

The Competition

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As I arrive I look all around
This is the day I have feared for a while now
There are butterflies in my stomach
And thoughts racing through my head
“You’re not good enough to compete with these people”
“What if you embarrass yourself?”
All negative
None positive
My coach can see the fear in my eyes
“Just do your best and have fun”
Is all he said
He has so much faith in me I fear letting him down

While I set up I have conversations in my head
“You are capable of great things; you should be here”
“You’re nowhere near the others. Just go home!”
I begin to remember
The things my coach had said
I am good enough to be here
I can do this
Just get in the zone and let it flow
My confidence begins to rise
I am finally convinced
All I have to do
Is just have fun

During the match things go smoothly
I am blocking out all the self talk
Going on inside my mind
I have a song stuck in my head
But that’s a good thing
I’m shooting well and going with the flow
I’m letting things happen
Rather than try to force them
I am competing against myself
And no one else
Thirty shots done with ten to go
I start to doubt whether I’ll compare to the others

Now I'm thinking more about the other people
And less about myself
I can feel the worry building up inside of me
And notice the gun won't steady
I'm holding longer and begin to wait for the perfect shot
I'm not in the flow anymore
Forcing shots
My scores are getting worse
Five shots left
I decide to stop and take a break
I have to calm down
There's always next time to place well

After some sips from my water bottle
I slowly begin to have control
Of my thoughts
And the self talk
"Just have fun" is all I can think of
And that's exactly what I do
Four shots left
That was pretty good
I'm having fun again
Three shots left
Now two
I just scored a personal best

I started out great
I was steady and focused
Bound and determined
To just have fun
And I did just that
Until the self talk took over
It hindered my ability
To perform the way I had in the beginning
I recognized the anxiety
And took control of the situation
I came out on top of all my thoughts and doubts
And I am overjoyed!

Michelle O'Connor, age 18, has just completed her freshman year of college. She is just beginning to shoot air and sport pistol, although her national level competition experience in other pursuits is apparent.

(Contact via JP O'Connor – jpoc@acm.org)