

How to Introduce Young Shooters

Unless you operate as a “traditional only” archery retailer you likely have the goal of getting as many new shooters as possible to buy a release along with their new compound. It’s much quicker to learn to shoot well with a release and in fact there are few bows on the market today long enough to be comfortable for the archer using a glove or tab. What about your younger customers? Do you stock releases for their small hands and are you comfortable helping them select one and learn to use it.

My experience as a coach can help you. This coming Tuesday evening I promised three of the boys at our local club that I’d help them work on their release technique. They, six other boys and one girl have been shooting this winter and have formed two of the teams in our indoor league. It’s been great having them there the past two years and they seem to be fitting in well with all of the other men and women involved in our club.

They’re too young to remember me from my teaching days – I retired before they made it to the senior high – so it’s taken six weeks for them to warm up to me to the point where they ask for help. But the ice is broken now and I’ve been helping them with their bow repairs, arrow repairs and sight adjustments. It reminds me about what I miss by not being in school every day – working with the kids. I’m looking forward to our session together.

What I have to do today is make a plan for our training session. The reason I need a plan is the fact that the words I choose in my instruction paint pictures in their minds and I don’t want to paint the wrong picture. The wrong picture can cause them to build bad habits and then we have twice the work to do to build the correct habit. I know from my early days teaching mathematics

to eighth graders that a poor first example can create misconceptions that take days to overcome.

What this all means, then, is that our learning session will begin with a clear explanation and demonstration of FULL-DRAW-POSITION. My students will have to know their posture “OBJECTIVE” from the first few minutes, after that we can discuss how to get into that position and how the release should be made to function while in that position.

What release aid will we work with? We’ll work with a back tension release aid and learn to do it correctly from the beginning. They’ve already been shooting with other release aids and learning “on the job” so to speak and most of them have picked up some bad habits. But they know that and are coming to our training session with an open mind. They have been watching the top shooters in our club shooting perfect and near-perfect scores with back tension release aids so they know where they need to go with their shooting.

Once they learn the proper release technique with a back tension style release aid then they can transfer that skill to other release aid styles. I’ll, of course, recommend that they always do some training with a back tension release. Once they build the proper skills they will need to reinforce and retain them.

Part of my plan for this training session is to “listen” to my students. I have to be sure that I use a good balance of talking, demonstrating, assisting and listening. What they have to say while they are learning is critical to my understanding of what they comprehend correctly and what they are misunderstanding. In other



T FORM: Teaching kids – or adults – how to stand at full draw begins with the archer’s “T” position. Hands and arms should be extended and raised to the horizontal level with the archer’s shoulders set down to their strongest and steadiest posture.



FINGERTIPS UNDER CHIN: The second step in building Full-Draw-Position is to bend the release arm at the elbow and bring the release-hand fingertips under the chin as shown. This prepares the holding arm to be in line with the arrow and to allow the holding to be transferred into the back muscles.

to Using the Mechanical Release

words, what they have to say is important and they need to know that – it builds their self-worth and helps the learning process.

My group will range in age from 14 to 18 years but I will use the same basic lesson plan for younger – or older- archers who need to learn how to shoot a release aid properly. We have several eight and nine-year-olds shooting back tension release aids. Learning to do it correctly has no age limits.

LEARNING FULL-DRAW-POSITION

Everyone should know how to stand at full draw before they draw their first arrow. Knowing your destination is always helpful when you get in your car and head onto the road. With gasoline at \$4 a gallon in some areas you can't afford to waste it wondering around lost on some back road. Determine your destination and plot the most efficient route to get you there.

Most archers don't know what that goal is for their shooting form. As a dealer you need to teach that concept first to all of your archers regardless of their ability level. If you do they will get better. The journey is always easier if you know where you are going. I know far too many archers that operate like those high-security government agencies where "the secrecy of their work prevents them from knowing what they are doing!"

STEP ONE: TEACHING "T" FORM

Your posture at full draw should be based on the letter "T". Just stand up straight and raise your arms out to your sides and you form a "T" from which we can build proper FULL-DRAW-POSITION. The teaching sequence is as follows:



TURN HEAD: Next, with the chin held level, turn the head toward the target. Keep the chin level as tilting the head/chin downward will prevent back muscles from fully accepting the holding load when it is transferred from the drawing arm.

1) STAND UPRIGHT WITH YOUR ARMS RAISED & EXTENDED HORIZONTALLY WITH PALMS DOWN (see T form photo)

2) ROLL YOUR SHOULDERS BACK AND DOWN INTO THEIR MOST STABLE POSITION

3) SET YOUR FEET SO THEY ARE SHOULDER-WIDTH APART

4) TILT YOUR CHIN/HEAD DOWNWARD TOWARD YOUR CHEST TO FEEL YOUR BACK MUSCLES SUPPORTING YOUR HEAD

5) RESET YOUR HEAD OVER YOUR SPINE TO FREE BACK MUSCLES, CHIN LEVEL, FACING FORWARD

6) BEND RELEASE ARM AT THE ELBOW AND BRING FINGERTIPS UNDER CHIN (see fingertips under chin photo)

7) TURN HEAD TOWARD TARGET, CHIN LEVEL, RELEASE FINGERS TOUCHING NECK UNDER JAW (see turn head photo)

8) FORM "STOP SIGN" WITH BOW HAND & RELAX FINGERS + THUMB (see stop sign photo)

This resulting position is FULL-DRAW-POSITION. From this posture we can effectively and most efficiently execute an archery shot using a back tension release aid...or any other type of release aid.

STEP TWO: BOW FITTING

Once the proper posture is established then, and only then, can you properly fit a person's bow to them. The bow has to match a person's Full-Draw-Position



STOP SIGN: With the bow arm extended, bones in line, present a "Stop Sign" to the target. The hand should be held so that the knuckles make a 45 degree angle to horizontal thus preparing the thumb pad to receive the grip section of the bow. The fingers and thumb should be relaxed allowing the thumb to point at the target.

posture so they can use their back muscles effectively and efficiently. Shoulder position, head position and arm positions must be maintained according to the archer's "T" while the bow is adjusted to fit!

Further, any training aids must fit this posture as well. Rope loops, stretch bands or commercially made devices like the Saunders Firing Line must be adjusted so that shot execution is practiced while in the archer's "T." Only in this position can an archer transfer the holding load into their back muscles and then (and only then) execute the practice shot using back tension.

DEFINING BACK TENSION

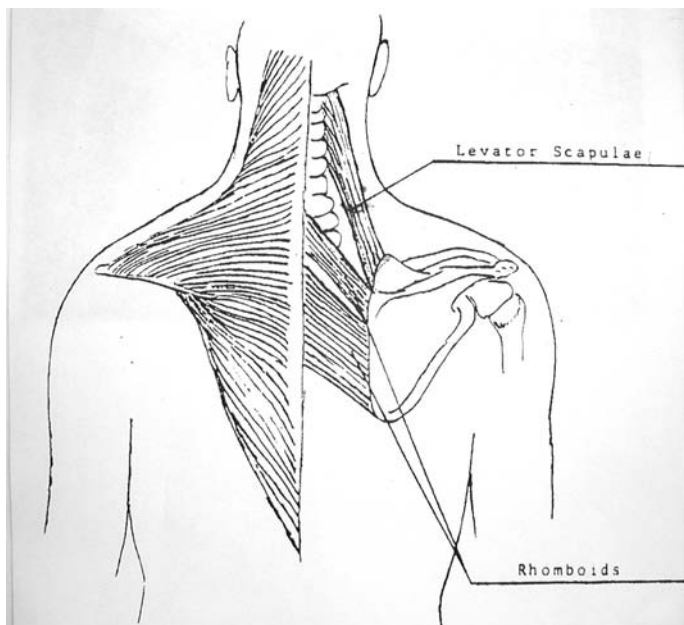
So, what is back tension? The term has been used for years without ever being defined, so we start to build good form by defining it. Being able to see our target is essential to hitting it and, therefore, knowing and understanding the definition of back tension is essential to achieving it.

DEFINITION: Back tension is the isometric contraction of the dominant or drawing-side rhomboid muscles, aided by the levator scapulae muscle, which causes a micro sliding-rotation of the scapula toward the spine. At the same time the trapezius contracts, locking the shoulder unit with the scapula holding them next to the rib cage.

Now, do you need to know where these muscles are and their names? Absolutely! The more you know about your objective, the better you can achieve it. The figure below shows the rhomboids and levator scapulae muscles that must be contracted to move the shoulder blade and shoulder unit toward the spine. The trapezius holds the shoulder blade close to the rib cage while linking the shoulder unit to it.

Kids, and most adults for that matter, won't necessarily remember the muscle names but they will remember what action these muscles create. **That action is rotational.** Rhomboid muscle contraction places a rotational force on the holding upper arm and elbow resulting in the elbow rotating about the shoulder joint – the ball-like head of the humerus rotates relative to the scapula.

It is this rotational force and micro-movement that



BACK MUSCLES: This anatomy drawing shows the location of the Rhomboid muscle groups and the Levator Scapulae muscle that help to hold the bow when back tension is used correctly. The Trapezius is also used to help the process. Holding with the back promotes a relaxed forearm and a proper follow-through.

we harness to activate the back tension release aid. When the elbow rotates a very small amount then the back tension release aid handle can also rotate and that, in turn, discharges the bowstring. No finger or wrist action should be used – the holding fingers should have equal gripping tension which remains constant through the release action while the wrist remains relaxed. The rotation action is driven by the back muscles only.

One special note here is the fact that the rotation of the upper arm and elbow is not in the horizontal plane. Instead, it is in a plane tilted about 20 to 30 degrees from horizontal. The elbow rotates around the shoulder joint and slightly downward. This tilted rotation is easy to see if you watch a proper follow-through movement. You can teach kids to do this because they (and even most adults) will feel that this movement is easiest for the shoulder joint to execute.

DEMONSTRATION: Seeing a person executing a shot is helpful. I wish I could put video in this article but short of that I can put in two photos that demonstrate full-draw-position and follow-through position so you can see the path of the upper arm/elbow. Seeing this path gives you a good idea of the plane in which the elbow rotates when back tension is properly executed. Check them out at the top of the following page.



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FULL-DRAW-POSITION: Correct posture at full draw will show how the drawing arm/elbow should be in line with the arrow so that holding can transfer into the back. Back muscle contraction places a rotational force on the elbow which can be used to set off the release aid.

FOLLOW-THROUGH: The rotational force on the elbow is evident when the release occurs and the contracted back muscles cause the elbow to rotate further. Because the shoulder joint doesn't rotate easily in the horizontal plane, the elbow rotates in a plane that is tilted 30 degrees from horizontal.

TRAINING AID PRACTICE

Hands-on practice with an actual release aid begins with a Tru Ball Sweet Spot II release. I like it because of its "safety" button and how easy that makes the transition from training devices to the actual bow and arrow. In our upcoming lesson my group of young students needs to focus on getting into position and activating the correct muscles without worrying about the release aid discharging an arrow.

ROPE LOOP: A simple piece of release rope or nylon cord can be fashioned into a loop that matches the student's draw length. Adjust the loop length until the student is in proper full-draw-position. Using this posture the student can begin learning how to transfer the holding load into their back muscles and then relax the holding forearm, wrist and hand.

STRETCH BAND: A length of colored stretch band material can also be fashioned into a learning aid. Add a



Learning to use the back tension is easy to do with any of the devices shown. The ISO Band with a D-loop attached provides some tension to the holding while the rope loop is the easiest to carry and to adjust to the proper draw length. The Firing Line from Saunders Archery provides both holding tension and adjustable draw length.

small piece of release rope so the release aid can be hooked onto the band. This device allows the student to attach a release aid, draw and hold against a force and discharge the release aid. Since the band length is not fixed like the rope loop you'll have to monitor the student's full-draw posture to be sure they correctly align their holding forearm with the arrow line.

SAUNDERS FIRING-LINE: This device is one of several that enable an archer to train release technique without a bow. Some others you'll find are the Range-O-Matic Formaster and the Morin Trainer, both listed in the current catalog from Lancaster Archery Supply of Pennsylvania. Once again, the full-draw posture of the student must be monitored to be sure they align their holding forearm with the arrow line. From this position they will be able to transfer the holding force into their back muscles and then they can execute the mechanical release technique properly.


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TECHNIQUE PRACTICE STEPS:

- 1) Establish Full-Draw-Position so that the drawing forearm is aligned with the imaginary arrow.
- 2) Transfer the holding into the appropriate back muscles.
- 3) Release the safety button.
- 4) Relax holding forearm, wrist and hand.
- 5) Maintain and equalize gripping tightness among all holding fingers (two or three, never four).
- 6) Further increase the tension (contraction) of the back muscles so that more rotational force is applied to the upper holding arm and elbow.
- 7) Continue back muscle contraction until release aid discharges the practice device.

TEACHER PROMPTS: You as the instructor must provide some prompts as the student works through the above technique steps. These are some things I say to my students while they are beginning to learn the technique.

- 1) Say, "Be sure to transfer the hold into your back."
- 2) Actually touch their back muscles between their scapula and spine to identify the correct muscles. Use a pen or wooden ruler to avoid touching if preferred.
- 3) Say "Do not try to "PULL" more arrow across the arrow rest as pulling does not cause the back tension release aid to discharge – rotation does!"
- 4) Say, "Keep your hand and wrist relaxed so your back can rotate your elbow. A stiff or tight hand and wrist acts like an anchor working against your back."
- 5) Say, "Don't make a fist type shape with your hand as that tightens forearm muscles."
- 6) Actually push their elbow lightly in the proper direction so they feel what rotation they are trying to produce.
- 7) Remind them to "think about their elbow rotating."
- 8) Say, "Be patient with the process and allow your back muscles to rotate your elbow."
- 9) Be sure to always tell them "what to do" and never "what not to do"!

Practicing ten shots is a good start. Often my students struggle to do more than that because their back muscles aren't conditioned to handle more. After a few shots they have difficulty isolating on the muscles they need and can't get the release to discharge. That's normal at the beginning so have them take a short break before trying a few more shots.

As their coach you have to be very observant as to their execution style. If you detect any wrist twist or finger torque being used to rotate the release handle then you'll have to correct them immediately. Insist on proper execution from the start – insist on back-generated rotation only. If it isn't back-generated then they may as well have a trigger release.

After 15 to 20 shots with the practice aid it's time for a few shots with their bow.

PRACTICE WITH THE BOW

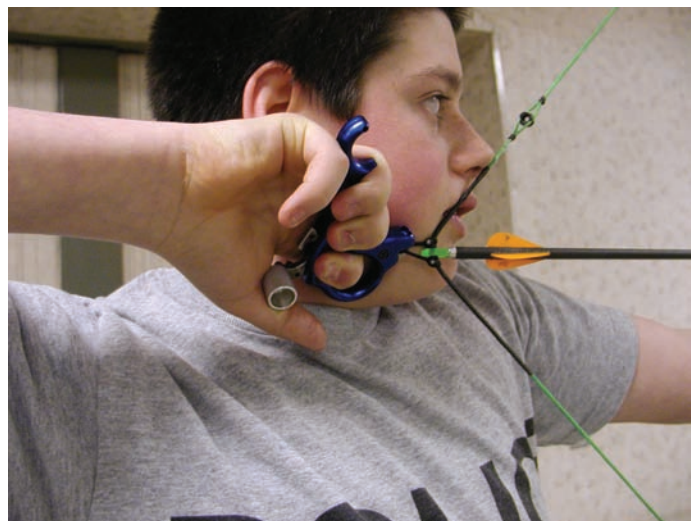
When I switch my students from the training aids to their bow I have them start at close range, just 3 yards. A blank target butt is all that is needed so they can focus on the proper shot sequence and, of course, the bow feels different from the training aid so they will have to adjust. Usually the bow feels better, easier to execute.

As with the training aid, be sure to monitor their execution style. The release handle rotation must come from the back and not from the fingers or wrist. Their bow's draw length may need to be adjusted so they can get into proper Full-Draw-Position.

If they struggle to achieve a good release then go back to the training aid and/or reset the release aid so that it discharges a little easier but be careful, don't set it too easy or quick as they must learn to work at the rotation and condition themselves physically. A release aid set too quick leads to "tentative" shooting and does not promote commitment to using back muscles.

Following ten to 15 good executions with their bow your students are ready for a target. Remain at a distance of 3 to 5 yards. Place a three-spot target on the butt and have your students shoot three consecutive shots, one at each spot. Have them shoot four ends being sure to monitor each shot for proper execution as visual focus on a target spot tends to draw the conscious focus to "aiming" and away from proper execution.

Watch for back-generated rotation and if it isn't there then remove the target face and rebuild proper execution before shooting more arrows at spots. Your student has to establish the correct method of execution from the beginning before improper execution becomes an ingrained habit and something that is very hard to remediate. When their shooting form is correct then allow them to shoot at the target spots again. Repeat this



THUMB RELEASE: Hold the thumb release so that the hand is flat and the trigger extends into the base of the thumb. Eliminate the sensitive thumb tip so your conscious is not connected to the touching of the release trigger. Tightening the back muscles and finger will drive the release trigger into the base of the thumb. Don't drive the thumb into the trigger.

process until your student succeeds in transferring proper back tension execution to shooting at target spots.

SHOOTING THE THUMB TRIGGER RELEASE AID:

The key to transferring proper back tension technique to another release style is in the holding of the release aid itself. As for the thumb style, you should teach your students to hold the release with the same straight wrist and flat knuckles as they hold the back tension release aid. That means the trigger length must be adjusted so that the trigger fits against the bone at the base of the student's thumb. Using the highly sensitive tip of the thumb is not an option as that sensitivity draws the attention of your conscious mind to the trigger and away from the much more important execution of back tension. (see thumb release photo)

Executing with a thumb trigger then becomes a task of transferring the holding into the back and maintaining finger tightness. The rotational force from the elbow then aids the finger tightening to drive the release trigger into the thumb base. This sequence eliminates any conscious thinking about the trigger or when the release aid will discharge.

INDEX TRIGGER RELEASE AIDS: These are the most popular style release aid among bowhunters and most of your youth students already have one. I dislike that situation but that's the reality we face because most dads have an index trigger and they give their old ones to their kids to use. Or they buy one for their kids just because the index trigger is so easy to use.

It's that ease of use, however, that leads to improper use. Kids see so many adults using index triggers by putting the tip of their index finger on the trigger and so



FINGER AROUND TRIGGER: Hold the index trigger by curling the index finger completely around it avoiding the use of the finger tip. Once again, tightening the back muscles and fingers simultaneously is the most effective release process. Correct follow-through will indicate if the archer is executing the process correctly; no follow-through means no back tension and it's all happening in the index finger.

that's what they do. It all seems so easy - - - until they start anticipating the string release because their conscious is connected directly to the trigger via their highly sensitive finger tip.

To avoid release anticipation and accomplish a proper release-with-follow-through, teach your students to hold the release aid so that they can completely surround the trigger with their index finger. The second joint of the finger needs to be contacting the barrel and the trigger simultaneously from the setup of full-draw-position. (The index finger tip touches nothing.) Waiting until you are aiming and then "touching" the trigger is asking for anticipation problems. Set the trigger tension to medium-heavy and establish full contact with the index finger. (see finger around trigger photo)

Executing with the index trigger now becomes a task of transferring the holding into the back and maintaining finger tightness. All fingers need to be gently tightened. As the back muscles and fingers continue to tighten/contract the rotational force on the elbow will assist in properly discharging the release aid. With this method, the instant of release will not be known to the shooter. The follow through from this action will be evidenced in the fact that the release hand will fall backward, straight away from behind the arrow and finish a short distance behind the ear.

CAUTION: When you feel your student is ready to switch from a back tension style release to a trigger be sure to monitor their first arrows closely. Adjust their release aid handle/strap length so they can achieve the proper holding technique. Don't start them until this criterion is met - avoid problems down the road by preparing correctly at the start.

CAUTION: if your student falters with the new release aid go back to the back tension release. Keep them reinforcing the proper technique and try the switch some other day when they may be more ready.

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RELEASE AID SURVEY FROM THE 2011 ATA SHOW

While at the January 2011 ATA Show in Indianapolis I was able to visit most of the release aid manufacturers to get a look at what they have available for kids. The following descriptions will give you a good idea of what you can stock in your shop for your up-and-coming youth shooters.



Carter Fits Me Too

CARTER ENTERPRISES: (carterenterprises.com)

My old friend Jerry Carter showed me several release aids that are suitable for kids. The first was the Fits Me thumb-trigger style. It along with the Fits Me Too have an interchangeable tension system for their thumb trigger as well as the Carter Adjusto Trigger that allows the user to micro adjust the distance and position of the trigger barrel as it relates to the base of the user's thumb. (see the photo above)

The Adjusto trigger system supplies several different springs so that the user can quickly change from one spring to another to customize the feel of the trigger pressure. In addition, the Fits Me and Fits Me Too release aids can be adjusted for trigger travel. Jerry recommends that both be shot using a D-loop on the bowstring.

Two other Carter release aids also get my recommendation, the Colby 2 Spike and the Colby Hinge. Both are back-tension style release aids without a safety setting but they fit any hand size because of their straight post-like handle. These release aids both hook to a D-loop on the bowstring and are activated by back-generated rotation of the release aid handle. Each has adjustable tension settings to vary the amount of rotation needed to discharge the bowstring.

The Carter Quickie release is also recommended for kids. This index trigger release has a shorter Velcro strap to fit smaller hands.

TRU BALL: (truball.com)

The Bandit and Outlaw caliper release aids by TRU Ball offer a smaller caliper and adjustable strap/handle length to fit kids. I like the trigger shape myself as it allows the archer to completely surround it with his/her index finger and avoid using the fingertip that promotes some poor release habits.

The release aid I use the most for training my students, both young and old, is the Sweet Spot II. The SS II

has a safety button that allows back tension beginners to start learning the technique without any fears of the release firing prematurely. Kids have no difficulty holding the SS II handle and operating the release aid – I've started hundreds on it and recommend it highly. The new tapered handle version will be on the market soon.



Tru Ball Bandit

HOT SHOT: (hotshotmanufacturing.com)

Two release aids caught my eye at the ATA Show Hot Shot booth. The Stan Potts Signature Series thumb model and the Infinity index-trigger model. The thumb model will fit the youth medium size hand while the Infinity strap (either buckle or Velcro) model can be adjusted to fit the medium and small hand. I really like this type of strap because of how short it can be made – short to get the index finger all the way around the trigger.



Stan Potts Signature Series and Infinity releases from Hot Shot.

TRU-FIRE: (trufire.com)

The biggest selection of kids caliper release aids was on display at the Tru-Fire booth. The features suitable for kids are available in fold back models, web straps, buckle and Velcro straps. The triggers are adjustable from 4 ounces to 12 ounces to get that custom feel. They even have pink straps. The illustration on the next page show the short handles and straps that can be adjusted to fit medium and smaller hands.

Check the following models on their website. The names you'll see are: Hurricane Hybrid Web (camo or pink), Edge Hybrid Fold Back Small (camo or pink), Edge buckle Fold Back (camo or pink), Hurricane Web, Hurricane Junior, and the Patriot.



These nine releases are from Tru-Fire

SCOTT: (scottarchery.com)

At the ATA Show Scott Archery presented the Silverhorn index-trigger release with an adjustable connecting rod or strap. The forward trigger brings the bowstring closer to the archer's face and the peep sight closer to the aiming eye. The release hook is spring loaded so that it's always in place, ready for an easy hook-up.

The Longhorn Hex was designed for bowhunters who want to or have to use a back tension release for hunting but I think it offers a good application for kids who don't yet have the hand strength to pull a regular back tension style handle. As you can see the rope-strap is adjustable to fit any archer's hand.



Scott's Longhorn Hex (at left) is a back tension release that lets you hold the draw weight with the aid of a strap. Two versions of the new Silverhorn index-trigger release are also shown.



The Stanislawski Shoot Off from Copper John not only comes in 2, 3 and 4 finger styles, you can get the body in two sizes.

COPPER JOHN: (copperjohn.com)

The thumb-trigger release named "Shoot Off" is offered in two sizes according to the boys at Copper John. The medium size, of course, will fit most youth archers. The swept-back holding section and the swept-back trigger barrel are a natural fit for medium to small hand sizes.

SUMMARY

There are lots of release aids on the market that will fit our kids. It is up to you, the dealer, and your local club coaches to get your kids started correctly. If they learn the correct technique from the beginning they will stay in archery longer...or come back to it at a later time in their lives. Lots of the guys and gals at our club started archery years ago but came back to it because they have good memories from when they started. We have to give our kids those same good memories.

The adults and the kids at my home club are all having fun so the kids will keep coming back. When they do I'll be glad to help them with their shooting. So, if you decide to take the time to teach kids how to shoot archery then you might as well do it right from the start. Follow the tips I have presented in this article and you be off to a good start that will yield high returns on your investment.

Keep well, shoot straight.

Larry

EDITOR'S NOTE: Larry's books are available from Larry Wise Archery, 402 Locust Grove Road, Mifflintown, PA 17059 for \$14 + \$3 postage. Titles available are *Tuning Your Compound Bow*, *Tuning and Silencing Your Bowhunting System*, *Bow and Arrow: A Complete Guide*. The phone number for Larry Wise Archery is (717) 436-9168 or contact him by email at larry@larrywise.com.

Larry Wise is also available to conduct one and two day Core Archery Academies on shooting form. Personalized coaching is now available on-line via Skype, and video clips of Larry offering bowhunting tips can be seen on the bowhunting.net website.

A new DVD by Larry Wise on Core Archery Back Tension is in production now and should be available by June.

Check out past articles by Larry Wise at the twin web sites of ArrowTrade.com.

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