

So Little Time - Little to Say

by

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I will confess that when I started this article three weeks ago, I was hoping that something more would come of it. However, I have been unusually busy writing position papers at work, so somewhere in there I think that I may have lost exactly where I was going. However, in an effort to help Steven, I have edited cut and rewritten to the point where there is probably not meaning to this article at all. Therefore, it is now probably right in line with all of my other articles!

One thing that I cannot help but like about racing pigeons is the fact that no matter how many times you do something in this sport, the following year will be just different enough so that you need to rethink everything that you have done in the past. While there are many out there that jump right into things, I am not one of them. No, instead, I like to plant things to death, and, of course, planning requires some amount of thinking. Because I like to think long cumbersome thoughts, I consider myself a strategist instead of a tactician. For those of you that don't know the difference between the two, strategists plan and tacticians react.

For all practical purposes, the breeding loft is usually a strategic operation, where the race loft is a tactical operation. Since these days my focus happens to be on the breeding loft, my skills are probably sharper as a strategist. The problem with being a full-time strategist is that over time, you tend to lose you tactical skills, or the ability to react quickly to changing circumstances (this is also a sign that I may be growing old). Even in circumstances where long range or strategic planning is possible, circumstances do change with time, and, with these changes, tactical decisions need to be made.

I have always preferred the strategic over the tactical, because I have always preferred long range thinking. The truth is that I love to have something to think about all the time, and pigeons give me that opportunity. Thinking keeps me occupied when I have nothing else to do! In fact, I have learned to focus on a single subject for hours, days, years on end, and to me this is enjoying.

People believe they know how to think, until they are forced into thinking about just one thing for months at a time. I play a little game with all of my potential students. This little game seems simple at first, and they tend to guess at the answer. However, as with many questions, there are several correct answers to the question.

but as they continue to work on it, they tend to guess at the final answer. However, eventually, they realize that in order to solve the problem, they first need to solve little portions of the problem.

I think about pairing combinations in my sleep, and I fret about them on the way to work and on the way home. To some degree, my thoughts are very much like a nonstop video game that is constantly playing in my head. It is kind of neat in a way because I am never bored, as I always have something to think about.

When Mauricio Jemal visited a couple of years ago, I was at a crossroads. To that point, I had put in many hours of carefully planning the future of the Hofkens family. However, as I pushed the game farther and farther out in my mind, I started to realize that, at least for me, a single family simply would eventually become too inbred, and I knew that I had already taken too many steps in that direction. As I mentioned in a recent article, Mauricio's comments about developing a second family, shed a brighter light on the obvious, and consequently, ever since then I have been off on a new mission to build a second family.

However, this new mission left a lot of debris in its wake, and I have been steadily working to tie up loose ends from the past while at the same time trying to move forward. This has proven to be extremely difficult at times. On the one hand, I at least partially dismantled a very good set of pigeons, so that on the other hand I could bring in this second family.

While I had total control over which pigeons would be liquidated from the Hofkens family, I lacked some control over when and how many Horemans I could buy. Although Ed Lorenz gave me significant latitude in purchasing the pigeons that I wanted to buy, I still had to sell Hofkens in order to buy Horemans, and, because of this, I had to buy them over time.

The purchasing process was not easy on either of us, but probably in different ways. As I was reducing one family, I was trying to decide exactly how much of another to buy so that I would be in a solid position going forward. He, on the other hand, was asking himself exactly how many of his key young breeders he could afford to give up and still maintain his family. I was concerned in this aspect as well, because Ed has become one of my closest friends in the sport, so I wouldn't want to do anything that would jeopardize the excellent family of pigeons. Therefore we spent many hours going over how we could make this happen. This was a very difficult negotiation process, and it has taken over a year to complete.

By my way of thinking, I like to have my breeders in place by the beginning of each year. Because I don't usually breed until March, this gives me three months to get them settled into their new home, and it gives me the minimum necessary time to develop my breeding plan for the year.

This year, it was after my last trip to California that things went astray, and since that time, I have hardly been in control of my own destiny. In fact, this has turned into one of those out of body experiences, where I am watching myself from afar and just shaking my head. It really isn't that I am doing anything wrong, but at the same time, because of the timing involved with breaking and re-mating pairs of pigeons, I can't seem to get anything going in the right direction.

Problem #1

Let me begin by saying that I am going to need to get both families on track as quickly as possible! As you may remember from my article 'Size Really Does Matter' I sold off all the Hofkens pairs that didn't fit the incoming Horemans, and that has left me with a much smaller group of Hofkens to work with. At the same time, while I have been fortunate enough to obtain the Horemans that I feel are critical for my program, I still need to produce more inbreds so that I can get the numbers up.

Problem #2

To make this more complicated, my hybrid program actually requires that I produce some hybrids. As the point of producing hybrids is to race them, I needed to produce them in time for the races. As I have probably mentioned many times, I generally don't pair my pigeons until March, but I usually can't ship pigeons out of this godforsaken environment after the first of May. Therefore, if I mated them in March, I would only have time to produce one round of youngsters before it got too hot to ship them. Since I can't send them out later, it means that I need to breed them much earlier, which is something that I don't like to do.

Problem #3

Problem #3 is kind of a combination of problems #1 and #2. At this point, I need to prove out the hybrids, because there is always the very real possibility that the two families of pigeons will not match up. Ideally, I would like to be producing hybrids and inbreds at the same time. However, that would mean that I would need to work with inbred Horemans crossed to inbred Hofkens, and inbred Horemans mated to inbred Horemans, and inbred Hofkens mated to inbred Hofkens, and obviously this would take a fair number of pigeons, and of course, unless I actually breed some more pigeons, I don't really see where the "lot" of pigeons is going to come from.

Therefore, what I did was about the only thing that I could have done given the circumstances. I decided to breed hybrids early and the inbreds late. In truth, from a hybrid standpoint, if I were to start complaining about what I have produced, I would be an idiot (I might be one anyone). In fact, as I was telling my partner last night, in terms of what I have produced from the hybrids, nothing could have possibly gone better. Since these hybrids were bred to race, I have sent many of them to the money races this year. In two of those instances, two of the bigger loft managers have called me to rave about the quality of the pigeons in comparison to the others they had received.

Problem #4

Because the first and second round went so smoothly, I decided to sign up for another big race, which I did. A day later, a friend of mine emailed me to enter some pigeons into a smaller race, which I also did. Between these two races and two other major races that I was already committed to, I was now pretty much booked through the third round, and this was probably one more round than I should have committed myself.

While these pigeons do need to be tested (the sooner the better), I also need to be breeding for the future as well. Therefore the longer I breed hybrids, the less time I am going to have breed inbreds. As a precaution and to be sure that they were well rested, I held back two key pairs of Horemans that were assigned to be inbred just so that they would be rested when the real breeding season finally came around. Aside from them, the remaining key pigeons were all mated up for hybrids. Generally, I only like to breed three rounds out of my yearlings, but this year, it is going to be difficult to stick to that, as at the end of three rounds, I will have produced virtually no inbred Horemans or Hofkens, and this is where taking a third round of hybrids is really going to hurt me. This is especially true of yearling cocks like the "U" cock, "U2" and The Headhunter," as instead of having six inbreds to work with, I may now only have two or possible four inbreds from these pigeons.

As I mentioned earlier, I recently made another trip to California and purchased four of Ed's top young cocks. While in the long run, this will be an outstanding move that will give me tremendous flexibility going forward, it has really confused my breeding program for the time being.

This is an extremely dry climate that has been made worse by the drought. To illustrate exactly how dry it is here right now, we have only had one day of light rain showers since October! While the Horemans have been extremely resilient, it usually takes a pigeon at least a year to get used to 5 to 10 percent humidity. It is very important to note that this is why I attempt to work with younger pigeons. In this environment older pigeons just do not hold up well. However, regardless of age, I have found that if you mate pigeons when they first get here, they tend to do much better, so that is what I did.

If I have made a mistake in all of this (other than choosing pigeons as a sport), it was in not mating the key pigeons (those that I held back for the inbreeding period) in sink with the second or third round instead of sticking to the calendar date of March 1. Because I will be splitting up the hybrid pairs at the end of the third round, and because of the influx of new Horemans cocks, almost everything is now out of sink on the production timeline. Because I would like to rest the yearlings for two weeks at the end of the third round, this becomes even more complicated. In contemplating the overall picture, it is now going to take me at least a month and a half to get things all straightened out, and this will greatly impact my inbreeding program, which could then have a similar impact on next year's breeding as well. For instance, right now, here it is at the end of April, and I have exactly six Hofkens inbreds and four Horemans inbreds.

Again I am not sure that much of this could have been avoided, but I can't help but hate it when what starts out as a good plan falls apart because of timing! All I really can do now is watch from the sidelines and hope that I can finish out strong.

Until next time!

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