



Freshmen Dominate NCAA Championships

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College Connection



West Virginia University claimed the 2009 NCAA Rifle Championship, the programs 14th National Title. (Photo: WVU Athletics)

Freshmen took top honors in both smallbore and air rifle at the 2009 NCAA Rifle Championships. In smallbore, Jacksonville State University freshman Brian Carstensen edged out veteran competitors for the win. In air rifle, University of Akron freshman Jenna Compton, a virtual newcomer to the sport, posted a surprising victory. West Virginia University won the overall team competition, its first win since 1998 but their fourteenth NCAA Rifle Championship.

The NCAA rifle season stretches from late September to mid-March. Throughout the year, teams compete in 10-12 matches. Eight teams go head to head for the championship. The 2009 NCAA Rifle Championships were held in rainy Fort Worth, Texas the weekend of 13-14 March. Teams field a squad of four shooters in both air rifle and smallbore and competitors shoot 60 shots in each event, for a team total of 4800 points.

This year's qualifying teams included defending champions, the University of Alaska, as well as the U. S. Military Academy, U. S. Naval Academy, Jacksonville State University, University of Kentucky, University of Nevada-Reno, West Virginia University, and host Texas Christian University. There were also individuals from other colleges who qualified to compete for individual national titles.

Smallbore was held at the TCU Rifle Range. Due to the rain and cold, the TCU team room filled to capacity with spectators. The match proved to be a close race that was exciting and nerve-racking for everyone watching. In the team competition, first and second were determined by a single point, with Jacksonville State edging out Kentucky for first, 2312 to 2311. Rounding out third place was the defending National Champions from Alaska-Fairbanks. With the rest of the field not far behind the leaders, the competition was heating up for a fight to the finish in the next day's air rifle portion of the championships.

Individually, Jacksonville State's rookie shooter Brian Carstensen took the top place with a 587 and a 95.2 in the final. His biggest competition in the match came from Kentucky's Ashley Jackson, whose 584 put her in only a three point

deficit going into the final. Jackson shot a 98.1 in the final but came up one tenth of a point shy of Carstensen's final score. Another freshman from host school TCU, Mattie Brogdon, came in third with a 581 in qualification and a 98.1 in the final.

The second day of competition was held in TCU's Daniel-Meyer coliseum. This venue had plenty of room for friends, family and spectators to watch the action, and see the scores projected on large screens during the competition. The biggest surprise of the weekend came when Jenna Compton from Akron advanced to the finals with a personal best score of 590. She came from behind to beat West Virginia's Bryant Wallizer in the final, 691.6 to 691.0. Wallizer was not alone in the final, as the entire four-person team from WVU qualified for the eight-slot final.

In the air rifle team competition, WVU shot an impressive 2353 to boost them to first place overall. This was a tremendous victory for the team. The program had been cut several years ago, and through fundraising and hard work from the team, was reinstated to NCAA status. After making NCAA championships last year for the first time since 2002, the WVU team is back in the forefront of NCAA shooting. Rounding out the top four was the University of Kentucky, followed by Jacksonville State University and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks.

The 2009 NCAA National Championships were a great competition with several surprises. Shooters who have participated in both arenas, say the NCAA Championships can be more nerve wracking than international championships, including the Olympics. Considering the success of the younger shooters this year, 2010's competition is sure to be an even more closely contested, exciting championship.

Overall Team Scores: West Virginia: 4643, Kentucky: 4638, Jacksonville State: 4636, Alaska-Fairbanks: 4624, TCU: 4614, Army: 4611, Navy: 4606, Nevada: 4586