

SHOOTING AS A LIFETIME SPORT

By Gary Anderson, DCME

Shooting is a lifetime sport with a lifetime of great opportunities and experiences. Junior shooting leaders have a special responsibility to prepare their youth participants for this future by making them aware of the opportunities that await them after they move on from junior shooting. One objective of every junior shooting program should be to encourage as many juniors as possible to continue shooting and become participants in other shooting disciplines that are practiced by shooters of all ages.

Unfortunately, the way junior shooting in the USA is structured makes it especially difficult for juniors to continue in shooting. In the USA, most juniors belong to school rifle teams, junior shooting clubs or 4-H clubs where eligibility is based on age. For most, eligibility ends when they graduate from high school. These programs do a great job of engaging youth in target shooting, but one of the shortcomings of this American junior shooting model is that it does not provide young shooters with shooting sports opportunities after high school.

Junior shooting programs in the USA are not directly linked to shooting programs for young adults and adults. When juniors graduate from high school, their access to coaching, a shooting range and equipment is no longer available. They are left on their own, often without even knowing there is a larger shooting sport that would welcome their participation.

The purpose of this article is to further the idea that all junior shooting sports participants should be informed about future shooting opportunities and encouraged to try some of these shooting disciplines before their rifle or junior club team experiences end. This article describes leading shooting sports disciplines that are open for participation after high school and tells how to get more information about them.

The Foundation for Success is Already There

Many state service rifle teams eagerly recruit juniors who are active on 3-position air rifle or smallbore rifle teams because they know these juniors already have skills that can quickly be transferred to highpower rifle shooting. Juniors who shoot air or smallbore rifle events already have sound shooting positions and know how to hold steady and execute good shots. They don't have to be taught how to shoot. They just have to adapt their skills to the requirements of the new shooting discipline.

Junior 3-position air or smallbore rifle shooting may indeed be the most effective way for young shooters to



Shooting is a lifetime sport where skills learned and experiences enjoyed as a junior shooter can continue as long as a person remains physically active. All young shooters should be encouraged to think about staying active in shooting after they leave their junior programs.

“DISCIPLINES” IN SHOOTING

Disciplines are different sub-groups of events within the overall sport of shooting. The many different disciplines or types of shooting that offer future participation and lifetime shooting opportunities for junior shooters include:

- College Rifle Shooting
- Air Rifle Shooting
- Smallbore Position Shooting
- Highpower Service Rifle
- As-Issued Military Rifle
- Rimfire Sporter
- Target Pistol Shooting

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learn the fundamental skills of target rifle shooting. They know how to handle guns safely and how to handle themselves on firing ranges. The targets and courses of fire in junior rifle shooting are difficult so participants must develop stable positions and the ability to fire especially accurate shots. When they decide to move on to another shooting discipline, they find that the learning curve is often very short. Every shooting discipline has its own unique challenges, but with the foundation they have been given juniors will find themselves well prepared to participate in almost all other target shooting disciplines.

Transition Models

For a young person who has just graduated from high school, moving from three-position air or smallbore rifle shooting to becoming active in a new shooting discipline that goes beyond the school years is not a seamless progression. Whether a young shooter can move directly into another discipline depends very much on the shooting discipline and his/her life circumstances. For top junior rifle shooters who go on to shoot on a college rifle team, the change from junior shooting to college shooting is immediate, but college shooting too will end four or five years later when the quest to keep young participants in shooting must start anew.

Junior shooters who are members of traditional shooting clubs that have both junior and adult programs may find opportunities within their home club to continue shooting in highpower rifle or smallbore position shooting. For many other youth, their first years after high school are years when doing any shooting is almost impossible because they don't have access to a club and are concentrating on completing their education or getting established with a job and family. There is typically little time or money for recreational shooting.

Nevertheless, junior leaders should try to give young shooters information about future shooting sports opportunities that they can pursue when the time is right. Junior shooters should leave their school age programs knowing about these opportunities and looking forward to returning to a new shooting discipline, even if it takes several years. Here are brief descriptions of some shooting activities that will welcome their participation whether it occurs immediately after high school or when they return several years later.

Varsity College Rifle Teams

What Is It? Varsity rifle teams supported by school athletic departments headline shooting sports programs in American colleges and universities. Limited numbers

of athletic scholarships are awarded to the very best shooters who advance from junior rifle programs. Some schools have women only teams while others are co-ed. NCAA rifle teams compete in high-level competitions that culminate in the prestigious NCAA Championship in March of each year. The standard college rifle course of fire includes both a 60-shot air rifle standing event and a 3x20 50-foot 3-position smallbore rifle event. In college shooting, team results are the most important. Five-member teams fire with the top four scores counting.

What Juniors Need to Know? The first thing juniors need to know about shooting in college is that becoming a member of an NCAA college rifle team is highly selective. College coaches recruit team members based on precision air rifle and smallbore scores shot in major junior competitions. Only the very best junior rifle shooters are awarded scholarships or are even invited to walk on with a top college team. The second thing they must know is that getting on a college rifle team means starting early, at least two or three years before graduating. Juniors who shoot 3-position air rifle and who want to shoot in college must shoot in the precision air rifle category. They must work very hard to improve their skills and scores and they must compete in the most important junior competitions.

College rifle coaches attend many of these competitions to scout for talent. The third thing juniors who hope to shoot on a college rifle team must know is that they need to acquire their own equipment including a

precision air rifle, a position smallbore rifle and a full set of rifle clothing. College rifle teams typically do not provide this highly individualized technical equipment.

Where To Get More Information. The NCAA website at <http://www.ncaa.com/sports/rifle/d1> is a good place to start in obtaining basic information about the NCAA rifle program and the schools that have varsity rifle team programs. If a junior is interested in going to a particular college, they can contact the rifle coach at



The NCAA website now provides a lot of interesting information about varsity college rifle teams.

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that school, but they need to know that the NCAA has strict regulations regarding how and when coaches can communicate with prospective athletes.

THE OLYMPIC PATH IN RIFLE

What Is It? The “Olympic path” for an outstanding junior rifle shooter is a sequence of developmental opportunities to pursue on the way to reaching a competitive performance level that makes earning positions on the USA National Team that competes in World Cups, World Championships and the Olympic Games a realistic possibility. For rifle shooters, the path almost always includes shooting on an NCAA varsity rifle team followed by additional and even more intensive training at the Olympic Training Center or the U. S. Army Marksmanship Unit. While following the path the best young shooters should qualify for membership on the National Development Team (National Junior Team) and then the National Team where selection to represent the USA in ISSF World Cups and other international championships offers opportunities to win medals in these competitions.



The “Olympic path” followed by 2012 Olympic rifle gold medalist Jamie Gray is a model for any young shooter who wants to pursue the Olympic dream. Jamie began as a 4-position BB Gun shooter, then participated in 3-position air and smallbore rifle as a junior club member before going on to excel as a college rifle shooter. She then became a resident athlete at the Olympic Training Center.

What Juniors Need to Know? For many young shooters, achieving excellence in international competitions is the highest goal to which they can aspire, but it is also a goal that cannot be achieved without many years of extraordinarily hard work. Anyone who is motivated to follow the Olympic path must recognize that going from being an outstanding junior rifle shooter to being an Olympic medal contender typically involves eight to ten years of dedicated

effort. This requires so much time to be spent in training and competitions that it is virtually

impossible to pursue a normal career. Moreover, having a very supportive family is absolutely essential.

Where to Get More Information. USA Shooting (<http://www.usashooting.org/>), the U. S. national governing body for Olympic shooting is the place to start in obtaining more information about the Olympic path.

COLLEGE CLUB SHOOTING IN RIFLE OR PISTOL

What Is It? In many American colleges and universities, rifle and pistol shooting is done on a club basis where students join rifle, pistol or shotgun clubs that are usually organized under the auspices of college student unions or recreation programs. Unlike NCAA college rifle teams, membership in college shooting clubs is generally open to anyone interested in continuing shooting. Most college club rifle and pistol teams have access to an indoor range, engage in regular practice sessions and compete in a limited series of matches. The NRA sponsors annual College Rifle and Pistol Championships for college club teams in conjunction with the Army Marksmanship Unit.

What Juniors Need to Know? For juniors who go on to college and who want to continue target shooting, college rifle or pistol clubs offer excellent opportunities. In most cases, anyone who shoots in college will need to have their own equipment including a precision air rifle and/or a position smallbore rifle and a full set of rifle clothing. Scholarships are not available for club rifle shooting. The emphasis in college shooting clubs is much more on enjoying the camaraderie of club life while being able to continue practicing and competing in a shooting activity.

Where to Get More Information. The NRA Collegiate Shooting Sports Directory (available online at <http://compete.nra.org/collegiate-shooting-programs.aspx>) provides much useful information about colleges and universities that have club rifle and pistol programs and how to contact them.

AIR RIFLE AND SMALLBORE POSITION SHOOTING

What Is It? Air rifle standing matches, fired on indoor 10-meter ranges or smallbore 3-position competitions, shot on indoor 50-foot or outdoor 50 yard/meter ranges under USA Shooting or NRA rules that generally follow international rules, are available in several parts of the country. The CMP and USA Shooting conduct major open air rifle matches on electronic target ranges at

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Camp Perry, Ohio; Colorado Springs, Colorado and Anniston, Alabama. USA Shooting sponsors important 50-meter position and prone events culminating in annual national championships. The NRA offers annual Sectional Matches and National Championships in various air rifle and smallbore events.

What Juniors Need to Know? Juniors who have their own precision air rifles or precision smallbore rifles together with the necessary rifle clothing can continue to participate in air rifle standing and smallbore position matches. Meaningful participation in air rifle and smallbore matches comes after becoming part of the community of shooters who shoot these matches. The best way to do this is to join a shooting club that sponsors these matches. Many air rifle or smallbore competitors also practice and travel to matches on their own or with one or two friends. Making the transition from indoor shooting where there is no wind to outdoor shooting requires access to an outdoor range where practice in outdoor conditions and wind is possible before going to any matches.

Where to Get More Information. Both the NRA Competitions Department (<http://competitions.nra.org/news-and-events/rifle-programs.aspx>) and USA Shooting (<http://www.usashooting.org/7-events/match-information>) can provide information about air rifle and smallbore matches that might be available in a particular area. The national championships of both organizations are open competitions and offer excellent experiences for shooters who have acquired some experience competing in these events.



The Camp Perry Open that takes place every January hosts one of the largest 10m air rifle and air pistol competitions in the USA. Competitors include both juniors and seniors with skill levels ranging from new shooters to National and Olympic team members.

TARGET PISTOL SHOOTING

What Is It? Target pistol shooting includes 10-meter air pistol events as well as various bulls-eye pistol events for .22 cal. and center-fire pistols that are fired indoors at 50 feet or outdoors at 25 and 50 yards.

What Juniors Need to Know? Junior rifle shooting is actually an excellent foundation for becoming a target pistol shooter. Many former junior rifle shooters used their knowledge and love of shooting to get them off to a good start in target pistol shooting. It is necessary to acquire a suitable target pistol; obtaining a target air pistol is usually the best way to start. One of the advantages of starting with an air pistol is that it can be fired at home because a safe 10-meter range can be set up just about anywhere. This can be important because



Junior rifle training can provide a great foundation for shooters who would like to get into target pistol shooting after they leave their junior shooting programs. 10-meter air pistol shooting (shown here) offers many excellent opportunities to continue in shooting in a discipline where the only equipment required in the pistol itself.

becoming a good pistol shooter requires a lot of practice. Once again, joining a shooting club that organizes pistol shooting events is a great way to get advice as well as to have a place to shoot.

Where to Get More Information. The two best sources of information for air pistol and bulls-eye pistol events are the NRA Competitions Department (<http://competitions.nra.org/news-and-events/rifle-programs.aspx>) and USA Shooting (<http://www.usashooting.org/7-events/match-information>). The USA Shooting Pistol Rules (http://www.usashooting.org/library/Rulebooks/2013_USAS_Pistol.pdf) govern air and international-type pistol events. NRA Conventional

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Pistol Rules (http://competitions.nra.org/documents/pdf/compete/rules/rul_conv_pistol_13.pdf) govern many outdoor and indoor pistol competitions.

HIGHPOWER SERVICE RIFLE SHOOTING

What Is It? Highpower rifle shooting involves shooting specially accurized U. S. military rifles or commercial equivalent rifles outdoors at ranges of 200, 300 and 600 yards. Highpower rifle events offer firing in three different positions, standing, sitting and prone, with both slow-fire and rapid-fire series. This discipline is very popular in the U. S. because the equipment is affordable



Junior rifle shooters can start shooting highpower service rifles while they are still in school. This is also a shooting discipline that they can continue to shoot for decades after they leave school.

and readily available and because it offers a great variety of shooting challenges in an outdoor setting.

What Juniors Need to Know? Junior shooters with good position shooting skills can get started in highpower service rifle shooting while they are still in school and with their 3-position training they will readily adapt to this new game. Highpower rifle shooting is mostly a summer sport and the National Matches take place in early August so it is an ideal summer activity for young rifle enthusiasts. Most state associations and many clubs sponsor and train junior service rifle teams to compete in state and national championships and usually can provide service rifles and equipment that their junior teams need.

Where to Get More Information. Juniors interested in shooting highpower rifle should first find out if their state association offers a state junior service rifle team program. Contact the CMP State Director (see the listing at <http://www.odcmp.com/Training/SD.htm>) for more information about junior highpower shooting in that state. The CMP is the national governing body for service

rifle shooting (<http://www.odcmp.com/Competitions/ServiceRifle.htm>). CMP Competition Rules for Service Rifle can be downloaded at <http://www.odcmp.com/Competitions/Rulebook.pdf>.

AS-ISSUED MILITARY RIFLE SHOOTING

What Is It? As-Issued Military Rifle shooting is a version of highpower rifle shooting that features the use of historic military rifles like the M1 Garand, M1903 Springfield, M1 Carbine and several foreign military rifles. Shooting is done at 100 or 200 yards in the prone, standing and sometimes the sitting positions. Since the rifles must be “as-issued” without modifications, equipment costs are relatively low. By using military rifles that are 50 to 100 or more years old, this shooting discipline becomes a form of historic reenactment that gives it a special appeal. A newer Vintage Sniper Rifle Match for two-person teams that is shot at 300 and 600 yards with original or replica military sniper rifles was recently introduced as a new military rifle event.

What Juniors Need to Know? As-issued military rifle shooting is normally done through shooting clubs that have 100 or 200-yard outdoor ranges. Many clubs offer new shooter clinics where loaner rifles are available. For persons who are looking for a shooting discipline that stresses fun and camaraderie rather than intense competition, shooting these old military rifles can be especially rewarding. Military rifles have also become the object of a major collector enterprise that specializes in collecting variations of these rifles.



As-Issued Military Rifle shooting is a fun-oriented game that can be done by shooters of all ages with rifles like this M1903A3 Springfield that have great historical significance.

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Where to Get More Information. The CMP is the governing body for As-Issued Military Rifle shooting. The Competition Rules for CMP Games Rifle and Pistol Matches can be downloaded at <http://www.odcmp.com/Competitions/CMPGamesRules.pdf>.

RIMFIRE SPORTER RIFLE SHOOTING

What Is It? Rimfire Sporter Rifle shooting is probably the easiest target shooting discipline in which to get started. Ordinary .22 cal. rimfire sporting type rifles that weigh no more than 7.5 pounds are fired at 50 and 25 yards in a 60-shot 3-position event with both slow-fire and rapid-fire stages. Costs to shoot Rimfire Sporter are extremely low because, except for rifle, sling and spotting scope, no other special equipment is needed or allowed.

What Juniors Need to Know? Rimfire Sporter is truly a shooting discipline for persons of all ages. Competitors are as young as ten and as old as 90. Juniors who have been shooting sporter class 3-position air rifle events where no special shooting clothing is permitted will find that Rimfire Sporter where shooting jackets are not permitted is ideally suited for them.

Where to Get More Information. The best source of information on Rimfire Sporter shooting is the CMP Guide to Rimfire Sporter. This publication includes rules and a complete guide to how to shoot the Rimfire Sporter course of fire. This Guide can be downloaded at <http://www.odcmp.com/Comm/Rimfire.pdf>.

INTRODUCING JUNIORS TO LIFETIME DISCIPLINES

Every year when the National Rimfire Sporter Match takes place at Camp Perry during the National Matches, the 400 plus competitors there will include the junior members of several 4-H and junior shooting clubs. These clubs use this match as a special trip for their members. They shoot BB Gun or Air Rifle position in many of their regular activities, but they use this match to give their juniors the experience of shooting in a new discipline, Rimfire Sporter. These club outings are a great way to introduce their junior shooters to a shooting game that can continue after they are too old for junior shooting.

In order to introduce variety into club or team activities, junior shooting coaches and club leaders may want to look for similar opportunities to make a team or club outing so that their juniors can visit a shooting club where they can see demonstrations or try

a different disciplines that might offer future appeal.

In addition to these shooting disciplines that offer great opportunities for junior shooters to continue shooting, there are other fine shooting disciplines that might capture the interests of shooters who want to continue their sport. These disciplines include highpower match rifle shooting and highpower long range shooting that are governed by the NRA, muzzle-loading shooting governed by the National Muzzleloading Rifle Association, silhouette rifle and pistol shooting governed by the NRA as well as several other shooting disciplines. Indeed, one of the things that makes the shooting sports great is the huge variety of choices that it offers, with so many of these choices offering decades of rewards and fulfillment.



Rimfire Sporter is popular because commonly owned rimfire sporter or plinking-type rifles are used in a 3-position event where special shooting clothing is not permitted. Rimfire Sporter is the most affordable shooting discipline.

About the Author

Gary Anderson, Director of Civilian Marksmanship Emeritus, retired as the full-time CMP Director at the close of 2009. He continues to work with CMP as the senior marksmanship instructor. He won two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships during his competition career. He is a Vice President of the International Shooting Sports Federation, the President of USA Shooting, a former Nebraska State Senator and was one of the two Olympic Games Technical Delegates for Shooting during the 2012 Olympic Games in London. In June, 2012, the International Olympic Committee awarded Gary Anderson the IOC's highest honor, the Olympic Order "for outstanding services to the Olympic Movement."



Photo courtesy of the ISSF.