

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THREE-POSITION AIR RIFLE COMPETITIONS

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus



Junior Three-Position Air Rifle Competitions are changing—for the better. This photo shows eight finalists being introduced before the start of the 2021 CMP National Championship final. For the first time, finals in this year's championships were three-position, start-from-zero finals. The finals were filled with suspense, had dramatic endings and athletes, coaches and spectators loved them.

The Winter 2020 edition of *On the Mark* published my article titled “Participating in Competitions: A How-To for Coaches and Junior Athletes.” That article explained why youth who participate in shooting programs should be introduced to competitions and what young athletes should do to make their competition experiences positive. This *On the Mark* article examines another aspect of competitions, how Junior Three-Position Air Rifle competitions are changing and how these changes promise to make Three-Position Air Rifle (3PAR)* competitions and the experiences young shooting athletes have in them even better.

In 2021, the junior shooting community began to emerge from the covid pandemic restrictions that shut

down so many competition opportunities in 2020. But instead of just returning to what was taking place before covid, there are several new developments in 3PAR and junior shooting competitions that promise to bring new opportunities to youth who participate in them. These new developments include: 1) the emergence of new junior shooting stars from the USA, 2) the publication of a new *Three-Position Match Officials Manual*, 3) the release of an updated 2020-2022 Rulebook, 4) new developments for showcasing athlete performances including an affordable electronic target and the successful use of Olympic-style start-from-zero finals, and 5) new CMP programs that offer youth opportunities to broaden their horizons.

* The junior shooting sports discipline Three-Position Air Rifle will be abbreviated as “3PAR” throughout this article.

America's New Junior Shooting Heroes

Positive change begins with inspiration and hope. The successes USA juniors enjoyed in the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games and the 2021 ISSF Junior World Championship should inspire junior athletes and program leaders to excel and give them confidence in the quality of our country's junior shooting programs.

In the Tokyo Olympic Games that took place this past summer, two American athletes who are still juniors, emerged as new shooting heroes. William Shaner from Colorado and Mary Tucker from Florida won Olympic gold and silver medals. Both are current student-athletes at the University of Kentucky. In the early stages of their development, both competed in 3PAR competitions. Mary Tucker earned Junior Distinguished Badge #1206 in 2017.

In the Olympic 10m Air Rifle Men event, Shaner shot the third best qualification score with a 630.8. In the final, he was third after the first five shots and then took the lead with a phenomenal 53.7 in the second series. He never relinquished that lead en route to a gold medal score of 251.6 and a new Olympic record. His worst shot was a 10.1 and he had only one of those. It is interesting to note that the silver medal winner in this event, Lihao Sheng of China, who finished 0.7 points behind Shaner, was just 16 years old. The gold and silver medal winners in this event were both juniors!

The 10m Air Rifle Women event was the first gold medal event in the entire Olympic Games. Mary Tucker shot the third best qualification score in that event with a 631.4 and finished sixth in the final. Her medal win came in a new Olympic event, the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event. She teamed with Lucas Kozeniesky, who had placed 6th in the 10m Air Rifle Men event. Their qualification score of 628.0 ranked 7th but that got them into the semi-final where their 418.0 score ranked second and qualified them for the gold medal match against Qian Yang (*she won the Games first gold medal in the 10m Air Rifle Women event and celebrated her 21st birthday just before the Games opened*) and Haoran Yang of China. The medal matches are decided by points. Both athletes fire single shots and the team with the highest two-person score receives two points. 16 points are needed to win. The Chinese team won the gold medal 17 to 13, giving Tucker and Kozeniesky the silver medal.

In the Junior World Championship in October, in Lima, Peru, Shaner won the 10m Air Rifle Men Junior gold medal in that Championship as well, while Tucker won two silver medals and one bronze in individual women junior rifle events. Overall USA juniors won four individual Junior World Championships and 21 total medals. Most young athletes in shooting already know about Shaner and Tucker, but junior



The two most successful junior rifle shooters in the world in 2021 were USA juniors. William Shaner (top photo) won an Olympic gold medal in the 10m Air Rifle Men event. Mary Tucker (directly above) won an Olympic silver medal with her USA teammate Lucas Kozeniesky in the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event.

program leaders must now ensure that their successes are known by everyone who encounters their programs. Their 2021 Olympic and Junior World Championship performances were inspiring. They demonstrated how the best juniors in the USA can compete with the best athletes anywhere in the world.

New Three-Position Match Officials Manual

With so many JROTC units, schools and junior clubs conducting 3PAR Matches, the CMP and National Three-Position Air Rifle Council decided that a guidebook or manual on how to conduct 3PAR Matches was needed. Its objective was to help junior program leaders apply best

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practice procedures while conducting their competitions. The result of this effort is a new **Three-Position Air Rifle Match Officials Manual**. The 76 page, spiral-bound, 5.5" x 8.5" manual was designed so match officials could carry it with them and consult it whenever questions come up. Here is a partial list of topics covered in the manual:

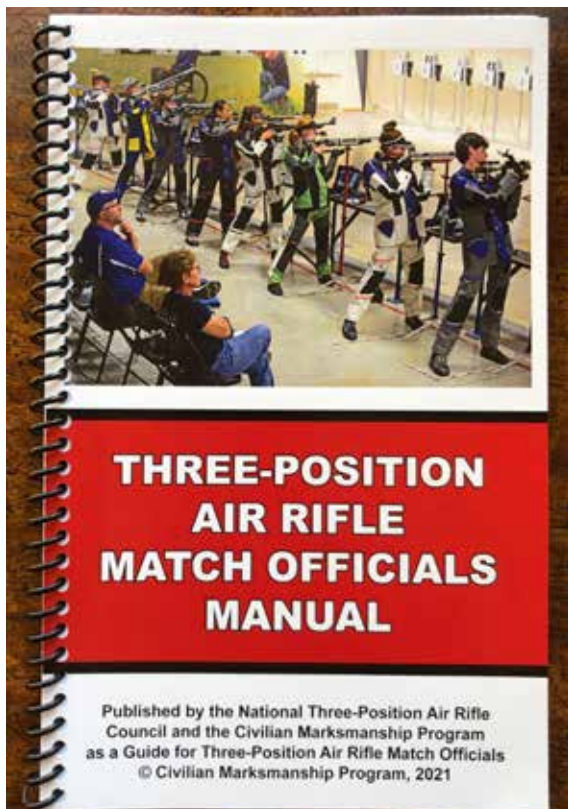
- 3PAR Values and Principles
- How to use the 3PAR Rulebook
- Guidelines for serving as a Match Official
- Requirements for operating safe air rifle ranges
- Procedures for conducting 3PAR competition firing
- Range Officer scripts and standard range commands
- How to resolve issues that arise during match firing
- Electronic target operations
- Procedures for resolving EST complaints and protests
- How to conduct finals
- Scoring and results operations (for Orion and manual scoring)
- Rule violations and protests
- Awards and award ceremonies
- How to plan and organize 3PAR competitions

- Equipment control testing
- Model forms for match operations

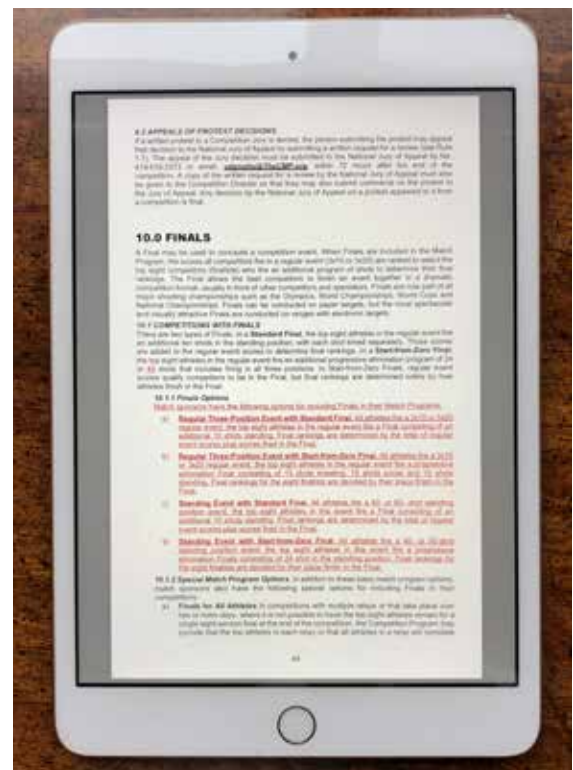
Anyone who serves as a 3PAR Match Official should obtain and study the sections of the manual that are relevant to match functions which they fulfill. Copies are available from the CMP at no cost. Send requests for the **Three-Position Air Rifle Match Officials Manual** to 3PAR@thecmp.org.

New Updated 3PAR Rulebook

The **National Standard Three Position Air Rifle Rules** are the governing document for 3PAR competitions. Every 3PAR Match Official should become intimately familiar with this rulebook and carry a copy with them whenever they work a competition. A new edition of this rulebook was released in August 2021 so be sure to obtain this latest edition. Download the **13th Edition 2020-2022 National Standard Three-Position Air Rifle Rules** at <https://thecmp.org/youth/air/national-standard-three-position-air-rifle-rules/>. Printed copies can also be ordered from CMP, or you can download and print your own rulebook.



This new 76-page manual contains detailed instructions, procedures, and tips for running Three-Position Air Rifle Matches. Copies are available on request from the CMP at no cost. Send requests to 3PAR@thecmp.org.



One of the best ways for Match Officials to carry a rulebook is to save the rulebook on a tablet or cell phone. Electronic search features are usually faster and easier to use than printed indexes.

There are some changes in the latest edition that Match Officials will want to note:

- **Automated Range Commands.** New Orion Athena electronic targets have red/green **START/STOP** signal lights on top of each target and display current range commands on each athlete's monitor. Rule changes permit the use of these visible signals to conduct range firing. A Range Officer script for conducting firing with automated range procedure signals is included.
- **New Crosman CH2021 Sporter Air Rifle.** Crosman's latest model competition rifle was added to the list of approved sporter class air rifles. Crosman Challengers already dominate sporter class competitions, and this new version provides further improvements. The maximum allowable cost for approved sporter air rifles was increased from \$600 to \$650; that price ceiling had not changed in five years (2016). Since the CH2021 has a detachable fore-end riser, a maximum fore-end depth of 100 mm was added for sporter air rifles.



The new Crosman CH2021 sporter class air rifle

- **Decimal Scoring.** Match sponsors that use either Orion (VIS) scoring* or electronic targets now have the option of using decimal scoring (tenth ring scoring) in their competitions. Decimal scoring has a strong appeal to many juniors and their coaches because this is how Olympic and international air rifle events are scored.
- **Virtual CMP Cup Matches Authorized.** Covid-related travel restrictions impacting many 3PAR teams led the National Council to authorize virtual CMP Cup Matches. Virtual matches allow participating teams to shoot on their home ranges or on designated, decentralized ranges as a means of reducing or eliminating travel requirements. The use of Orion (VIS) scoring or electronic targets is necessary to ensure uniform scoring. Virtual CMP Cup Matches continue to be authorized because they fulfill an important need in areas where greater travel distances make them a practical option for offering accessible matches.

- **EST Protest and Complaint Procedures.** Previous rules for resolving electronic target scoring issues were based on ISSF rules developed for older acoustical-sensing targets. Newer electronic targets offer simpler issue resolution procedures. For example, the shot validation procedure on Athena targets makes it unnecessary to direct athletes who protest a score value or claim a missing shot to fire an additional shot. The updated rules also include procedures for adjudicating missing shots on KTS targets that do not have witness strips. If your range has electronic targets, check these new rules carefully to be sure you are applying rules applicable for your EST system.
- **Options for Conducting Finals.** The options for scheduling and conducting either standard finals (Ten additional shots for the top eight finalists) or start-from-zero three-position finals were expanded. Detailed rules and Range Officer scripts for conducting start-from-zero three-position finals are now included.
- **Technical Rule Changes.** The updated rules also include numerous, mostly minor, technical clarifications. Match Officials need to look for changes (marked in underlined red type) in the rulebook to be sure they are aware of any rule changes that impact their duties as a Match Official.

Start-from-Zero Finals and Showcasing Athlete Performances

Everyone who was present for the individual final for the 2021 National 3PAR Junior Olympic Championship surely remembers its dramatic ending. For the first time, the 2021 National 3PAR Championships used start-from-zero finals. The top eight athletes in the 60-shot three-position events advanced to 45-shot three-position finals where the top eight places were decided solely by how athletes finished in the final (*60-shot scores do not carry forward in start-from-zero finals*). In this final, finalists shoot three 5-shot series kneeling, three 5-shot series prone, two 5-shot series standing, and then progressively eliminate the lowest ranking athletes as the last five shots standing are fired one shot at a time. Only two athletes remain for the last shot which decides the gold and silver medals.

In the Junior Olympic final, two outstanding young athletes, Katie Zaun from North Dakota and Emme Walrath from Wisconsin remained to contend for the gold and silver medals with one shot remaining. Zaun had a 1.2-point lead, but her 9.6 and Walrath's spectacular 10.8 left the

* The Orion Scoring System, Athena electronic targets were designed, produced and marketed by Dr. Erik Anderson, the author's son.

THE LAST SHOT IN A START-FROM-ZERO FINAL



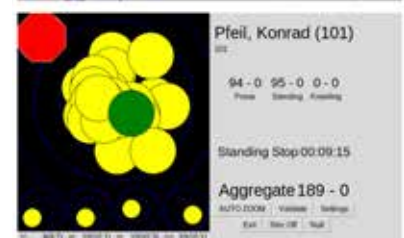
Rylie Passmore (on left) and Emme Walrath (on right) battled it out during the National CMP 3PAR Final at Camp Perry. The photos show them firing their last shots and sharing an embrace after Walrath prevailed.

two athletes tied. Ties are broken by a sudden death shoot-off, where Walrath prevailed 10.4 to 10.1, to take the gold medal. No youth sport offers drama and excitement that is any better than that, and it took place in a 3PAR National Championship competition.

The memorable finish in this final occurred because 1) the match sponsor (CMP) had a range equipped with **electronic targets**, 2) the range accommodated lots of spectators, 3) a **start-from-zero final** was used to decide final place finishes, 4) two **highly skilled athletes** performed exceptionally well under tremendous pressure, 5) the range had a **visual display system** where spectators could instantly see every score and athlete rankings after every shot and 6) the Chief Range Officer and Announcer kept the final running smoothly and the audience informed. These are all things match sponsors can build on to better showcase the drama and excitement inherent in youth shooting.

Electronic Targets (EST). The future in shooting is electronic targets. Everyone is familiar with EST advantages, with instant scores visible to competitors, spectators, and online audiences. However, until now, high costs have prevented almost all 3PAR ranges from installing EST. EST have been mandatory in Olympic and World Championships for 30 years and they are

now standard for NCAA college rifle competitions in the U. S. Major junior championships conducted on CMP, USAShooting and USAMU ranges have used EST for the past 20 years. A few junior programs were able to raise the funds needed to purchase EST but for most junior clubs and schools, EST were simply too expensive. A new development within the last year is changing that--the introduction of Orion Athena electronic targets (<http://www.orionscoringsystem.com/orion/Home.aspx>), which sell for \$1,500 per firing point. This target is already making it possible for many more school and club teams to enjoy EST



The Athena electronic target (above) and an image from the Athena athlete monitor.

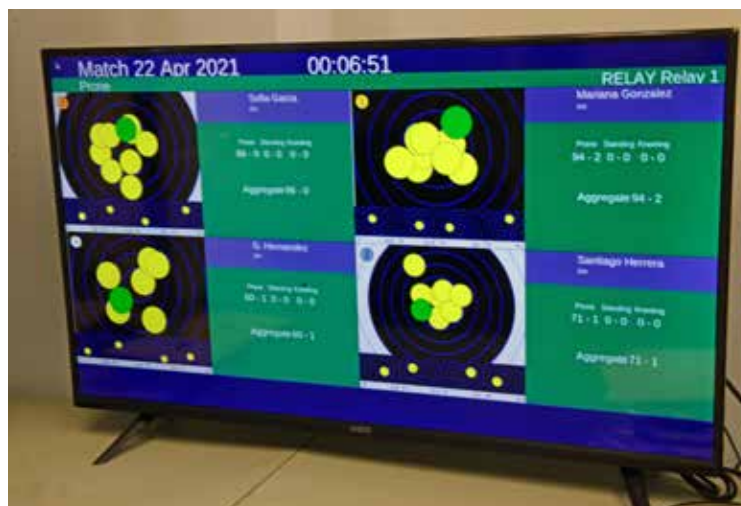
benefits. Several hundred of these new targets have now been installed in ranges all over the country and are being used to conduct many 3PAR Matches.

Accommodating Spectators and Score Display Technology. Anyone who says shooting is not a spectator sport doesn't know shooting. The problem is not that shooting lacks spectator appeal but that we haven't been very good at accommodating spectators or displaying athlete performances and scores. The first step in changing this is for 3PAR match sponsors to take steps to acquire score display technology and simultaneously make room for spectators on their ranges.

Score Display Technology. Modern EST installations have software that supports the public display of scores, usually with graphic displays of shots. The Orion VIS Scoring System for paper targets also supports the display of ranked results and a leaderboard. To display scores for spectators, the range's main computer needs to be connected to an OLED, LCD or plasma display panel that is large enough for spectators in the range to read scores and rankings.

Accommodating Spectators. Most shooting ranges were not designed to accommodate spectators, but even ranges with limited space behind the firing line or with an adjacent assembly room have some space for spectators. Match sponsors should make conscious efforts to include spectators in their planning. By installing a visual display panel and providing a few chairs, it is possible to start a spectator program. At first, spectators may only be family members and school friends but if you give them a good experience more will come.

Start-From-Zero Finals. The so-called standard final in 3PAR shooting with ten additional shots in standing for the top eight competitors has been used for 3PAR championships for more than 20 years, but that format has not been used in international competitions since 2012. The new international norm for finals is the start-from-zero format, with progressive eliminations, 24 shots in a standing final or 45 shots in a three-position final. The problem with progressive elimination finals is that they require electronic targets. With major electronic target installations at Camp Perry, Anniston, Fort Benning, Colorado Springs, and the CMP mobile range, and with several hundred electronic targets now being installed on junior program ranges, the possibilities for conducting start-from-zero final are expanding. The CMP's use of start-from-zero finals during last summer's National Junior Olympic and CMP 3PAR Championships was well received and will continue. As more ranges acquire electronic targets, their competition plans should include



Electronic display panels like this Spectator Display Module for Athena EST can keep coaches and spectators fully informed about match progress.

conducting start-from-zero Olympic format finals. These finals are one of the best ways to present the true drama of target competitions and make shooting a better spectator sport.

New Opportunities for Growth — CMP Smallbore and Air Gun Programs

New developments in other CMP programs also offer many 3PAR athletes opportunities to broaden their horizons by participating in air rifle standing and smallbore rifle position competitions. These opportunities are especially important to junior athletes who hope to shoot in college



An ideal range configuration to accommodate spectators: Bleachers or chairs for spectators and an LCD panel (top center) showing results. This Sporter Class Final took place at the CMP Competition Center at Camp Perry.

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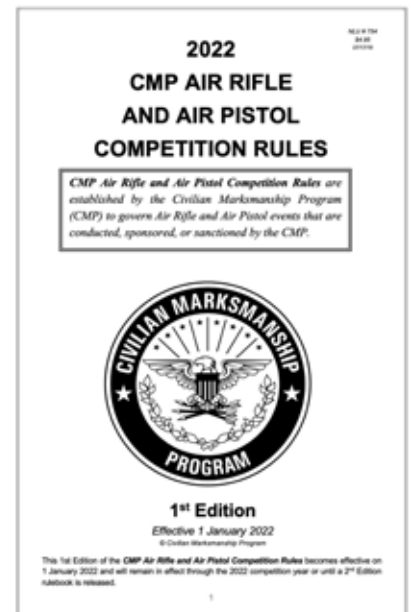


Many 3PAR athletes who come to the National Matches at Camp Perry now are also able to compete in 50m position championships like this National Smallbore Rifle Position Championship.

because in college rifle competitions, team members shoot two events, 60-shot air rifle and 60-shot 3-position smallbore rifle. As a result, most college rifle coaches prefer to recruit athletes with records of success in both air rifle and smallbore position. Juniors who have the skills to shoot in college, and who have access to smallbore equipment, will be able to expand their competitive resumes by including these CMP program opportunities in their 2022 competition plans:

- The **Camp Perry Open**, which previously was a popular January air gun only competition, with three-position and standing events, was moved to May in 2021. By holding this competition in May, it was possible to also offer a 50m 3-position smallbore rifle event, in addition to traditional 10m 3PAR and 60-shot standing events. For juniors who have access to smallbore rifle equipment, that gave them another opportunity for a high quality smallbore position match. And with more high level smallbore position matches being offered, more juniors will be encouraged to also try smallbore competition. The 2022 Camp Perry Open will take place on May 13-15 and will include a 50m smallbore rifle position event.

- **New CMP Air Rifle/Air Pistol Competition Rules.** The CMP Rules Committee recently approved a new rulebook, **CMP Air Rifle and Air Pistol Competition Rules**. The new rulebook will go into effect in 2022 and allow the CMP to sanction 60-shot air rifle and 60-shot air pistol competitions. These rules are closely modeled after ISSF rules. They require, for example, air rifle events sanctioned under these rules to use decimal scoring. Either electronic targets or paper targets with Orion VIS scoring are needed to do that. However, the Orion system now dominates the scoring of 3PAR



The CMP will have a new air gun rulebook in 2022.

AIR & SMALLBORE RIFLE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE 2022 NATIONAL MATCHES		
Championship	Date	Comments
National Junior Olympic and CMP 3PAR Championships	13-15 July	Precision Air Rifle 3PAR competition for athletes who qualify in state or CMP postal competitions
National Matches Air Gun Championship	16-18 July	Air Rifle and Air Pistol National Championship events for juniors and seniors
National Matches Smallbore Rifle Position Championship	19-22 July	Smallbore Rifle 50m 3-Position Championship for juniors and seniors (2 x 120 shots)
National Matches Smallbore Rifle Prone Championship	22-27 July	Smallbore Rifle Prone Championship for juniors and seniors (4 x 160 shots at 50 yds, 50m, 100 yds)
CMP National Junior Rifle Camp	23-28 July	Smallbore rifle and air rifle instructional camp for beginning and intermediate juniors
National Rimfire Sporter Rifle Championship	23-24 July	Open Rimfire Sporter Rifle (7.5x weight limit) juniors and seniors
Detailed program announcements for these championships will be released through the <i>CMP Shooters' News</i> electronic newsletters and posted on the CMP website.		

competitions to the extent that scoring paper targets by hand is becoming a relic of the past. This and more EST installations in 3PAR ranges will allow the conduct of 60-shot air rifle events that are scored in decimals.

- **More Junior Opportunities in the National Matches.** In 2021, the **Precision Air Rifle CMP and Junior Olympic National Championships** took place in July, just before the National Matches Smallbore Rifle Position Championship. This made it possible for many juniors to compete in the National 3PAR Championships and then remain at Camp Perry for the Smallbore Rifle Position Championship. This schedule change was a big success. 88% of the 137 competitors in the National Smallbore Position Championship event were juniors. In 2022, this scheduling combination is being expanded with another new program, a new **National Matches Air Gun Championship** that will offer National Trophy Match competitions in both air rifle and air pistol (see chart). Juniors who come to next summer's National Matches will have an unprecedented ten days or more of national championship competition opportunities.

- **Smallbore and Air Rifle Distinguished Badges.** Gold Distinguished Badges are the highest individual awards authorized by the U.S. Government for excellence in marksmanship competitions. Distinguished Badges

are awarded by the CMP and the respective military commands in accordance with federal law. One of the most coveted awards in marksmanship is for a person to "go Distinguished" and be presented with one of these badges. The first Distinguished badges were awarded by the Army in 1884. For decades, Distinguished Badges were restricted to Service Rifle, Service Pistol, International competitions, and the Junior Distinguished program, which recognizes excellence in 3PAR competitions. Recent CMP decisions to expand the Distinguished Badge program will now award Badges for Smallbore Rifle Position, Smallbore Rifle Prone, Air Rifle and Air Pistol. Sanctioned matches where EIC (excellence-in-competition) credit points can be earned with top ten percent finishes will be available in the coming year to give junior and senior athletes new opportunities to work towards earning one of these prestigious badges.

It's a great time to be a young athlete who is active in 3PAR and junior shooting competitions. These programs are changing, and for the better, by giving juniors more opportunities to participate in high quality national and local competitions. Now juniors and their program leaders just need to act to take advantage of these new opportunities.



CMP changes in the Distinguished Badge program will now give smallbore rifle and air gun competitors opportunities to earn prestigious gold Distinguished Badges.

About the Author

Gary Anderson is the Director of Civilian Marksmanship, Emeritus, and is the holder of two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships. Mr. Anderson served as a Technical Delegate for Shooting during the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games as well as for the 2014 and 2018 World Shooting Championships.

In 2012, the International Olympic Committee awarded Gary Anderson with the Olympic Order, its highest honor "for outstanding services to the Olympic Movement."

