

BRAIN

MICHAEL BRUNTON REVIEWS THE BRAIN BUDDY

Training



"HENRY HOPKING'S COACHING IS WITHOUT DOUBT THE MOST POWERFUL MENTAL TRAINING SYSTEM FOR TARGET SHOOTING," SAYS GLENN ELLER – OLYMPIC GOLD, BEIJING 2008

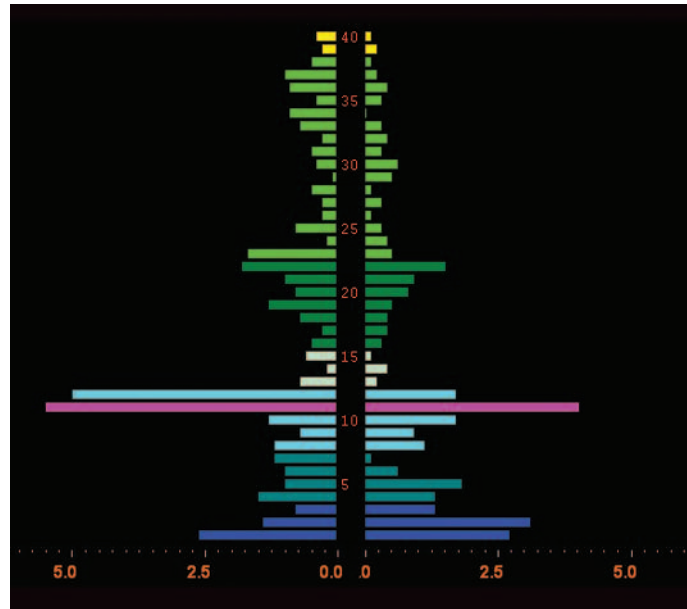


We've all experienced it – a target missed because of a momentary lapse in concentration. Worse still, missing the next target because of frustration. How can you prevent this from happening? There is as much mental stamina required for trap shooting as technical expertise – hence the increasing popularity of sports psychologists. The margin of winning can now be so slight, that any edge is worth investigating.

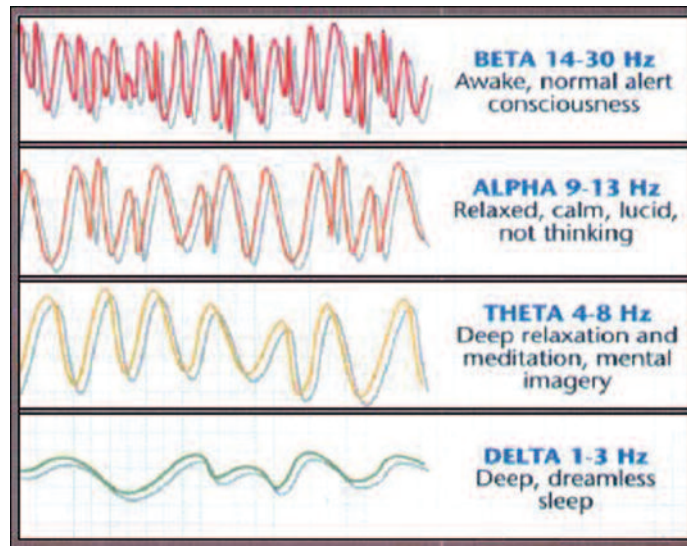
At the end of the last millennium, emphasis in sport was on physical and technical perfection. This might require endless hours in the gym or going through thousands of cartridges in practice. But now, a quantum leap has been made in sporting excellence – training your brain just as you would have previously trained your body. Thanks to newly developed technology, it is now possible to measure and learn sustained levels of intense concentration. This is not psychology, but a system that trains your brainwaves to optimal levels.

Henry Hopking, the founder of The Brain Training Company, has developed a 'Brainwave Conditioning System™'. With recent advances in technology, it is now possible to accurately measure your mental state (or brainwaves) just prior to shooting. Furthermore, it is now also possible to train someone how to control their brainwaves on

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TRAINING CAN INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF THE 12 Hz BRAINWAVE FREQUENCY (PINK LINE) ON DEMAND – THE PERFECT LEVEL FOR FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION BEFORE YOU CALL FOR THE TARGET.



demand. It is by learning to control them and ensuring that you are using your brain in the most efficient way that leads to a significant improvement in performance. The system has been proven with great success – just ask Glenn Eller, Olympic Gold medalist.

IDEAL STATE

We all have brainwaves – and not just at inspired moments. “Our brains produce electrical activity,”

explains Hopking, “and these pulses of electricity, or brainwaves, are the foundation to our performance. There are different speeds of activity and for optimal performance we need to be in the ideal brainwave state for that task. The good news is that it is possible to learn how to control your state of mind – and with modern technology this can be taught in a matter of days.”

When we experience stress and mental tension, our brain starts to work faster in what is called a High-

Beta state. Conversely, when we are relaxed (or are going to sleep) we enter the Theta and Delta states. The state associated with relaxed attention, focus and concentration is the High-Alpha, sometimes known as SMR state. Hopking goes on to explain, “The best athletes need to be able to shift between all of these states. It is not just about getting focused, but also about how to switch off and relax or control nerves.”

We all have two sides to our brain – the left and right hemispheres. Some people refer to themselves as being more ‘left’ brained if they are a logical person and others as being ‘right’ brained if they are more artistic. However, for peak performance in sport, such as trap shooting, what is required is to be able to utilize both hemispheres of the brain equally or in balance.

While ensuring that you are totally focused by accessing the SMR state, you must also be balanced between the two hemispheres. This is when athletes are able to enter what has become known as ‘The Zone’ or ‘The Flow State’. For some, this comes naturally. To others it is an elusive state occurring momentarily in a shooting career.

In the early years of brain training, the technology simply wasn’t advanced enough to achieve significant results. But in the last ten years, technology has advanced at such a pace that training systems like Hopking’s are now possible – and importantly, getting results.

BRAIN BUDDY

As well as helping with the measurement of our performance, technology has enabled the development of tools to specifically improve your brain’s hardware. A component of Hopking’s training system uses the Brain Buddy.

WORKING WITH THE BRAIN TRAINING COMPANY, YOU CAN NOW SEE THE BENEFITS OF VISUALIZATION AND OTHER TECHNIQUES USING COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY – THUS REINFORCING YOUR BELIEF IN THE BENEFITS OF VISUALIZATION.



Benefits are:

Mental Dissociation. The clearing of thoughts from the mind and physical relaxation, similar to what a Zen meditator would experience.

Cerebral blood flow increases. The blood flow within the brain can increase by up to 28% (Fox and Reichle 1985). Many cognitive and emotional disorders involve areas of the brain low in blood.

EEG activity changes. The concept of "entrainment" is about altering brainwave activity. It is possible to normalize brainwave activity to a healthier pattern and to assist in training an individual to control their brainwave activity.

So, with this small portable device in your bag you find a quiet place, perhaps your car, just prior to starting competition. Uniquely programmed for your individual brainwave activity, you wear the glasses and headphones of the Brain Buddy™ and switch it on. Twenty minutes later, you have been able to banish the negative



effects of nerves and get yourself into an optimal state of relaxed attention – perfect for shooting. Each client is provided with their own Brain Buddy™ system, custom programmed for their brainwave activity.

The idea of brain training exercises is nothing new – or the theory isn't anyway. For a moment, think of your brain as you would a muscle; you can exercise it and it will both strengthen and grow. There are actual physical changes which occur after practice. Your brain cells

become better connected and the connecting pathways become thicker. You are creating a specific pathway of neural wiring in your brain.

VISUALIZATION

However, not all of Hopking's training is about technology. Brain training is about teaching a variety of skills which can be used in different situations. One method of mental preparation that is popular with top athletes is visualization. Many studies have been done on the effectiveness of this technique. A side effect of visualization is that it helps put your brain into a relaxed state, slightly slower than that required for focus. So, at any time you feel nerves getting the better of you, the best thing you can do is to visualize – simple yet so powerful. However, while visualization is not a new technique, the undoubted benefit of working with The Brain Training Company is that you can now see the benefits of visualization and other techniques using computer technology – thus reinforcing your belief in the benefits of visualization.

Another well known and simple technique is to focus on your breathing. When under pressure, your breathing becomes shallow, resulting in less oxygen getting to the brain and muscle tension creeping in. A few deep breaths helps to ensure you are fully relaxed with a clear head ready to shoot. From brainwave measurements, it is often seen that you achieve peak levels of concentration towards the end of an exhale.

PEAK PERFORMANCE

Hopking has developed a name for himself in recent years as a specialist helping people control their brainwave activity for peak

performance. Rather than being on the psychology side of sports training, he describes himself as more akin to that of a sports neurologist. To explain this, he uses the analogy of a computer. "In general terms you have both mental hardware and software," says Hopking. "Your hardware is the physical aspects, or the neurology of your brain and how it communicates – brain cells and electricity, or brainwaves. Your software is the resulting thoughts which are created and your response to them. This is the psychology. You can't expect software to work at its best if the hardware is not tuned for peak performance."

Hopking sees his job as helping people train and improve their mental hardware; to create techniques unique to them which

will fire off a specific conditioned response. You get a variety of mental tools to use – be it to ramp up concentration levels or keep focused.

The technology and system is being used for a wide variety of applications outside sports training, including memory training, speed-reading, stress management and helping children with ADD/HD. Dominic O'Brien, a business associate of Hopking's, is eight times World Memory Champion. Hopking himself has previously been ranked as the third fastest reader in the world and awarded the title of "Second most creative mind on the planet" at the Mind Sports Olympiad!

To date he has helped several of his trap and sporting clays shooters to win numerous titles, including two Olympic Gold Medals in trap shooting (Sydney 2000 and Beijing

2008). Across other shooting disciplines his clients have won FITASC and Sporting World Championships, National, European and State Championships, as well as World Cup events – sometimes with at least two of his clients on the podium at the same time, neither realizing the other was a client of Hopking. Clearly, for some people, the training has been a closely guarded secret that they haven't wanted others to know about.

"Henry Hopking's training taught me a powerful mental routine and gave me the knowledge to understand how to control my brain states. It is like having a reset button I can use whenever I need to boost my concentration or control nerves – and that helped in winning Gold at the recent Olympics," said Glenn Eller.

The key to these applications is learning to control your own brain

waves – there is not one 'state' for golfers and another for shooting and yet another for studying. They all require high levels of concentration, which is achieved by putting yourself into the SMR state.

To be coached personally by Hopking, courses can cost anywhere from \$2,000. One day basic and two day advanced courses are available. Group and shared sessions are also possible. Hopking travels over here to the USA with his Brainwave Conditioning System™ several times a year and holds a limited number of private coaching sessions. ■

*More information is available at
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emails can be sent to
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or call 210 775 2648.
It's certainly worth checking out.*