

## NATIONAL MATCHES HISTORY AND APPEAL

# THE NATIONAL MATCHES – THEIR HISTORY AND APPEAL

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus

*The National Matches are a U. S. national championship for rifle and pistol target shooting, but they are so much more than that. This **On the Mark** article seeks to answer these questions: “What are the National Matches?” “Why has ‘going to Camp Perry’ become such cherished experiences for competitors?”*



*The National Matches offer multiple training and competition opportunities designed especially for Juniors. This poster commemorates the 2021 **CMP-USMC Highpower Rifle Clinic** where 81 Junior Service Rifle competitors benefitted from three days of intense instruction from Marine Corps Rifle Team members.*

The National Matches are frequently called “*the World Series of the Shooting Sports*” but that description is a serious misnomer. If a successful Little League baseball team wanted to participate in baseball’s World Series, they would receive nothing but derisive laughter. If a well-prepared junior rifle team wants to participate in shooting’s National Matches, they will be welcomed with open arms. This comparison underscores how the National Matches are much more than a national championship for the best rifle and pistol competitors. Shooting’s National Matches are open

to junior and senior competitors of all levels. Another huge difference is that while most people who attend the World Series are spectators who don’t play the games, virtually everyone who goes to the National Matches goes to be a

### NATIONAL MATCHES ORGANIZATIONS

- NBPRP – National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice
- NRA – National Rifle Association
- OHNG – Ohio National Guard
- USAR – U. S. Army Reserves
- CMP – Civilian Marksmanship Program



*Shooting's National Matches welcome competitors of all levels.*

competitor, not to be a spectator. They go to compete in one or more of the dozens of National Matches events, but they also go to learn new and better marksmanship skills, to update their equipment, to experience the sights, sounds and activities of a truly unique place and to enjoy the fellowship and camaraderie of a special group of people.

### Creation of the National Matches

The first step in understanding the appeal of the National Matches is to know something about their history. Dreams of having a U. S. national rifle and pistol championship go back to the 19th century and the first decades after the Civil War when rifle and pistol competitions were gaining popularity. A primary interest of many military and political leaders was to promote military rifle competitions because they were concerned about poor marksmanship skills among military personnel. There was a growing conviction that the best way to improve those skills was to have Soldiers, Sailors and Marines use their rifles in target competitions.

The first attempts to put these ideas into practice were led by two young New York National Guard officers, Col. William Church and Capt. (later General) George Wingate. Their leadership efforts led to the formation of the National Rifle Association of America in 1871. The new NRA acquired the legendary Creedmoor Range on Long Island and conducted its first competitions there in 1873. All but one of the 12 events were military rifle events for military personnel only.

During this same era, the active Army also began promoting marksmanship activities. Army Department and Division level competitions were fired with M1873 Trapdoor Springfield .45-70 rifles at distances up to 600



*Trophies in the CMP's National Trophy Collection preserve National Matches history. This Soldier of Marathon Trophy entered NRA competition in 1875 and became a National Trophy in 1903. Its brass plates on the base are inscribed with trophy winners' names.*

yards. A bi-annual All-Army Match began in 1882. The first gold Distinguished Marksman Badges were awarded in 1884. The Marine Corps, Navy and Coast Guard also initiated their own marksmanship and Distinguished Badge programs.

By the end of the 19th century, rifle and pistol marksmanship activities in the U. S. featured NRA Annual Matches and Armed Services championships. Matches were generally restricted to military personnel and military rifles, but there were also pistol competitions. These programs, however, lacked national coordination and



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adequate funding. Marksmanship leaders of that day decided a U. S. government agency, with Congressional funding, should be established to address these problems and organize a national shooting championship.

NRA leaders took the lead in lobbying Congress to pass legislation that established a **National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice** (NBPRP) and annual **National Matches**, with federal funding to support them. President Theodore Roosevelt was a marksmanship advocate. When Congress finally acted in early 1903, the President signed the legislation, and the new program was launched.

### Growth of the National Matches

The new NBPRP utilized Department of War resources to organize the first National Matches at Sea Girt, New Jersey, in 1903. Their first event was a military rifle team match that was destined to become the **National Trophy Rifle Team Match**. Fifteen teams representing the Navy, Marine Corps, Infantry, Cavalry, and several state National Guard organizations competed with U. S. Krag rifles. Congress had provided funds for a **National Trophy**, now revered as the “Dogs of War Trophy.” The New York National Guard team was the first winner. In addition to the National Trophy Rifle Team Match, regular NRA Annual Matches events, including the President’s Match, Leech Cup, and Wimbledon Cup, were also conducted at Sea Girt during those first National Matches.

The new National Matches met with an enthusiastic response and the NBPRP worked with the War Department to organize the next Matches. An early problem involved finding adequate facilities to host the competitions. The 1904 National Trophy Rifle Match was moved to Fort Riley,



*Camp Perry is named after Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, hero of the 1812 Battle of Lake Erie. The Battle took place in Lake Erie waters not far from Camp Perry. Perry's heroism was celebrated in this 1911 painting by Edward Percy Moran.*

Kansas while the NRA matches remained at Sea Girt. National Individual Pistol and Rifle events were added to the National Trophy program and civilians were allowed to participate. Rifle events were fired with U. S. Krag rifles; pistol competitors fired U. S. Service Colt or Smith & Wesson .38 caliber revolvers.

After the NBPRP National Matches and NRA Annual Matches were separated in 1904, the two organizations agreed to combine their championships in future years. Increasing participation, however, required a facility larger than Sea Girt. Ohio Adjutant General Ammon Critchfield had selected a site on the south shore of Lake Erie, and in



*Competitors in the first National Trophy Rifle Team and Individual Matches used U. S. Krag rifles. The M1903 Springfield was accepted as the National Match Rifle in 1908.*

1906 secured \$25,000 in funding from the Ohio Legislature to purchase land there for a “state rifle range.” He proposed this new range as an ideal long-term solution for the Matches. The NBPRP and NRA agreed to conduct the 1907 Matches at Camp Perry. This site ultimately became the home of the National Matches.

The National Matches were comprised of NBPRP Matches, which became known as **National Trophy Matches**, and NRA Annual Matches, which became **NRA National Championships**. The National Trophy Matches were service rifle and service pistol team and individual competitions. The Infantry Trophy Team Match became a National Trophy Match in 1936; the President’s Rifle and Pistol Matches, were released by the NRA to be National Trophy events after WWII. The “*National Trophy Matches Table*” (on right) chronicles the development of those matches prior to 1996.

The NRA Matches also evolved. The President’s Rifle Match gained prestige in 1904 when the match winner received a letter of congratulations from President Roosevelt. For many decades thereafter, the prize for the President’s Match winner was a letter of congratulations from the U. S. President. NRA highpower rifle events had a “Grand Aggregate” by 1928, an “All-Around Championship” by 1935 and National Service Rifle and Match Rifle Championships by 1952. The NRA added pistol events in 1918. By 1940, they became an NRA National Pistol Championship with an 1800-point two-gun aggregate. After WWII, the 2700 three-gun format was adopted. A smallbore rifle prone competition was added in 1919, but NRA Smallbore Rifle Championships were prone only until a four-position championship was introduced in 1957.

## Camp Perry’s Special Appeal

So many competitors don’t talk about going to the National Matches, they talk about “going to Camp Perry.” The words “Camp Perry” are synonymous with the National Matches in the same way that “Augusta,” “Indianapolis,” and “Wimbledon” are synonymous with famous sports

### National Trophy Matches, 2003-1996

Year	Event	Trophy	
1903	NT Rifle Team Match	National Trophy	
1904	NT Individual Rifle Match	Daniel Boone Trophy	
1904	NT Individual Pistol Match	Custer Trophy	
1920	NT Pistol Team Match	Gold Cup	
1936	Infantry Trophy Team Match	Infantry Trophy	
1877	President's Rifle Match	President's Rifle Trophy	
1981	President's Pistol Match	President's Pistol Trophy	

events that those locations host. After the National Matches came to Camp Perry in 1907, there have been only a few occasions linked to wars, lack of Congressional funding or a pandemic (2020), when they were not held at Camp Perry. In 2022, the CMP will conduct the National Matches at Camp Perry for the 93rd time. Camp Perry, which is an Ohio National Guard training site when it is not



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## CAMP PERRY RANGES ARE UNSURPASSED FOR SIZE AND GRANDEUR

**HIGHPOWER RIFLE**  
250 firing points



**PISTOL**  
Three or four 100-firing point ranges



**SMALLBORE RIFLE**  
150 or more firing points



**RIMFIRE SPORTER**  
150 or more firing points



**10m AIR RIFLE & PISTOL**  
80 firing points with  
electronic targets



hosting the Matches, also had the distinction of being the site of the 1913 and 1923 ISSF World Shooting Championships, eight Palma Trophy International Long-Range Team Championships, and the 1992 World Muzzle Loading Championship.

The reasons Camp Perry is beloved by competitors start with its awesome complex of ranges. From the 1000-yard range on the west to the world class 10-meter air gun range in the Gary Anderson CMP Competition Center on the east, Camp Perry has nearly one continuous mile of shooting ranges. Every year, this range area is reconfigured to set up different ranges according to the competition phase. The Matches begin with a Pistol Phase. After that, new targets and temporary covered firing points are installed for the Smallbore Rifle Phase. Finally, the ranges are reconfigured for the Highpower Rifle Phase, which features, in succession, Service Rifle, Vintage Military Rifle and Long-Range Rifle Matches. Since 1903, Camp Perry Highpower Rifle ranges have used pit-operated targets, but the CMP is now acquiring electronic targets for both highpower and smallbore rifle championships.

Camp Perry's airgun range is open throughout the 35-day National Matches schedule for competitors to shoot National Matches Air Gun Events. In addition, Petrarca Range's permanent firing line cover makes it a multipurpose range that hosts the National Junior Rifle Camp as well as several other special events.

Something that makes Camp Perry appealing is its availability of low-cost housing. In its early decades, Camp Perry had hundreds of tents that housed competitors and military support personnel. Competitors have come to regard living in Camp Perry huts, which were constructed to house POWs during WWII, as an authentic Camp Perry experience. In recent years, the OHNG has upgraded the fabled huts and other housing units. Many competitors stay in Camp Perry's enlisted barracks and take their meals in a military-style mess hall. Many teams rent smaller on-base housing units that allow their team members to live and share meals together.



## CAMP PERRY HUTS



*Living in Camp Perry huts has become part of Camp Perry lore for many competitors. The huts are shown in their original condition (above) and refurbished condition (below).*

Many competitors also stay in motels or bed and breakfast units in the Port Clinton area. During the Matches, food concessions on base provide lunches. In the evenings, local restaurants are crowded with competitors. The Port Clinton-Catawba Island area is a popular resort area. Port Clinton calls itself the “*Walleye Capital of the World*.” Many competitors’ plans include fishing excursions, outings to the nearby Lake Erie Islands, or to Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky.

Camp Perry has had a fascinating history. During WWI, it was a concentration camp. During WWII, it was a prisoner of war camp. 32 men from an Ohio National Guard unit based at Camp Perry, Company C, 192nd Tank Battalion, were involved in WWII’s Bataan Death March, and only 10 of them survived. During WWII, stars like Bing Crosby, Loretta Young and Bob Hope entertained military personnel in Camp Perry’s historic Hough Theater. Today many National Matches award ceremonies take place there.

### National Match Governance

Responsibilities for governing and conducting the National Matches has belonged, at different times, to the Department of War, the NBPRP, the U. S. Army, the NRA, and now the CMP. The 1903 legislation made the Department of War responsible for conducting the Matches and established the NBPRP as their governing body. From 1903 through 1940, the Department of War assigned military officers to manage the Matches and placed large



*A 1920 National Matches 600-yard firing line. When the U. S. Government conducted the Matches from 1903 through 1967, hundreds of military personnel were detailed to Camp Perry to act as scorers, like those shown here, or target pullers, who scored and marked targets in the pits.*

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## CMP National Matches Events, 1997-2022

Year	Vintage Military Rifle Events
1998 2002 2003 2006 2011 2016 2017	John C. Garand Match Springfield Rifle Match Vintage Military Rifle Match M1 Carbine Match Vintage Sniper Rifle Team Match Modern Military Rifle Match Springfield M1A Match
Year	Highpower Rifle Events
2004 2006 2007 2009 2018 2018	M16 EIC Match (Small Arms Firing Schools) Hearst Doubles Team Match President's Rifle Match Final Freedom's Fire Junior Team Match CMP Cup Highpower Rifle Championship Long-Range Rifle Matches
Year	Pistol Events
2006 2007 2009 2015 2017 2021 2021 2021	M9 EIC Match (Small Arms Firing School) Junior National Trophy Pistol Matches Service Pistol Warm-Up Match .22 Rimfire Pistol EIC Match Glock Pistol Match Service Revolver Match Match Pistol 3-Gun Aggregate M1911/M&P As-Issued Pistol Matches
Year	Smallbore Rifle and Air Gun Events
2002 2008 2018 2018 2022 2022	National Rimfire Sporter Championship National Matches Air Gun Events Smallbore Rifle 3-Position Championship Smallbore Rifle Prone Championship National Matches Air Rifle Championship National Matches Air Pistol Championship

numbers of military personnel on temporary duty to act as Range Officers or serve as scorers and target pullers for competitors. After WWII, National Matches responsibilities shifted to the Department of the Army. The Army provided Soldiers to operate the Matches, but the Army cancelled

its support after the 1967 Matches because of financial constraints related to the war in Viet Nam and gun control politics.

Many feared that the cancellation of Army support would be the end of the National Matches, but the NRA saved them. The NRA recruited a cadre of volunteers, and with USAR and OHNG assistance, successfully conducted a significantly reduced 1968 National Matches. Without government travel funding, most military competitors no longer participated, but the NRA managed to keep the Matches alive and a new system of conducting them with volunteers was instituted. From 1968 through 1996, the NRA conducted the Matches, with USAR and OHNG support.

The National Trophy Team and Individual Matches continued to be part of the Matches even after Army support was withdrawn. In fact, they were the Matches' most popular events. The NBPRP remained active in governing those Matches and obtained much needed, but substantially reduced, Congressional appropriations. The national gun control debate that began in the late 1960s was linked to annual attempts in Congress to eliminate government funding for the National Matches and NBPRP programs. Congressmen and Senators who supported marksmanship managed to prevail in these battles but after more than two decades of these fights, they decided the best way to preserve the National Matches and NBPRP programs was to privatize them. In 1996, Congress and President Bill Clinton

approved legislation that established the **Corporation for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Firearm Safety** as a federally chartered, non-profit corporation. The corporation quickly became known as the **CMP**. This far-sighted legislation mandated that the National Matches



must continue to be conducted and it gave the new CMP a secure source of funding by authorizing it to sell surplus military rifles and ammunition to U. S. citizens and use the proceeds to fund marksmanship and firearm safety programs such as the National Matches.

The CMP became active in the post-1968 National Matches partnership where the NRA continued to handle match operations, while the OHNG, USAR and CMP fulfilled support functions. With new leadership and funding, the CMP gradually assumed organizational responsibility for CMP National Matches events. In 2003, the CMP implemented a new Competitor Tracker computer software system that enabled it to take over statistical operations for these Matches. By 2017, the CMP implemented a Range Officer Training Course that allowed it to take over all range operations for CMP events.

At the same time, the NRA was inexplicably withdrawing its national championships from Camp Perry and the National Matches. In 2014, the NRA Smallbore Rifle Championships were moved to a new location in Indiana. In 2017, the NRA Highpower Rifle Championships were moved. The last NRA championship was withdrawn in 2021 when the NRA National Pistol Championship was moved out of Camp Perry. By 2022, the two remaining National Matches partners at Camp Perry are the CMP and the OHNG.

A dramatic expansion of National Matches participation opportunities began with the CMP's introduction of the John C. Garand Match in 1998. This match launched Vintage Military Rifle shooting as a separate shooting discipline. From 1998 through 2022, the CMP created more than two dozen new events or championships (see "New CMP National Matches Events" chart). The opening of the Air Gun Competition Center in 2008 facilitated the addition of National Matches Air Gun Events. To fill voids left by NRA departures, the CMP introduced its own Smallbore Rifle and Long-Range Rifle Championships in 2018, and new Match Pistol (3-gun pistol) and Service Revolver competitions in 2021. Now, competitors in those disciplines who cherish Camp Perry experiences will continue to have those same participation opportunities in the National Matches at Camp Perry.

### Unforgettable National Matches Experiences

The main reason competitors go to the National Matches is to compete, but there are many other aspects of the National Matches that give competitors added value and make their experiences unique and memorable.



*The President's Rifle Match Final gives the winner an opportunity to claim victory in front of hundreds of spectators. Here, 2007 winner SGT Kristopher Friend, USAR, receives a water cooler tribute from his teammates.*



*The USA flag that flew over the 2019 National Matches at Camp Perry was brought to the First Shot Ceremony by a wounded warrior parachute jumper.*



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*Each of these Camp Perry Commercial Row buildings houses display and retail sales operations set up by shooting equipment manufacturers and suppliers.*



*One of five National Matches paintings by Jerry Antolik on display in CMP Headquarters.*

**MARKSMANSHIP TRAINING.** The National Matches are one of the best places to learn new and better marksmanship skills. One great way to do this is to take advantage of the many opportunities Matches' competitors have to observe and speak with the best shooters. In addition to these informal opportunities, the National Matches offer formal training programs to meet virtually every need. In Pistol, Smallbore Rifle and Service Rifle Small Arms Firing Schools, U. S. Army Marksmanship Unit instructors teach basic marksmanship skills to hundreds of new shooters. Range Officer Training Courses prepare volunteers to serve as match officials. New shooter clinics precede Rimfire Sporter and Vintage Military Rifle events. Junior instructional programs include a week-long National Matches Junior Rifle Camp and a three-day CMP-USMC Junior Highpower Clinic. There is also a three-day Advanced Highpower Rifle Clinic for experienced competitors.

**NATIONAL MATCHES PAGENTRY.** A colorful First Shot Ceremony opens each year's Matches. Past ceremonies included flyovers, parachute jumps, historic military reenactments, and guest speakers who have the honor of firing the Matches' ceremonial "first shots." One of the most meaningful National Matches experiences occurs every morning before firing starts when a canon is fired, and the national anthem is played. The President's Rifle Match Final may be the Matches' best spectator event. National Matches Award Ceremonies are celebratory events, especially for those who receive their awards in front of hundreds of their peers. Highlights for many are formal presentations of Distinguished Badges to competitors who earned these prestigious badges during the previous year.

**EVERYONE IS A PLAYER.** The National Matches are unique among sports championships because they are open to all levels of competitors. Some competitors will already be acclaimed champions; some will be shooting their first competitions. Everyone goes home with participation recognition awards (T-shirts, etc.). Most competition events offer age group (Junior, Senior, Grand Senior, etc.) awards. CMP Games events award Achievement Medals with neck ribbons to hundreds of competitors. National Matches trophies that date as far back as 1875, are presented during Award Ceremonies that honor the competitors and teams that won these trophies.

**GUNSMITHING SERVICES AND COMMERCIAL ROW.** The National Matches are one of the best places to learn about new equipment or to upgrade existing equipment. CMP and military armorers perform many no-cost repairs as services for competitors. Experienced competitors are eager to share information about their equipment choices with new shooters. Shooting equipment dealers and manufacturers have display and retail sales operations in Camp Perry's Commercial Row. It is a great place to see and purchase new equipment for next year's trip to Camp Perry.

**IMAGES AND ICONS.** Camp Perry's unforgettable visual impressions start when one first arrives at its entrance marked by twin lighthouses. The Camp Perry water tower standing off in the distance is a National Matches icon. State flags line the entrance road to let everyone know something important is taking place there. Walking on Camp Perry firing lines is humbling when one thinks about the heroic sacrifices made by Soldiers who were awarded Congressional Medals of Honor and whose names are on those ranges. A 90 feet long mural by acclaimed Wyoming artist Jerry Antolik adorns the south wall of the indoor competition center; five of his paintings venerating National Matches images hang in CMP Headquarters and his "M1 Man" sculpture stands guard outside CMP Headquarters. The National Trophy collection has several important works of art including Remington bronzes and 19th century Tiffany creations. The trophies are on display at CMP Headquarters, and during award ceremonies. Seeing those elegant trophies and reading the names of some of the greatest heroes in American marksmanship that are engraved on them is another awe-inspiring experience.

The National Matches are a National Rifle and Pistol Championship, but they really are so much more than that. The National Matches are a **National Festival of Marksmanship** that offers Junior and Senior competitors great competition opportunities, training by outstanding instructors, memorable experiences, and camaraderie. If you have not been to Camp Perry and the Matches before, start your planning now!

## NATIONAL MATCHES RESOURCES

Junior shooters and their coaches who have not yet been to the National Matches should consider making a trip to Camp Perry part of their marksmanship plans. Here are some essential resources to use in planning a National Matches adventure:

**CMP National Matches Website.** <https://thecmp.org/competitions/matches/cmp-national-matches/>. This is the starting point for obtaining information about the Matches and their current programs.

**National Matches Calendar.** The "Calendar" identifies the events that take place on each day of the Matches. This is a basic resource to use in planning a National Matches trip. Download the Calendar at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1uCgLkHYEv4XWO1GXwGy3aoQfICXkFh1dms9-NqWNB6U/edit?usp=sharing>.

**The CMP National Matches Program.** Each year, the CMP publishes an "Official Program" with details about all aspects of the Matches including how to enter, the schedule, competition events and event regulations, and training courses. The National Matches Program is normally available by February or March of each year.

**CMP Competition Rulebooks.** Every competitor should have a copy of the rulebook that governs the events in which they are competing. The CMP publishes rulebooks for Highpower Rifle, Pistol, CMP Games (Vintage Military Rifle, As-Issued Pistol and Rimfire Sporter), Smallbore Rifle, and Air Rifle/Air Pistol. Download current versions of these rulebooks at <https://thecmp.org/competitions/cmp-competitions-rulebooks/>.

### 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."

