

Combative Applications of Competitive Techniques, Part I

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I've been asked many times, "Does 'practical shooting' under the stress of competition offer training *benefit* to those who want to use these skills for 'combative' purposes?" My answer is a strong yes, and I plan to break down why in this article. This is a two-part article, where I will try to draw correlations between the two areas (combative and competitive) in each of the five critical skill-sets in part I. In part II we will break down each of those skill-sets and discuss training concepts for each area. What's in it for you? Civilians who use practical shooting as a testing ground for their ability to perform under stress will get that process validated. If you carry a firearm professionally, hopefully this will help you convince your supervisor or training coordinator to let go of some ammunition and perhaps a couple hours of training time to test your skills in a local match.

Why listen to me? Consider my background. Competitive experience: I am a card holding GM in USPSA, Master in IDPA, and a Master in the NRA classification system. I have done well in pretty much every major match and have more than 10 years competing against the best shooters on the practical shooting circuit. Combative experience: I am a former Marine with combat experience (if Desert Shield/Storm counts as combat!). I have local and federal law enforcement experience, including more than 10 years as a full time instructor or lead instructor a portion of which I was in charge of the Federal Air Marshal (FAM) firearm-training program during the FAM buildup after 9/11. I have had the privilege of working with some of the best Military and Law Enforcement Instructors in the United States, and I credit all that I submit to you in this article to folks I have worked with and learned from. What should this mean to you? It means I have done my homework in both arenas and can hopefully offer some insight into how "practical shooting" translates to quality training for combative purposes.

During my time in law enforcement, I keenly remember hearing this statement: "that competition stuff will get you killed on the streets." That was sometimes followed by a polite refusal of my invite to attend a match (I invited those around me every month). More than once I heard: "I have always wanted to do that, but I better get some practice time in before I go, thanks any way."

WOW! Get some practice time first? What happens if the stuff goes down tonight? Will you tell the bad guy to wait until after you practice to start the fight? I think not. I had no doubt about my skills and ability to perform under stress and on demand. Why? Because I had spent hundreds of hours training myself to get the gun out of the holster and rounds down range, and had validated this skill under stress during my agency training as well as at practical shooting matches. So the real question is, what happens when we compare the skills needed to **excel** in practical competitions to real world fighting skills with a firearm?

First, let's set the record straight. I advocate using "practical" type competitions and the training that goes with it as an addition to regular law enforcement, military, or civilian self defense training program. Winning a gunfight is a combination of solid tactics, good manipulation skills, and an aggressive will to *Win the Fight*. Competing in a match will not train you; it will, however, *validate* your marksmanship and manipulation skills

under stress. Another belief is that practical shooting will teach someone tactics, which it won't! It will test and validate the ability to perform on demand and get rounds on a given target very quickly, under stress! All of the good trainers I know will agree this is good tactic! (Speaking of stress, I have had more than one highly trained military operator tell me that they felt more stress before a match than in combat). One key point: I STRONGLY recommend that the Law Enforcement or military operator in question shoot matches with their standard issued gear, and NOT use tricked-out racing equipment.

The following table contains five skill areas that are critical to perform well during practical shooting matches (left column). The right column compares that same skill and outlines its application in a combative environment. In Part II of this article, I will outline exactly how we train each skill.

Skill	Competitive Application	Combative Application
<i>Weapon deployment (draw)</i>	In any match that I have ever shot, the first shot (hit) was critically important. In matches like the steel challenge, competitors who draw and "hit" faster than the others will have a serious advantage in the match.	Yep, CRITICALLY important here too. In our Tactical Handgun classes at USSA, we emphasize over and over that statistically and realistically the person who gets the first "hit" in a gunfight increases their chances a ton. We are the good guys, and when the time is right, we want to do damage first. In reactive gunfights (police officer reacting to a gun pulled on them), the draw and hit is even more important.
<i>High Speed Marksmanship</i>	The ability to shoot a quick first shot, and then repeat shots accurately is incredibly important at any match. Any top shooter will tell you, speed combined with accuracy is the key.	Once again, a direct correlation. I guess the saying is "speed is fine, but accuracy is final." I would change it to, "speed is fine, but accuracy at extremely high speed is final...faster!" You get the point. Anyone who plans on fighting with a firearm would be that much better off with the ability to shoot accurately at high speed.
<i>High Speed Weapon Manipulation</i>	"Practical" shooters know that their ability to manipulate their gun to clear a malfunction, or do a reload (any type), may make the difference in winning or losing a match. I don't think there could be any argument that competitive shooters are the best on the planet at high-speed	Would the ability to rapidly manipulate through a reload or malfunction under extreme stress be important during a fight? Absolutely! Think about it. If an officer or soldier must reload, or fix a malfunction, they are already in a fight....hence the incredible importance of using high speed manipulation techniques to get the gun back in action.

	manipulation of a handgun or rifle.	
<i>Movement</i>	Top shooters separate themselves from the rest of the pack in their ability to move and flow effectively through stages. Even shooters who lack experience learn to move, shoot, and/or manipulate with relative skill after their first several matches. The best shooters spend a ton of time in this critical area.	Think about the average gunfight (is there such a thing?). How important is movement? It's critical! How many fights are stationary in nature and don't have some sort of dynamic movement involved? None that I have witnessed! Think about the incredible advantage the ability to move while placing solid hits on target would give someone during that life or death situation.
<i>Information Processing</i>	Any competitive shooter would probably tell you "information overload" has happened to them more than once during a stage at a match. We shooters call this a "mental meltdown" on a stage, but the reality is we have not trained our brain to process the visual and kinesthetic information we are receiving while under stress. The ONLY way to learn this process is to experience it!	Hmmm, let's see. The ability to process an extremely large amount of information coming from multiple senses while under extreme stress, while at the same time, manipulating and applying solid fundamentals of marksmanship (getting rounds on target)? Would that be important during a fight? You bet it is. Experienced operators have an incredible edge (proven) after they have been through numerous "high stress" situations. They get extremely efficient at processing information and using it to make decisions quickly. This skill is critical and has been shown to be directly related to surviving in combat.

In summary, the skills honed to perfection and used in practical shooting are the very same skills that would help someone win the fight if they had to do so. If you have a correct understanding of what competitive matches can do for you, and how you should use them to test your skills under stress, you will benefit from doing so. One thing that should not go unmentioned is the fact that competitive pressure brings out the best in us. It drives us to excel, and to increase and analyze our training with intent to win. That drive to train harder and more often can and will increase skills to a point where that standard qualification that most officers have to pass will be a "breeze." And remember, "correct design and perfect execution" of training sessions is the only true way to performance on demand!