was mentally throwing barriers in my own way, but eventually it did come true. I was able to visualize after two to three months.

He told me to do this at different times of the day, and not necessarily for 15 minutes at a time either. I would do it anywhere. Usually it was only an image, but occasionally I did find myself raising my arm. Once I was in a bank queue, raising my arm. "Whoops, what am I doing?" I didn't have my gun with me of course!

When I do mental imagery I see the rear sight not as a notch, but as two light bars, and the front sight is really sharp. I usually look at the centre, or a little bit to the left of the centre, of the top of the front sight. Then I can see the target as a fuzzy grey blob. I'm not conscious of my hand, I'm just concentrating on that small part of the sight. Right now with my eyes open, I can 'see' the sights hovering around the middle of the 25 metre target.

It used to bother me that I would get up on the firing line and what I actually saw wasn't as perfect as what I could visualize. Previously it used to be the reverse, my mental image wasn't anywhere near as good as the real thing.

I actually shoot in imagery because it is important not just to hold up the gun, but also to imagine the shot going off. That is important to me because one of my bugaboos is not having the shot go, and I wind up 'pumping iron', doing several raises just to get the shot off.

You want to make up your mind before you raise the gun that this shot is going to go extremely well, so I imagine firing. I see myself inside myself, shooting in regular motion. I can feel the initial pressure of the trigger, and then I'm looking at the sight, and then the shot goes off itself.

The shot has to break by itself because if you think about it going, you are going to disturb the gun. The shot breaks without thinking about it. You have trained your reflexes to come back through the trigger positively.

Then I'm outside myself, an observer. I see the bullet going in slow motion through the middle of the target, cutting the paper through the "X" ring, and the paper starts to fly, all in ultra-slow motion.

For months I did this, virtually every time before I fired on the line. I would sit down and do several raises and shots in my mind. I would do it for five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen, or anything up to about 30 minutes.

I wouldn't spend more than 30 minutes in preparation, and that would include diary time. I would be doing imagery as I was doing the diary work and I would write what I wanted to do and say to myself, "What am I going to do in this training session?" I wouldn't just get on the line and pump rounds down range, but would actually go to the line with an intent, a goal, even if it was just to make sure everything was smooth.

When I go to the line, and set everything up, and take the gun in my hand, I also mentally go through my shot-plan checklist before I shoot. This strategy started out very mechanically with a physical list of words which I have on the shooting table, and which I read exactly. These words represented every single step involved in shooting a shot. Then I reduced these to key words so that I could go through the list faster. Finally I didn't need a list anymore. I would usually write one word to emphasize what I wanted, such as "trigger" or "smooth". Then this shot plan rehearsal became a mix of simple verbal reminders and images which I "ran" before each shot.

As for success imagery, I didn't do as much imagery of being on the podium as I have heard some athletes do. But I would imagine to myself, "How would a champion act? How would a champion feel? How would she perform on the line?" This helped me find out about myself, what worked and didn't work for me. Then as the actual roles I had imagined came along, and as I achieved them, that in turn helped me believe that I could be the Olympic Champion.

As the springtime came along I would say to myself, "I don't know exactly how I'm going to win, but I know I'm going to win. I've got the technical expertise, the ability, and the determination."

My mental preparation for competition starts the night before. I sit down and write everything in detail in my diary about what I will do the next day. Each little step is written out, such as getting up at 6.15 a.m., stretching, having a shower, brushing my teeth, packing, getting dressed, checking the room, putting my gear in the car, having breakfast, going to the actual location of where I'm going to shoot. Everything is pre-planned right up to the time I shoot, during the match, and afterwards.

I also get to know the range officer ahead of time so that I'm familiar with whom I have to deal. Before the shoot I put my equipment near the line. As soon as I am allowed I start setting up. When the 10 minute formal preparation time is announced, I push my stopwatch to time myself while I smoke my sights, put up my 'scope, set out my magazines, ammunition, rosin, and screwdriver. I set it up so that I'm not scrambling around in my bag. I reassure myself that I have everything ready.

Once I've set up I usually sit and look through my diary so that I don't miss a step, like visualizing shots. I may write down one word like "determination" to remind myself what I want to do that day. Then I do a few raises.

Once again I get up on the line, I fit the gun in my hand, take up my stance, line up dead-centre with the target, make sure that my grip is absolutely correct, then I just wait for the command to load.

I'll be thinking about the shots and what the sights will look like. I try to occupy my mind with constructive thoughts to avoid invading negative thoughts. If these start to creep in I'll immediately focus on what I have to do. I'll go through the shot sequence. Or, I'll pick a mental image. Sometimes I imagine a Russian whom I shot with. She was so steady. When the shot broke the gun never moved. She followed through beautifully. She calms me down because I know I can do it too.

If I'm already shooting, but feeling uncomfortable, I'll say to myself "You candy-ass!"

I'll start thinking about Les Desci, who's got one leg off above the knee. He's constantly in pain, and if it's hot and humid, like it would be in Los Angeles, he'd be in even more pain because the

stump would be sweaty and bothering him. He's always got that to contend with, so what am I doing looking to find things to be wrong?

Disabled athletes inspire me because they have to be so determined just to get to the point where they start to train, just to get up in the morning and start to dress, they have to go through so much effort to do things which you and I don't even think about.

If I start to get distracted I refocus right back to the task. Sometimes I even say to myself, in Joe's voice, "Show me how to shoot a ten." You'd be surprised. Most people shoot tens when he stands behind them and says that. Or, I'll think of my old coach Ed Kelly, how much faith he had in me, and how proud he would be of me, and I get right back to my routine.

After shooting five shots, you sit down while everything is scored. When the scores are announced to everyone up and down the line, you have to ignore this. I don't count my score and I don't count anybody else's score because that is a distraction I don't need.

Over the years I've discovered that every time I was aware of my own score, then my performance would deteriorate. Early on I would actually hum to myself to block out the announcing of the shots. Now I'll sit with my screwdriver in hand so that I'll remember to adjust the sights when I go back to the line. I think of what I want to do in the next series.

When I look through my 'scope, I'm not counting the value of the shots, what I'm doing is concentrating on the group to see whether I've got to click the sights up or down or sideways. When the target crew have stopped announcing, and they tack up a new target, I'll check to make sure the target has been properly stapled and then start focusing on the shot. I make sure that my magazine is in. That whole routine fills my focus and the time until there is a fresh target. Then I'm starting afresh.

All of that is how I prepare mentally for competition. Unfortunately, I can remember one competition in Mexico, when I felt great and had everything planned but things didn't go well. Both my coaches were behind me. They are both very good observers. I was getting some tens, but there were several nines just outside the ten ring.

During the match I would go back to Joe and say, "Here's a super opportunity because this is happening while you are watching. What did you see, what should I be doing?" He would give me a focus point. I would focus on that but I came up with a lousy score. Afterwards he said, "I don't know what the hell was going on, I called almost all of those shots tens." I think that there must have been something disturbing me, I was anticipating the shot so slightly that not even my coaches could see.

There was also a three quarter hour delay before the shoot. I said, "Fine, this is bothering other people but it isn't bothering me." I know for sure that it wasn't bothering me.

My very best international performance was somewhat different. My personal coach, Al, was behind me. I didn't talk a lot to him. Before a shoot I always say, "I'll come back from the line, but don't say anything to me unless I ask." He was good about it, he really buttoned his lip.

The match was really great, it just went like a dream. I can remember thinking positive things. Thinking about the individual shot, and saying, "This is going to be a ten." Kristina Freis of Sweden tied with me. We were in a shoot-off, and I said to myself, "Sister, this is the shoot-off.

There are a lot of people standing here and I'm going to show them how it should be done." I shot 150 out of 150.

I've already told you about the positive thinking which I learned from my coaches, the books I read, and Lanny Bassham's clinic. In addition, Joe invited a psychologist to work with us. Joe had met Jack Leon at a party. Jack works as a counselor at Mohawk College. He's not a jock', but Joe thought that he might be suitable, and Jack thought that he might like to work with the pistol team.

Joe got Jack to run a clinic with him. Jack didn't know beans about shooting, but that didn't matter, he was talking about the principles of team building and the principles of not allowing things to distract us, the principles of looking at what we wanted to do and not what we didn't want to do. He had run seminars before for nurses and other groups. The shooters reacted positively to it. They weren't threatened by Jack. He wasn't trying to say, "I'm better than you," in some way or another. He was really giving of himself. This reassured everybody.

At the end of the first clinic he asked us to fill out an evaluation form. I had felt that he was unsure of himself and tended to dump on himself a bit. I felt that we didn't need someone insecure coming to an international match and we might have to carry his socks for him. Jack really took all the criticism as constructive. He used it to change his behaviour. After that he walked around as cool as a cucumber, just like the rest of us. We all attended several clinics by Jack. We did team building and became more aware of each other's likes and dislikes, and how we could avoid inadvertently distracting each other.

He was good because he was there for the shooters and not for himself. He said that beforehand, and he really meant it. Some people will say that, then go off partying somewhere. He was there one job night and day right along with the coaches, we needed him, or Joe thought we did.

The coaches and the consultants worked tremendously hard. Jack and Joe worked together to develop pre- and post-competition action forms. At first, the coaches got very little sleep because they were constantly going over things with the athletes. Afterwards they realized they had to shorten the forms for their own sake, as well for the athletes.

Several days before the event we filled out our feelings, our goals, our expectations and we made out a detailed competition plan. This was discussed, and if the coaches felt the athlete's goal was unrealistic they would say so. They didn't want the athletes falling on their faces.

Right after the match we filled out a form to tell how we felt during the match, how we had felt so many minutes before the match, at the match beginning, during the match, and at the end of the match, whether our score goals were achieved or whether they weren't, what distractions there were, how we felt, how did the coaches perform in relation to that athlete.

Most of us filled these out either right on the site or that evening following the match. Then we discussed the form usually with the coach and the psychologist together, or whomever we felt comfortable with. This would usually take about a half hour. The coaches kept the form and the athletes were encouraged to write out the things in their diary. In fact there was a question on the form, "Have you written this in your diary?" Because of the pressure of time, we often found ourselves discussing our forms together with everybody who shot that day. We felt trustful enough of each other that we didn't mind talking about what was going on.

The general feeling was that these forms were helpful, but that there was too much on the form. They went from a very condensed version that we felt didn't cover enough areas to an expanded one, which was expanded further, then finally cut down. They were very open to athlete's suggestions about what should be on the forms and how things should be stated.

The athletes also felt that the forms should go to the coach and sport psychologist and no further. So the forms are kept confidential.

The coaches realize the value of working with these forms and they don't want to stop doing it. It's very valuable to make sure the athlete is focused on the task and that he is not being unrealistic and the athlete has the opportunity to go "one on one" with the coach to talk about his feelings before the match and after the match. From this, athletes come to realize that losing is not the end of the world. The coach's task is to reassure them and let them talk it out. Athletes tend to be very hard on themselves and get closed up. It's a delicate balance because as a coach you've got to let the athlete know that we expect you to improve and we expect an effort out of you.

I knew I was going to win at the Olympics. All week I had a quiet feeling, not a big feeling, but a quiet feeling that I would win. Every now and then I'd sort of check on that, "How does it feel? Great! I'm still going to win. The gold medal? Yes, the gold medal." And it just went on quietly all week, and then that day I thought, "Well, gee, everything feels so positive and yet I didn't shoot a great score this morning," and then I managed to put that out of my mind and just carry on, and then I just felt better and better and better.

I had my whole preparation done ahead of time. I do a complete dress rehearsal the day before so there weren't any surprises. I even paid for an extra night at the motel. Also, beforehand I imagined what sorts of questions the media might ask, and we told the coaches that we didn't want reporters interviewing us before the match.

I got to the line at 8:30 a.m to shoot at 9 a.m. Then I just set up what they would allow me to set up and I thought about my match. I did some raises. I had read that a lot of successful swimmers prepare by actually doing the motions that they will be doing in the water. We had a huge gallery. But I had mentally prepared myself for the fact that they are going to be for me, and they are a good crowd. I just said those positive things to myself.

Immediately before the start I was looking at the range with the sunlight on the target, and I was thinking, "This is nice, and still there's no wind." I just thought about how I wanted the shots to go. I don't dwell on individuals or anything like that, I dwell on what I want to do. I sort of observe the other things, but I dwell on the task at hand.

But I also had this feeling beforehand that the control wasn't perfect. I was a little edgy. During the event I wasn't trying to powerhouse myself into control, but I was using things like focusing on the task at hand to gain the control and reassure myself. The odd time I'd think about, "Well, I know the sighting target's going to go well, but then what about the first target?" This shows that you're thinking too far ahead. Just think about the one-shot. Think about the shot, and it's just an extension, and you'll just carry on, and the ice will be broken, and it'll be smooth and you won't think about this and you'll go on ahead. Don't anticipate trouble. Just simply come back to what you are doing. You tell yourself, "I know I can do it, I know I'm really capable, I just have the ability and that's that."

When the competition started you could have heard a pin drop, but when the scores were announced the people started cheering for the people who had got 50 out of 50. So I thought, "Oh,

that's interesting, they're cheering, and the range officer asked them not to." So I thought, "Ah, I know how it's working. They're being absolutely quiet while we're shooting and they're rewarding those who are shooting well." So I thought, "When I shoot my 50 they're going to cheer me." I shot a 50. They cheered. I thought, "That's wonderful! This is the way it's working." So it was a potential distraction but it wasn't. I turned it around.

When the scores were announced I just recognized my score, sat down and thought about my relaxation. I have a bad lower back so I do sidebends, walk up and down, and sometime I push on the chair just to stretch a bit and maintain my determination.

Then there was a break. I had planned out exactly after the first half what I was going to do in those four hours. I ate part of my lunch, and thought about what I wanted to think about. A couple of competitors came into the trailer too and we just sort of said, "Hello" to each other, but we kept to our own thought processes. I had a book there to read and I had my diary if I wanted to refer to it. The book I had was totally irrelevant to shooting. I just said to somebody, "Lend me your book", and I opened it in the middle and started reading. I wasn't involved in the story. It was just occupying my mind and it was keeping me from thinking about negative thoughts. I had practiced so much about maintaining the positive attitude that I really did maintain a very positive attitude.

Joe was concerned, though, because when we walked out of the range after the first half he could see that I wasn't terribly pleased with my score and he said, "Well, I'm sorry, but you worked real hard, you made things work for you, and brought them together and I'm proud of you. What are you going to do this afternoon?" Of course, he wanted me not dwelling on the past but going forward. And I said, "I'm going to put every shot in the centre of the target So he said, "Fine." That's all he had to say to me. We communicate very well.

During the morning shooting I had felt better and better and finished quite strongly. Then in the afternoon it started again - with my first target I was a little edgy. But then I pulled it together and just cleaned up.

I was feeling very, very good indeed after I finished although I still didn't know the results because the second relay had to shoot the second half. I didn't want to go back into the range even though I had finished shooting. So I walked around just outside and every now and then somebody would come out and I'd say, "Oh, how Ruby Fox doing?" "What did she have this morning?" "How's she doing now?" The person would reply, "Oh, she's losing some points, not a lot but she's losing some." And I thought, "Oh, that's interesting." So I just waited.

Then Joe came out of the range at the end of the second relay and he just looked at me with a big bright smile, his whole face was lit up and he said to me, "Well, lady, it looks like you're in a shoot-off." We gripped hands but we didn't say another word, we just had big, big grins. He knew I was feeling very, very happy. I knew then that I was going to win, and he knew it too.

I knew I would win if I went into a shoot-off situation. I though "She's lost it now." I knew I was stronger in dueling, the shoot-off. But I also knew Ruby was an excellent competitor. It went right down to the last shot. Ruby is a friend of mine but you have to put that friendship into neutral when you're on the line. You have to put your feelings aside and treat them as you would any possible distraction and do your best.

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