

Sports Hypnotherapy in Archery

Hypnosis . . . hypnotherapy . . . the words alone conjure up visions of stage performers we often see advertised on television, where members of the audience are hypnotised and are then coaxed into performing some act in front of an audience that they don't realise they are doing or wouldn't normally do if they were not hypnotised. I know this was my first reaction. But this surely shouldn't be the case when people talk about sports hypnotherapy could it? My curiosity got the better of me (like it usually does – good thing I'm not a cat, I'd probably be dead by now) and I did more research on the subject, as I wanted to know, whether hypnotherapy—sports hypnotherapy—could help me in archery.

Right now I'd bet you are wondering to yourself if, in fact you went to see one of these hypnotic performers, they could hypnotise you into being the greatest archer of all time, so that when competing at a tournament, at a signal of just a word, you would drop into "the zone" and shoot nothing but Xs or tens every time you shot an arrow. Well, sorry folks, but it just doesn't work that way.

Sports hypnotherapy, is nothing like what those stage performances do. But, I will say that it will help you to become not only a better archer, but will also give you a feeling of inner peace and calm as well. In other words it may change your outlook on things in general so that you understand yourself better and become a better person for it.

I had toyed with the idea of seeing a sports hypnotherapist for quite some time after coach Terry Reilly first mentioned it to me and then my coach, Robert DeBondt, also made mention of seeing a hypnotherapist. Like most new things I consider trying, I undertook mountains of research at the library. Even before taking the final plunge I had the opportunity to see a sports psychologist, Gavin Freeman, at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) during one of my training visits there. I must say that meeting was one of the major turning points in my archery. Gavin opened my mind to a new way of thinking that has

had a profound effect on my attitude when I shoot. It also made me realise that seeing a sports hypnotherapist would also further assist me in attaining my archery goals.

So I decided to finally "bite the bullet," but finding a hypnotherapist is easier said than done! I do recommend that if you decide to try this, don't settle for the first hypnotherapist you find in the phone book or on the internet. I emailed several therapists and asked them exactly the same questions each time. Some never replied and were naturally crossed off the list. Those that did reply were on the "further consideration list." I then discussed their answers with my coach and let him decide which one was the person I would see. Suffice it to say that one of the main requirements was that the hypnotherapist should be a member of a "Clinical Hypnotherapist Society or Association" and be currently registered with them. This was one of the reasons why Robert DeBondt and I chose Lyn Macintosh, along with the fact that her response via email was very upfront and genuine with no pressure implied. The fact that she had been involved in pistol shooting was the deciding factor.

Lyn Macintosh, is a member of the following: Australian Society of Clinical Hypnotherapists, Australian Hypnotherapists Association, Counsellors and Psychotherapists Association, and the Professional Clinical Hypnotherapists of Australia. (Whew!) Before I go any further here, I am only going to touch on what happened during my hypnotherapy sessions with Lyn, because much of what I worked through with Lyn is of a very personal nature (as will your session be, if you decide to give sports hypnotherapy a try).

What I Have Learnt from Lyn and Myself

I was a little nervous seeing Lyn for the first time being not quite sure of what to expect or still yet, how this was going to benefit my archery. Lyn was very welcoming and mostly we sat and talked for a time so we got to know each other. During this time I

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learnt that yes, hypnosis is used during these sessions but Lyn assured me that even when in hypnosis, you are still fairly self-aware and will never do anything under hypnosis that you would not normally do if fully awake. That is what re-assured me the most. We also talked about what I wanted to achieve.

Suffice it to say that Lyn helped me with problems that I didn't even know I had. She brought out underlying problems from my subconscious mind that were affecting what I wanted to achieve in archery. Problems that arose when I was a child and had just stayed with me buried within my subconscious and were the cause of many automatic responses that I could not control. Other things such as my worries in this world and in archery, my trusts and mistrusts, we looked at what was preventing me from shooting better than I currently was and delved deeper into those issues and are making inroads into resolving them. These problems were also the cause of me not reaching a higher plane in archery and once the problems are addressed they can be more easily dealt with in the conscious world. They are no longer problems when you make the steps towards dealing with them and then steps towards greater success in your sport can be taken.

One thing I have noticed during each of my sessions with Lyn is that I lose track of time and have no concept of time at all during the hypnosis sessions. During one session Lyn and I worked through several issues, each time she put me in hypnosis to work out the origin of the problem and then work through it so that that I could learn to face it, then deal with the situation so that it was no longer a problem. At the end of the session I felt tired, which is quite normal. Being brought into a state of hypnosis is very relaxing, and at the same time I felt filled with energy. I know this is contradictory, but this is how I felt. As I said goodbye I thought that the hour that I had been there was great and I learned much more about myself. Upon seeing a clock, I realized I been there for nearly two and a half hours!

Another thing I have noticed is after each hypnotherapy session, I have a wonderful night's sleep that night. I wake up feeling absolutely motivated and filled with energy. In general, I am sleeping more soundly and wake up more refreshed as well.

One of the many important lessons that Lyn has taught me is how to deal with those archers among us that like to play with your psyche, to try and put you off your game—how to be able to have the power to reverse what they said to you back onto them and how to really talk to yourself positively during a tournament so that you reach your potential. She also taught me how to really concentrate on the “here and now” and have more control over my thoughts and concentration levels. This has made me more self-confident. Lately, I

have noticed that when I am shooting really well, that the only conscious indicator of a well shot arrow is the bow falling forward into my finger sling and my release hand ending up behind my ear. At times I have asked fellow archers watching me practise if my clicker had gone off when I shot, as I don't remember hearing the click or feeling the release. The only way to describe it is like shooting, but not really feeling anything, like being in a dream. I have had no feeling of back tension being instigated or anything else, just the bow falling forward and the arrow hitting the target in the spot that I was looking at. When this happens, my arrow groups have been very small. The goal now, in working with Lyn, is to make this happen all the time, not just some of the time.

By now you are probably thinking that hypnotherapists just concentrate on solving your problems and in doing so, remove barriers to higher performance. Well, wrong again people. Lyn also helped me in re-affirming the positives as well. For example, she asked me about my achievements in archery and which ones really stand out. For me my first ever National Title in ABA Field archery stood out the most. That weekend of shooting was really something special for me, with the last round of the weekend being eight points off of a perfect score. Lyn asked me how I felt during that time, mentally and physically, what made it so special. She then, in hypnosis, re-affirmed these memories so that they will assist me in recreating the feelings of that day and hence help towards repeating that performance again. This is important in that it

re-affirms the positives as your strengths. You can then use these strengths in dealing with the problems as they surface, so that they too are then dealt with and can then be cast away and are no longer a performance barrier.

Have the sessions been worth it? I must say yes. I have been able to work through many problems and resolve them. I am still working with Lyn and we are making great progress toward my goals in archery. All the positives have been re-affirmed as positives and strengths in not just archery, but in life and have become a source of strength and confidence in my own ability. I am now able to just cast aside the bad execution of a shot and just forget it. I realise that bad shots happen from time to time and accept the fact without getting stressed or over analysing “what just happened.” I simply just get on with shooting arrows, returning to my routine with supreme confidence that the shot I am about to perform will be as it should.

Before finishing, I will try to anticipate a question here that some of you may be thinking. That is “Is this going to turn me instantly into a Olympic gold medallist or a 1300+

“You can ensure you have the best equipment, best coach and best practice conditions but don't underestimate the role that your mind will play in how well you shoot.”
—Lyn Macintosh

archer?" The answer is no, I don't expect that it will. At time of writing I am still only a 1200+ archer and have much yet to learn from the people who are in my team, that is my coach, my trainer, my hypnotherapist, and my family and friends. But it will help you along the path to your goals whatever they may be. It will give you much more mental power than you thought possible and total unwavering confidence. I know it has helped me and made me realise that there is much more yet to come and that when everything is right the score will be forthcoming. Mentally, I feel much stronger than I was before I started and that I believe has come from the undoubting confidence I now have in myself.

Matthew Lee (shown here with his son Brandon) has written more articles for AFm than any other "down under" archer. Matt and his wife and two children live in Australia.



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