

## *Am I good enough to go to the Nationals???*

*By Anthony Finn*

In the first three articles I spoke about equipment, the importance of knowing and practicing with your shooting gear, positions, stance hold and so on. This time I want to talk about how to put all this good stuff into practice, gain valuable experience as you accelerate your learning, travel and have a lot of fun into the bargain.

Club Matches, Zone and State Shoots and the National Championships

What is the difference between all these shoots?  
Should there be a difference?

In theory, there shouldn't be any difference in the way we approach certain shoots but generally we do things differently depending on how much importance we place on the desired outcome.

The atmosphere and adherence to the rules is usually a little more relaxed at your club matches than they are at bigger shoots and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Not everyone has aspirations of being a champion - they just want to have a bit of fun, get away from their normal routine for a couple of hours - and shoot.

Because the majority of shooters probably fall into this category, and some may never want to shoot at anything other than their local, once a week club match, we can't afford to put them off with rules which don't make sense to anyone other than the more serious competitors.

The down side of this is, when someone does decide to have a go at a more formal shoot, they may find themselves protested against for adjusting their scope or loading their magazine into the rifle before the ready call, accidentally leaning against a bench while they're shooting or leaving the firing line before others have finished shooting or without having their firearm cleared by a spotter or range officer.

The other 'major' hiccup that occurs at big matches is someone (not always just the newcomers)

arriving with a firearm that doesn't pass scrutineering. That is, it's too heavy, the trigger is too light, it's too long, too wide or whatever. Again, at club matches, we tend to overlook many of these things and some people may have never had their rifles weighed or measured before. They travel a long distance for their first competition and find they either have to take to their rifle with a hacksaw just to compete or have to borrow one that does meet the specifications.

These are the most common mistakes that arise during big matches and, while it's acceptable at most club matches, shooters do need to be advised of the 'real' rules now and then. The best place to start is to get yourself a rulebook and make sure you understand the rules and that your equipment complies with the specifications.

### Range Behaviour & Etiquette

Regardless of when or what or where a shoot is, there is a number of basic points that all shooters should be made aware of. I believe that if we all try to follow as many of the following suggestions as possible, it will make for much more enjoyable shooting for everyone - not just silhouette shooters.

- o Be aware of what other people are doing - e.g. sighting in, sitting quietly (meditating/focusing), etc. Do not interrupt and start up a lengthy conversation at inopportune times. Allow them to concentrate on what they are doing.
- o Never touch anyone else's firearm, ammunition or equipment without asking first.
- o Watch where you're walking, especially if near gun racks/stands so that you don't inadvertently knock over someone's pride and joy.
- o Be aware of the detail you are shooting in and be ready when you are called to the line. There is nothing worse than waiting for the same people every time their detail is called. In some cases, the detail will start without them.
- o Control your mood/temper. Everyone is disappointed at one time or another but we should be prepared to take the good and the bad in a sportsmanlike fashion.
- o If you are lucky enough to be in a shoot-off for a place at a match, always shake your opponent's hand afterwards, regardless of whether you win or lose.
- o During a match, at any level (and even more so in a shoot-off situation) keep as quiet as possible and restrict your movements around the competitors. It can be very distracting to see people moving around out of the corner of your eye, or hear loud conversations about the fishing last weekend, when you are trying to concentrate on shooting.
- o Do not talk to other shooters about negative influences prior to a big match. Those who are serious about the sport will be trying to focus on positives. Those who have a habit of starting up conversations about wobbles, how bad the wind is, flinches, etc., could find themselves being avoided by shooters who are already working hard to overcome their own difficulties without more negatives being fed to them. It is far more productive (especially to yourself) to talk about positive aspects. i.e. ideal weather/conditions, good shots, etc. This is particularly important if you are a member of a shooting team, be it a club, state

or national team.

- o Do what you can to help the shoot captain or your fellow shooters. Arrive early and help to set up the range and/or stay back a little and help to clean up when the shoot is over.

- o Be quick to welcome new shooters or observers and introduce yourself and ask if there's anything they'd like explained. It can be very intimidating for people to approach any large group and a friendly welcome goes a long way.

- o If you see someone without a spotter, and you're available, ask if you can help. If your offer is accepted, find out what your shooter requires of you - e.g. call every shot, just call the misses, time calls, reminders of which bank or which shot they're on, or just keep quiet and write down the score, etc. Or, most importantly, with each hit to exclaim loudly 'Great shot. Right in the middle!' You don't need to be posting scores in the 30's to go to a 'big' match.

All matches are graded and a B grade shooter wins exactly the same medal for a place in

their grade as the Master grade shooters do in theirs'. From experience, I can tell you that

the same effort goes into winning a medal in B grade as it does in Master grade and the

satisfaction is identical. Most of the time you are shooting against yourself anyway, that

is, trying to improve on your personal best, or maintain your normal score level when you

go to other/different ranges.

Even if you don't get a placing in your first few events, it's probably just down to nerves

and, once you've settled in and accepted the new experience of a big shoot, you will start

to shoot better at them.

To me, the most important things you can learn by making the effort to attend bigger matches - whether you choose to compete seriously or not - are:

You will see a whole new range of equipment - rifles, scopes, ammunition, spotting scopes, shooting glasses, footwear, gun cases, etc. You could come away from a shoot

with a better idea of what equipment is available, might suit you or what you believe would improve your scores.

You can observe the different stances, attitudes, behaviours, preparation and approaches

to competition that a range of shooter's adopt. It is also important to see that the most

expensive equipment does not guarantee big scores. It is the shooter that makes the difference.

You can't help but to learn something from talking to a new circle of shooters and, quite often, it's the friends you make at some of these competitions that will draw you back time and time again.

Then there are the never-ending tips you will pick up in discussions. Sometimes, there are so many, you probably won't remember half of them by the time you get home. A lot of them are so simple, but can make a big difference, and you'll wonder why you hadn't thought of them yourself.

I think the best way I can sum it up is - if you only shoot with the same people, on the same range, in the same conditions, week in and week out, you will only learn what the most knowledgeable person in that group has to offer. If you widen your horizons, you will widen your knowledge. If you widen your knowledge, you will improve your scores.

My first nationals experience was at Bateman's Bay in 1996. I had just made my way into A grade (the week before), Lynne and I arrived at the range and had no idea what to do where to go etc. One fellow emerged from the crowd of shooters and introduced himself, welcomed us to NSW and explained how things worked, where to sign on and so on. This made a big difference to us and we felt welcome, more at ease and we appreciated it and won't forget it. That man was Alex B. Thanks Alex.

During this event I was lucky enough to be squadded with a Master Grade shooter from whom I learnt a few things I still use today. He was helpful and encouraging and it improved my result and although to him it was probably no big deal, to a bloke who drove 16 hours from QLD to get there it was a very important shoot and this advice and guidance was fantastic. I appreciated it then and still do thanks, Dave T.

That's all for this article, good luck and good shooting.