

# The Filter

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We interrupt this scheduled article to bring you a more recent account of "My Twisted Road to Gold." My last few submissions have been retelling my struggle as an American trying to grasp the art of "Japanese *kyudo*" while living in Japan. But as fate would have it, I have also been tasked with a struggle in the modern art of "American *kompoundo*."

Currently, I am on the US World Compound Team, but getting there certainly merits a chapter in my very twisted road to becoming a top archer. In fact, I am still so surprised that I am on this team that writing this article will certainly help put things in perspective! Because to tell you the honest truth, I had never intended to go for the compound team, nor did I expect certain challenges that I endured to make it.

Last year I was on the US World Field Team and was alternate on the US World Indoor Team; both with recurve. I decided that since I enjoy shooting compound in and around my recurve training, I would shoot two star FITA tournaments in the spring before I switched entirely to recurve. My archer friends call me the Iron Maiden because I have a tendency to shoot more than one bow at the same event. Such was the case for the Indoor Nationals, which was the first ranking tourney for the 2004 United States Archery Team (USAT) selection process. I shot my longbow, compound, and recurve. I felt I shot well with my compound but that only placed me 11th in the US ranking.

I decided to shoot the Arizona Cup International as my second and final event with compound. This would give me the required minimum, plus the US Target Nationals in the fall, to gain national ranking for USAT, which I clearly was NOT a contender for. I had never placed higher than ninth place in the US with my compound but nonetheless, I want to be nationally ranked.

After two days of driving I showed up at the Arizona Cup. I went to the registration and told them I could not shoot. My shoulder was screaming with pain I had incurred somehow and somewhere between Denver and Phoenix. I couldn't lift my own arm let alone my compound. The director of shooting told me not to give in just yet. He wanted me to meet with someone first. He took me over to Great Britain's Paralympic Team and introduced me to their physiotherapist, Pauline. She asked me questions about the pain and then began an extensive massage that hurt dearly, however; she ensured it would help bring blood back into my shoulder, hence loosening the taught muscle and nerves that caused me such grief. She gave me clear instructions to nurture my shoulder and I was on my way. I told the tourney director I would wait until opening day to decide whether I would shoot.

That day came with little relief and when I stepped to the line during official practice, I was uncertain what would happen. I saw stars when I tried to lift my bow so I decided to throw my hip into the draw so my bow would swing up with momentum, avoiding using muscles to lift. Once it passed the painful zone, I seemed fine at full draw. When I went to pull my arrows, they were littered all over the target bale. I just wanted to cry. The next few ends produced no better.

Even though I looked like I was dancing while shooting, I decided to shoot the tourney. My head was filled with confusion as I asked myself why I was forcing myself to shoot this event. Because, I have never quit anything in my life!

The buzzer sounded the start of the tourney and I just grit my teeth and shot my arrows. When I went to pull and score the first round, it was a 58 out of 60! I couldn't believe my eyes! I was very susceptible to negativity but once the buzzer sounded, I was able to turn on my "filter."

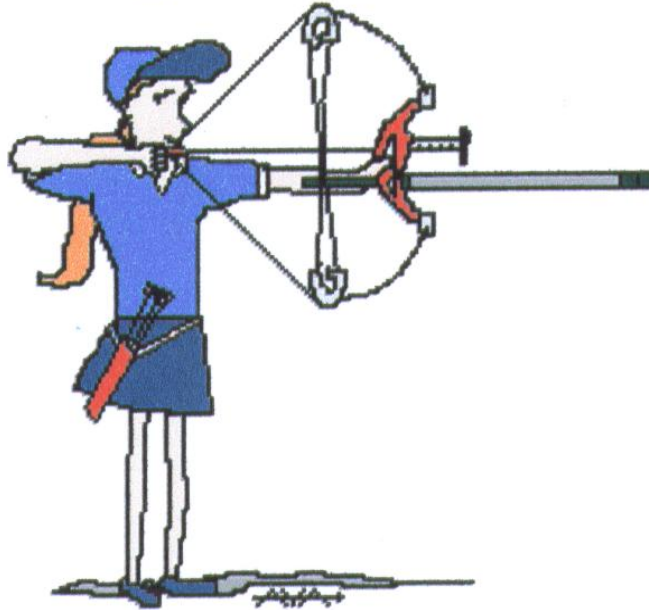
When any negative phrase enters my head, it has a particular inflection and tone. For example, "That was a horrible shot!" from the girl next to me, or "I don't know if I can make this shot!" from inside my own mind.

That was a terrible shot!  
I've already lost this match!  
...low left six ring!  
Why can't I make a good shot?  
I punched the trigger!

F  
I  
L  
T  
E  
R



That was a terrific shot!  
I've already won this match!  
...low left X ring!  
Why, I can make a good shot!  
I released the trigger!



These comments or thoughts can linger and repeat themselves in my head setting my shot up for destruction. Instead of trying to block them out of my mind I simply replay the phrases again with the same inflection and tone but with different words: "That was a terrific shot!" or "I just know I can make this shot!"

I have done these kinds of mind exercises since I was little but I needed them more than ever at the Arizona Cup. After the first day at 70 and 60 meters, I was tied for first. I took the lead and won the FITA on the second day. After barely winning a shoot-off, I went on to win the Olympic Round. It was so unexpected but made me recall how I have spent most of my life twisting the bad events in my life to produce a good outcome.

I purposely didn't have it on my schedule, but I decided to shoot the Texas Shootout. This tourney held a lot of negative memories from the year before when I got second-degree sunburns and nearly ended up last place. Again, I just replayed my thoughts embellished with good overtones and, to my surprise; I won the Texas Shootout FITA and went on to win the OR. That put me in the highest possible position for USAT.

Now I had to start thinking about the US World Team and which bow I would shoot. I had always intended to shoot with recurve, but I couldn't ignore my shooting with compound. However, I was never prepared for what happened next. Two weeks before the last USAT qualifier and one month until the trials I ended up in the hospital with ovarian cysts and more pain than my mental game would permit me to handle. I wasn't even sure I could attend either event. Regardless, I called and registered for both. I lay in bed holding my compound bow practicing my shooting in my head. I couldn't even walk to the toilet but I pictured myself pulling arrows and climbing up the steps to the top spot on the podium.

One day before the Gold Cup, I got my plane tickets and I made my way to New Jersey after two weeks in bed. I had practiced only one time for real but a hundred times in my head. I won the Gold Cup FITA and the overall OR. I felt redeemed and ready for the trials. But the unexpected always seems to find its way into my path. I had taken on the physical challenge but I was very unprepared for the mental challenge I was about to face.

After returning from a late practice, my best friend was standing in the doorway of my apartment. He told me to leave my bow and just come inside. I knew something was astray. He told me that my brother had called. Our dad had been killed in an accident. I just swayed and nearly fell over. Everything went dark.

A few days later, I was standing on the shooting line at the Olympic Training Center at the US World Team trials. My best friend came with me and she coached me through the FITA, reminding me to keep my filter on. But now it wasn't phrases that I had to replay in the positive, it was my feelings. I couldn't simply change words and make everything better anymore. I needed to dig deeper and actually replay feelings of confidence instead of doubt, strength instead of fear, and fun instead of anguish.

I started off rocky in the beginning of the FITA, but I kept battling the entropy that exists in the mental game: the natural tendency to break down. I found that I actually started talking to myself on the line (not out loud of course) to keep my focus on staying positive. I had to fight how my posture would change each time the aching in my heart purged through my mental focus thus reflecting on my shot. I pushed on and finished second in the FITA. The next three days were all round robin matches. I lost only four matches and closed the gap to 7 points from first place and ended second with a secure place on the US World Team.

As I stepped up onto the podium, it felt like I was reliving a dream. When I returned home, I cried for several hours. I finally let myself breakdown. However, not all those tears were of sadness. Tears go both ways too. All the energy exerted from events in our lives can go either way. But admittedly, negative energy is harder to transform to good use. When you "lose" in life, don't "lose" the opportunity to learn and grow.