

How Olympic Shooting Competitions are Organized and What This Means for Youth Shooting

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus



Finals now conclude all Olympic Shooting events. This is the 25m Pistol Women event during the 2012 London Olympics. Finalists are competing in a “shooting theater” with multiple television cameras and a rail camera in front of them, a hand-held camera on the field of play with them and an audience of 2,000 spectators, media and TV commentators behind them.

Everyone involved in the sport of shooting takes pride in knowing that Shooting is an Olympic sport and that 15 Olympic rifle, pistol and shotgun Shooting events will be contested during the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Most shooting enthusiasts, however, do not know what goes into organizing these competitions, nor do they understand how Olympic shooting has changed worldwide target shooting, and even junior shooting in the USA. This article explains how Olympic Shooting competitions are organized and how efforts to improve them are changing

Definition of “Organizing”

When the terms “organizing” or “organize” are used in reference to a sports competition, this refers to the planning, preparation, competition management and support service activities necessary to successfully conduct the competition.

target shooting for all.

A good starting point is to consider how much changes in Olympic Shooting have changed junior shooting in the USA. In 1988, finals were introduced to give Olympic spectators and television viewers more exciting experiences; finals are now common in junior competitions. Electronic targets made shooting a spectator sport. Today, electronic targets and more affordable electronic scoring systems are common in junior competitions; electronic scoring even makes live results viewing on the Internet possible. Many junior leaders are encouraging spectators to attend their matches. Bright lighting on Olympic firing lines was necessary so television and spectators could see athletes perform; as a result, dark, unlighted firing lines have become a relic of the past even in junior matches. In the Olympics, shooting spectators talk, cheer and applaud, sometimes very loudly; mandates for “silence” during junior shooting are also going away.

This litany of changes that have taken place in Olympic shooting is a context for examining how Olympic Shooting competitions are organized and how continuing IOC (International Olympic Committee) and ISSF (International Shooting Sport Federation) efforts to make Olympic shooting more spectacular and appealing are also making junior shooting more exciting and appealing.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC)

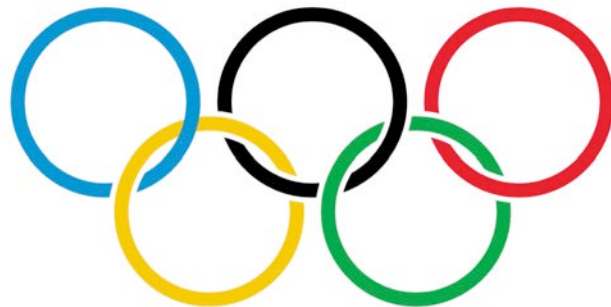
The IOC is the supreme authority for the Olympic Movement and the governing body of the Olympic Games. It controls the Games and owns commercial rights to the Olympic symbol (the 5 rings), flag, anthem, flame and torch.

To facilitate each re-enactment of the Games, the IOC: 1) decides the

AUTHOR'S COMMENT:

For me to write about how Olympic shooting events are organized is also a personal story because I have been directly involved in making the rule changes and designing the organizational changes that have changed shooting. My involvement in Olympic shooting began as an athlete, but subsequently continued as an Olympic Jury member, Technical Delegate and Competition Manager. I have been an eyewitness and active contributor to three decades of developments that have changed our sport so much.

Gary Anderson



The Olympic Symbol, the five interlocking rings, represents the meeting of athletes from the five continents at the Olympic Games.

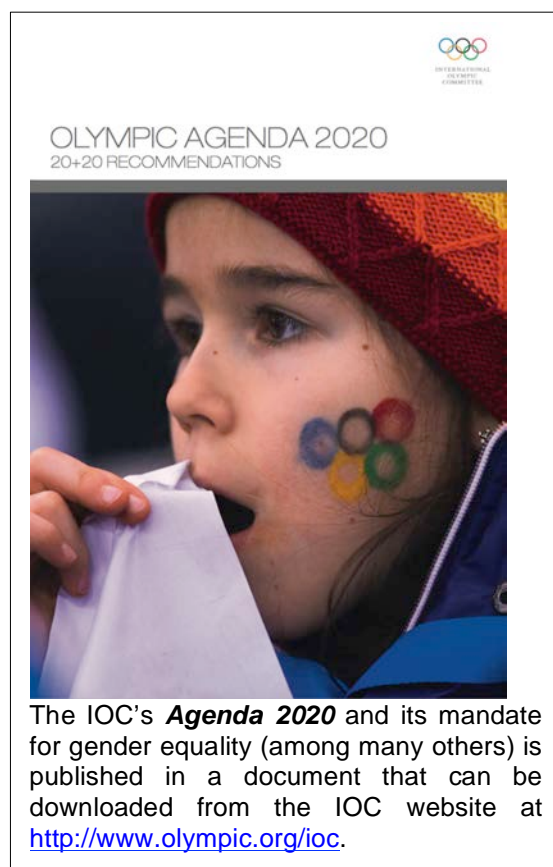
cities that host the Summer and Winter Games, 2) decides the sports and events that are on the Games program, 3) recognizes National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and empowers them to train, select and enter athletes in Games events and 4) recognizes International Federations (IFs) that are “*responsible for the control and direction of their sports*” (***Olympic Charter***). The IOC recognizes the ISSF as the IF that governs worldwide shooting.

It is important to understand that shooting and its current 15 Olympic events have no guaranteed right to be in the Games. After each Olympic Games all Olympic sports and each Olympic event is subjected to a detailed “*event-based*” evaluation to determine the sports and events of the next Olympics. The IOC evaluation examines each sport’s history and tradition, universality (worldwide participation), popularity, governance, athlete development and financing.

Dr. Jacque Rogge, the immediate past President of the IOC, described the Olympic sports evaluation by saying, “the Olympic Games are not only competitions among athletes, they are also competitions among sports.” There are 35 sports in the IOC’s “recognized sports” category that are eager to take the places of current Olympic sports that rank low in the IOC evaluations.

Work is already being done to decide the shooting events that will be on the 2020 Tokyo Olympics program. The IOC recently approved a guideline for the future of the Olympic movement titled ***Agenda 2020***. This document includes a mandate that Olympic sports must have equal numbers of women’s and men’s events by 2020. Shooting now has nine men’s and six women’s events. This likely means that some men’s shooting events will be eliminated and perhaps replaced by Mixed Gender Team events (2 persons, one male, one female).

The ISSF will make recommendations for how to fulfill this mandate, but the IOC will make the final decisions. IOC decisions to finalize the next Olympic Games program are the first step in organizing every Olympic sport. It is very likely that the 2020 Olympic Shooting program will change to provide equal participation



opportunities for women and men, and this ultimately will encourage more girls to participate in junior shooting.

The Shooting Leadership Team

A next step in organizing an Olympic sport is to establish a leadership team for that sport. This involves a partnership between the Olympic Games Organizing Committee (OGOC) and the ISSF. In 2009, the IOC selected Rio de Janeiro to host the 2016 Games. The Rio de Janeiro OGOC then hired staff leaders for all 28 Summer Olympic sports, including a Shooting Competition Manager. The Competition Manager, with his staff and volunteers, are responsible for the actual conduct of the Shooting competitions.

The second leadership partner for Olympic Shooting is the ISSF. The ISSF is responsible for making sure that “*all elements of the competitions, including the schedule, field(s) of play, training sites and all equipment must comply with its rules*” (***Olympic Charter***). The ISSF does this by appointing two Technical Delegates, one for rifle-pistol and one for shotgun, who work with the OGOC Competition Manager to plan and advise all aspects of the Shooting organization. Technical Delegates are appointed because of their expertise in how to plan and conduct competitions.

Olympic Games sports are not governed by conventional hierarchal chains of command where lines of authority flow from the IOC to the IF to the OGOC. Rather international sports are governed by partnerships and cooperative relationships. In international sports, the realities of budget, national human and infrastructure resources, cultural differences and obvious requirements for diplomacy and mutual respect determine how well the leadership team functions.

Competition Planning Starts with a Schedule

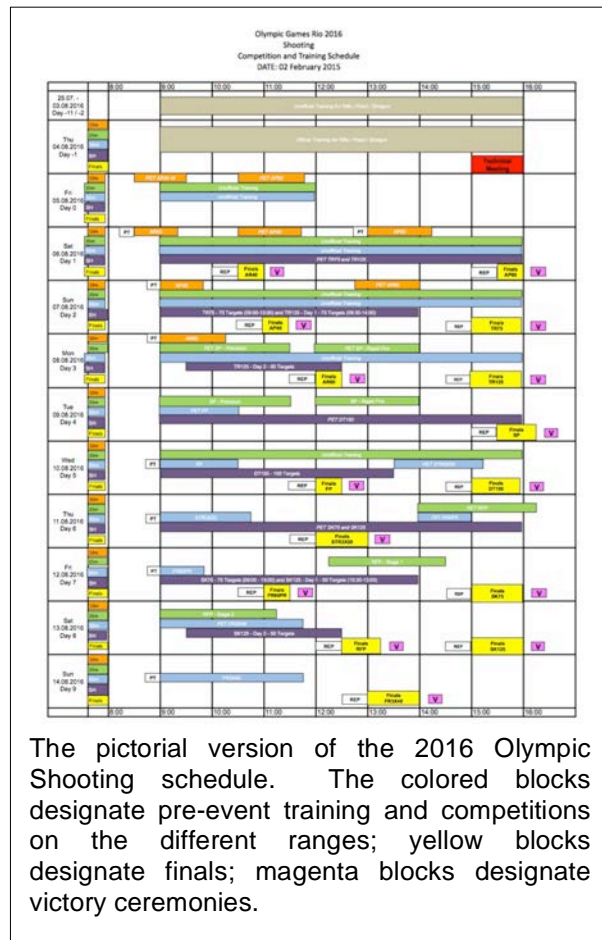
After the program of events is fixed and the leadership team established, the first planning step is to prepare a schedule that designates the precise times for every competition and training activity. The schedule is the foundation of the entire Shooting plan. This is especially true in a complicated sport like Shooting where there are 15 events for men and women, three different disciplines (rifle, pistol, shotgun) and as many as five different ranges. Finals must be scheduled to facilitate live

telecast requirements. The schedule must also allow for plenty of training time on each range.

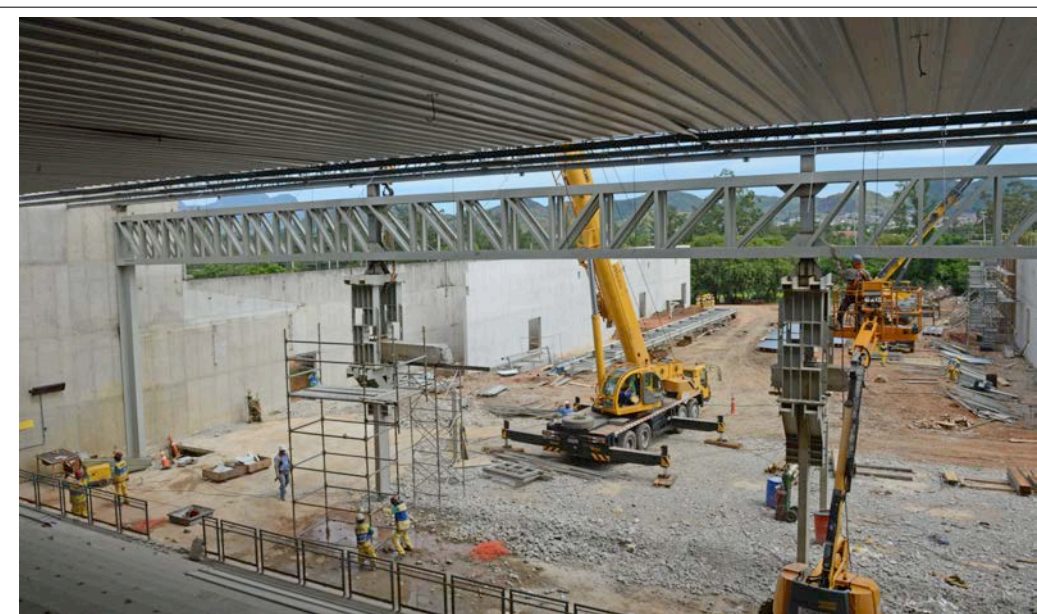
A well-designed schedule makes it possible to plan support requirements, allocate supplies and resources and manage the work of all officials and volunteers. The schedule is also an important resource for coaches and athletes to use in preparations for their competitions.

The Shooting Venue

Olympic Games sports facilities are called venues. In Rio de Janeiro, there are 37 different venues for 28 different sports. The Shooting venue in Rio is appropriately named the “Olympic Shooting Center” (OSC). Shooting venues for ISSF Championships are very complicated and, unfortunately, also very expensive. To provide facilities for 15 different rifle, pistol and shotgun events, 10m, 25m 50m and shotgun ranges as well as a



The pictorial version of the 2016 Olympic Shooting schedule. The colored blocks designate pre-event training and competitions on the different ranges; yellow blocks designate finals; magenta blocks designate victory ceremonies.



The existing Finals Hall in the Rio Olympic Shooting Center had to be completely rebuilt because it did not have adequate seating for spectators. Construction began in January 2016 and will not be completed until July 2016.

rifle-pistol finals hall are required. The ISSF has detailed regulations governing the configuration and design of Olympic Shooting ranges. Rifle and pistol ranges must have electronic targets and scoreboards. Olympic venues need lots of spectator seating on all ranges and numerous workrooms for the staff and international Juries.

Few Olympic host cities have ranges ready made for the Olympics. In London 2012, the city had no range and no plans to establish a permanent range so it constructed a temporary range at a cost of £36 million (\$51.7 million). The all-time worst case was the Olympic Shooting venue in Athens (2004) that cost €65 million (\$73.5 million) for a venue that was never used after the Games. Rio de Janeiro has an existing shooting range that was built for the 2007 Pan American Games, but it was necessary to renovate the facility and completely rebuild the Rifle-Pistol Finals Hall.

Olympic venues not only must comply with IF regulations, but they also must showcase their sports for a worldwide audience. One of the ways this is accomplished is by adding what is called the “Look” to Olympic venues. The special colors and graphics of the official Olympic Look make the venues uniquely attractive.



The exterior “Look” that was used for London 2012 venues produced what many regarded as the most attractive venue Olympic Shooting ever had.

Paying the Bills – Finance and Budget

Paying for a venue that costs tens of millions of dollars and an organizational infrastructure that includes hundreds of people is an expensive proposition. Television rights for the Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies and competitions yield a big share of IOC and OGOC income. NBC alone paid \$4.38 billion for the US television rights for the 2014 and 2018 Winter Games and the 2016 and 2020 Summer Games. Sponsors like Coca-Cola™ and Omega™ also pay huge fees. Ticket sales produce significant income for sports where stadiums or arenas hold tens of thousands of spectators, but Shooting is not one of them. 23,000 Shooting tickets were sold in London 2012; over

40,000 were sold in Atlanta 1996. In Rio de Janeiro, venue-seating limitations will restrict ticket sales to 2,000 per day.

Government funding is substantial for many Olympic host cities. Government agencies constructed and paid for the sports venues for both London and Rio de Janeiro. In Brazil, this was complicated by an adverse political and economic situation. When the Games are over, it is expected that OGOCs should have a small surplus, but this may not occur in Rio where the OGOC is now projecting a \$500 million budget shortfall.

Providing for Athlete Needs

Modern Shooting organization planning must pay a lot of attention to providing for the needs of the athletes so they can perform to the best of their ability. There are several venue and organizational facilities needed to fully support high performance Shooting athletes. They include:

- **Transportation.** In the Olympics, athletes stay in the Olympic Village. During other international championships, they stay in hotels. In either case, a fleet of buses and a well-planned transportation schedule are needed to take athletes, coaches and team officials to and from the range.
- **Secure Arms Storage.** Police regulations in almost all countries now require guns and ammunition to be stored at the shooting venue, where a 24-hour guard protects them. Separate storage must be provided for rifle equipment bags.
- **Athlete Lounge.** Athletes who spend much of the day on the range need a place where they relax and hang out. Shotgun shooters, especially, need a place where they can rest between the times when their squads are shooting.
- **Changing Rooms.** Athletes usually do not put on their competition clothing until after they arrive at the range so they need appropriate places to change before going to the firing line.

- **Warm-Up (dry fire) Area.** Today's Shooting athletes know competition performances are improved by systematic warm-ups. This requires setting up one or more dry fire areas for this purpose next to the ranges.



The Athlete Warm-Up Area that was used during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro World Cup and Pre-Olympic Test Event. Shooting athlete warm-ups usually consist of holding exercises and/or dry firing at a blank wall.

- **Equipment and Doping Control.** Modern range complexes must provide centers for equipment control and doping control testing.

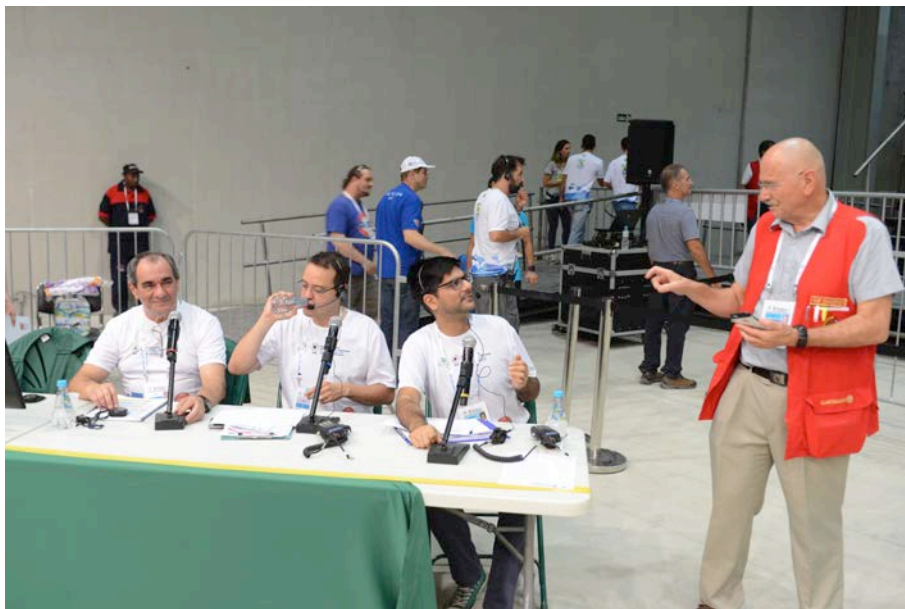
Running the Competitions

The OGOC is responsible for the actual conduct of the Olympic competitions while the IF is responsible for advising, assisting and supervising the OGOC staff. The OGOC does this by appointing National Technical Officials (NTOs) who work as Referees, Range Officers and Statistical Officers under the direction of the Competition Manager. All NTOs who work in the Olympic Games must have ISSF Judges Licenses that are earned by attending and passing an ISSF Judges Course. Chief Range Officers (CROs) must have ISSF A Licenses and significant experience in working international competitions. 73 NTOs, all but six from Brazil, will serve during the 2016 Games.

In Shooting, ISSF Juries supervise OGOC NTOs. Shooting has lots of Juries, for Rifle, Pistol, Shotgun, Classification (Results, Timing and Scoring) and Equipment Control. There is also a Jury of Appeal that must make final decisions on appealed Jury

decisions. Modern Juries are actively involved in all aspects of the competitions, working long hours while being present during all training and competition activities. 25 ITOs from 18 different countries will serve during the Rio Games.

NTOs, led by CROs, actually conduct the competition events. If an issue comes up involving a rule application or interpretation, the Jury members on duty decide. The appropriate Jury must decide protests, penalties or disqualifications. Equipment that fails a post-competition test is cause for automatic disqualification as soon as a Jury member confirms that the test was done correctly. The Classification Jury is responsible for checking results lists to be sure all scores are correct.



Part of the team of ITOs and NTOs that will conduct finals during the 2016 Olympic Games. Shown here (from l. to r.) are the CRO, the Portuguese Announcer, the English Announcer and one of the ISSF Jury Chairmen.

Other Functional Areas

Olympic sports venues become small cities during Games Time. In addition to conducting sports competitions, many other essential functions take place there:

- **Security.** Olympic venues are high-risk terrorism targets. Violent attacks occurred in Munich 1972 and Atlanta 1996 and extreme measures are taken today to prevent further attacks. Every person who enters an Olympic venue must have an

accreditation (special photo ID) or ticket and must go through a rigorous security check.

- **Television Production.** The IOC has its own television production organization called the Olympic Broadcast System (OBS). Production facilities and camera positions must be installed in the venue to facilitate OBS productions. With the exception of NBC productions for certain sports, OBS produces live television signals for all sports that are used by 59 different rights holding broadcasters. As many as 30 of them will be present during shooting finals adding commentary in their languages so the OBS productions can be telecast in more than 100 countries.

- **Media and Photographers.** Writers and photographers from virtually every one of the 95 countries that will have athletes in the 2016 Shooting events will attend the events where athletes from their countries compete. Dedicated photo positions and media tables must be provided on the ranges. There will also be a large work center for media and photographers.



Between 100 and 250 photographers covered every 2012 Shooting qualification and final competition. The photo sections on the ranges are again expected to be full in Rio.

- **Technology.** The electronic display of results on the ranges and the production of results lists and information to service worldwide media and Internet distribution requires a massive technology installation.

- **Spectator Services.** In the Olympics, spectators don't just show their tickets and walk to their seats. Every spectator must go through a security check. Ushers are needed to control seating. Special programs are needed to educate Olympic spectators about events they often do not understand. Food service and souvenir sales must also be available for them.

Creating a Show

As recently as 1984, Olympic shooting was a simple matter of having the athletes complete a course of fire, scoring their targets, posting official scores and awarding medals to the winners. Spectators knew the preliminary "estimated" results that register keepers posted behind each athlete, but the most

dramatic moments often occurred when official results were posted on the scoreboard after the competition.

When the modern electronic, media and television age blossomed at the end of the 21st century, Olympic sports that did not already have large spectator and television followings were challenged to change their old ways and transform their competitions into presentations with more appeal to youth, television audiences and spectators. Shooting was faced with two choices, exclusion from the Olympic program (the 1984 Los Angeles OGOC almost succeeded in doing that) or dramatic change.

The ISSF accepted the challenge and adopted a succession of major and often controversial changes:

- **Finals.** Finals were first used in the 1988 Games. Finals established the principle that competitions must be concluded with a competition stage where competing athletes were reduced to a final best six or eight. This gave Shooting “a show” with tremendous spectator appeal that could also be televised.



This 25m Pistol Women final during the Brazil World Cup and Pre-Olympic Test Event in April 2016 shows how the finals field of play will be laid out during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Jury members and Range Officers sit to the left and right of the athletes. The athletes' coaches sit next to the Jury members. The empty chairs are for athletes who may be eliminated during the Final. The Look colors and graphics were not installed for the test.

- **Electronic Scoring Targets (EST).** Electronic targets that produce instant, official results and electronic scoreboards that are visible to spectators and media were first used in 10m and 50m events in 1992 and in all rifle and pistol events by 1996.

- **Live Television.** Live telecasts of shooting finals were first produced in 1992. In 1996, the Olympic Shooting TV production received an IOC “Golden Rings” award for professional excellence. People who were concerned that having TV cameramen right behind the firing points would “disturb the shooters” now accept that television is an indispensable part of modern shooting.

- **No Tolerance Post-Competition Testing.** The threat that technological doping poses, especially for rifle events, climaxed during the 2004 Games when medals were won by athletes whose jackets and trousers could only pass stiffness tests if blow torches or other manipulations were used to temporarily soften them. No tolerance--no manipulation testing became necessary to keep athletes’ equipment capabilities relatively equal and ensure that medals are won by superior shooting and not by athletes whose equipment gives them an unfair advantage.

- **Dress Code.** A “Dress Code” for shooters was adopted after the 2008 Olympics because the clothing worn by too many athletes just did not look like sports clothing. Blue jeans and black, grey and brown colors did not convey images of world-class athletes competing in a modern Olympic sport.

- **Sports Presentation.** “Sport presentation” refers to the show that is produced for spectators and television during a sports competition. Shooting now has a professional announcer who gives commentary for spectators during all finals. In 2016, music will also play during both qualification and finals. Shooting finals are being transformed into a real shows that can compete with the shows produced by many popular Olympic sports.

- **Start from Zero Finals.** New finals where qualification scores do not carry forward and finalists start from zero were adopted in 2013. This change fulfilled a standard now prevalent in almost all Olympic sports. Sports must have progressive competition stages that are each new competitions where results from earlier rounds do not carry forward. More than one outstanding performance is now required to win Olympic medals.

- **Opposition to Changes.** All of these changes in shooting were controversial and fought by many athletes, coaches and shooting officials when they were introduced. Many argued that

they were not necessary and would reduce participation or even destroy Shooting. In fact, just the opposite occurred. After these changes were given a chance to work, they made Shooting a more exciting sport, strengthened Shooting's place in the Olympic program and ultimately were well accepted.

- **Will There Be More Changes.** Changes to achieve gender equality in Olympic shooting as a response to the IOC's *Agenda 2020* are almost certain. The ISSF expects that graphic displays of shooters' hold trace patterns will be used during 2020 Olympic shooting finals. Modern Pentathlon has already adopted laser pistols and the IOC is now asking whether Shooting can develop a "laser discipline." Some national federations are doing innovative work to further improve finals settings (shooting theater) and sport presentation. Since Shooting's goal is to remain in the Olympic program, future change is certain.

How Will This Affect USA Junior Shooting?

We began by describing how Olympic Shooting changes have already changed national and grassroots shooting programs including junior shooting in the USA. Junior shooting leaders are encouraged to consider and apply these additional lessons learned from recent developments in Olympic shooting:

- **Finals.** Finals are here to stay and should be part of the experiences available to juniors in all competitions.
- **Improve Range Appearances.** Olympic "Look" examples should inspire junior leaders to use color themes and graphics to make their ranges more attractive to youth and parents.
- **Encourage Spectators.** Few junior ranges have electronic targets or room for spectator seating, but they can use electronic scoring to produce quickly updated scoreboard images on a video screen in a staging room.
- **Develop Internet Audiences.** The use of electronic scoring can also be used for even the smallest matches to provide results displays on the Internet. 4-H BB Gun matches successfully use this technology to involve Internet audiences of hundreds of viewers.
- **Provide Dry Fire and Staging Areas.** The best junior ranges today have large staging areas where competitors can prepare for firing. The designation of safe dry fire areas will

encourage more juniors to use performance enhancing warm-ups before they go to the range.

- **Promote Gender Equality in Junior Shooting.** Junior leaders should use the coming of absolute gender equality in Olympic Shooting to promote participation by more girls and the development of more women as coaches and match officials.
- **Dress Code.** Junior clubs and teams should consider adopting their own dress codes that promote the wearing of sport-oriented clothing.
- **Music.** Sponsors of junior matches should consider how they can use music to enhance their competitions.

Three decades of change in the organization of Olympic Shooting competitions have made Shooting a more attractive sport that is better able to retain its status as an Olympic sport. These changes have also inspired many changes that have benefitted junior shooting in the USA and other countries. Junior leaders are encouraged to take full advantage of them.



Junior shooting in the USA now has finals, electronic score displays, spectators, announcers and frequent applause thanks to changes that first took place in Olympic Shooting.