By Greg Kirkham

As a new Cowboy Action shooter and parent of one buckaroo and buckarette, the learning curve is tremendous. This is one technical sport. As a former wrestler and coach, I know the importance of muscle memory and practice makes perfect.

My introduction came when my 10-year-old son Cody, aka “Cody James,” became interested after watching his uncle and cousin compete for the Yavapai Rangers. He even earned an extra $10 picking up brass, which he enjoyed and would have done for free. I already had a Ruger Single Six, Browning Model 92 and a single-shot .410 Rossi in the safe, so I almost had enough firearms to get him started. I picked up a Cimarron .22 and borrowed some old holsters from his uncle, and Cody James competed in his first local match, scoring 585 seconds in six stages. A typical six-stage match includes hitting 72 targets with average 144 rounds. Cody averaged about 98 seconds per stage. After the match, several club members asked if Cody could shoot their “Cowboy Action firearms” in .38 Special and 12 gauge, and the rest is history.

Cody found that Santa belonged to the NRA, and woke up to a pair of Ruger Vaqueros in .357 Magnum. A little work from “Colt Faro” and a new shotgun purchase from “Johnny Meadows,” and Cody was off to his second match. While not blazing, he did knock 181 seconds off his previous score, averaging 67 seconds a stage. Cody received lots of tips at the club shoots and started to get the hang of things. He improved his average over the next three matches to 58 seconds. Even though his actual times were higher, Cody’s raw times (times without penalties for misses) were in the high 30s to low 40s.

Soon after, I also became interested and started entering local matches with my son. We entered a clinic with other members of our club, featuring top shooters “Johnny Meadows” and “Pecos Clyde.” This is where my wrestling experience and Cowboy Action Shooting came together. I saw a discipline, which would not only help my shooting, but also help my son so we could build confidence together in our new sport. This is where I learned the importance of “perfect practice” – the art of practicing skills with accuracy to improve our performances.

Shortly after, I approached “Pecos Clyde” to see if he would coach us. After all, Cody inherited many of the same mistakes that held back my shooting. After a few days, I received the email I had been looking for. It read:

I will be happy to work with the two of you. BUT, the training must have structure, and not just be three guys out there shooting guns for the heck of it. Consider finding four days over a period of about 12 to 16 days that you both are available for two hours each of those days. (Day four needs to be at least 2 hours.)

Day 1. Pistols for 1.5 hours and then pistol, rifle, and shotgun for the last half hour. (100 rounds pistol and 20 rounds for rifle and shotgun, per shooter.)

Day 2. Rifle for 1.5 hours and then rifle, pistol, and shotgun for the last half hour. (100 rounds rifle and 20 rounds for pistol and shotgun, per shooter.)

Day 3. Shotgun 1.5 hours and then shotgun, rifle, and pistol for the last half hour. (30 rounds shotgun and 20 rounds for rifle and pistol, per shooter.)

Day 4. Shooting stages with all three types of firearms. (100 rounds pistol and 100 rounds for rifle and 50 shotgun, per shooter.)

The first three days during the first 90 minutes we will concentrate on gun handling and a variety of drills particular to the firearm we are concentrating on for that session. The last 30 minutes of each session we will work on transitions from the highlighted firearm to the other two types. Between training sessions you will both be required to complete dry-fire exercises.

I will commit to teaching you what you need to know, to providing encouragement and constructive criticism. The two of you must commit to providing a cooperative attitude, a willingness to learn, and promise to complete the dry-fire homework (you really have to com-