

THE ISSF – SHOOTING’S WORLD GOVERNING BODY

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus



The Olympic Games’ 10m Air Rifle Women event has become one of the world’s most-watched sports competitions because the winner receives the Games’ first gold medal. A worldwide TV audience of 120 million people watched this 2016 10m Air Rifle Women event and victory ceremony. In addition, many tens of millions also followed this event via the internet, social media, and mobile apps. Virginia Thrasher of the USA won the 2016 Games’ first gold medal.

Olympic Games Shooting events and the World Shooting Championships are the world’s most important and most-watched Shooting competitions. These competitions are governed by an organization called the **International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF)**¹. The **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**, which governs the Olympic Games, recognizes the ISSF as the **International Federation (IF)** responsible for managing Shooting in the Olympic Games. The ISSF is the world governing body for a complex program of the world’s most widely practiced Shooting competitions. The ISSF also cooperates with **World Shooting Para Sport (WSPS)**, the world governing body for Shooting competitions for persons with disabilities. These responsibilities combine to make the ISSF the world’s most important shooting sports organization.

Many young people participate in Shooting because it is an Olympic sport. Youth Shooting programs have their highest appeal when they are modeled after Shooting competitions in the Olympics and World Championships

that are governed by ISSF rules. Anyone who competes in smallbore rifle, air rifle or air pistol events has a direct interest in ISSF rules because CMP, USA Shooting (USAS) and NCAA rules for those events follow ISSF Rules. Competitors who compete in international versions of bulls-eye pistol, skeet and trap are also impacted by ISSF rules for those events. For these reasons and more, many athletes, coaches and parents who are active in the sport of Shooting have important reasons to know about the ISSF and how it functions.

This **On the Mark** article explains: 1) ISSF history, 2) how the ISSF is governed, 3) ISSF functions and 4) how the CMP relates to the ISSF. This article will show readers how the ISSF governs the conduct of Shooting in the Olympic and Paralympic Games, World Championships, and other international competitions and how ISSF decisions may impact their participation in CMP Shooting programs.

¹The world governing body of Shooting has had four different names since its founding in 1907, but in this article, it will be referred to only by its modern name, the “International Shooting Sport Federation” (ISSF).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ISSF

International Shooting competitions began in Europe in the late 1800s. The ISSF's founding grew out of a series of annual international 300m rifle matches that were organized in Europe, starting in 1897. Those Championships added a 50m pistol event in 1900 and were later recognized as the first World Shooting Championships. When the 10th Championship took place in Milan, Italy in 1906, representatives of national shooting federations from Argentina, Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, and Netherlands agreed to form **L'Union Internationale des Fédérations et Associations nationales de Tir** (*International Union of National Shooting Federations and Associations*) to govern their matches. Delegates from these nations met again in Zurich, Switzerland in 1907 to formally establish the Union and elect Daniel Mérillon from France as its first President. Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, and the USA joined the Union in 1908.

From that austere beginning, the ISSF added national federation members until today it has 163 members in 150 countries (*13 countries have separate rifle-pistol and shotgun federations*). ISSF history progressed through four distinct eras: 1) from its founding in 1907 until its dissolution in 1915 for World War I, 2) from its restoration in 1921 until its dissolution in 1939 for World War II, 3) from its return in 1946 until the end of its era of European domination in 1979, and 4) its modern era that began in 1980 when Olegario Vázquez Raña of Mexico and Horst Schreiber of Germany were elected President and Secretary General. ISSF Headquarters have been in Munich, Germany since 1980.

ISSF history is highlighted by several major changes that made it and the Olympic sport of Shooting what it is today:

- **IOC Recognition.** Today, the IOC recognizes the ISSF as the Olympic Shooting International Federation (IF), but it took eight decades for this relationship to mature. The ISSF was not involved in the early Olympic Shooting events, but the IOC decided to use ISSF Rules, starting with the 1924 Games. Then Shooting was dropped from the 1928 Games because the ISSF awarded cash prizes in its World Championships. That violated the IOC's strict amateur regulations of that time. Shooting was back in the 1932 Games after agreeing to stricter amateur rules. Attaining a secure position in the Olympic program, however, did not occur until the 1980s when ISSF President Vázquez Raña gained full support from the IOC after getting the ISSF to make Shooting one of the first Olympic sports to accept athlete quotas, adopt an Olympic qualifying system and make changes that adapted Shooting to be a spectator and media sport.

Abbreviations in this Article:

IOC. International Olympic Committee

ISSF. International Shooting Sport Federation

WSPS. World Shooting Para Sport

CMP. Civilian Marksmanship Program

USAS. USA Shooting

USOPC. U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee

NCAA. National Collegiate Athletic Association

IF. International Federation

HISTORIC ISSF NAMES

1907. L'Union Internationale des Fédérations et Associations nationales de Tir

1924. Union Internationale de Tir (UIT)

1946. International Shooting Union (ISU)

1998. International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF)



At the conclusion of the 2014 World Shooting Championship in Granada, Spain, ISSF President Olegario Vázquez Raña (l.) and Secretary General Franz Schreiber (r.) presented a jubilant team leader from the People's Republic of China with the Nasser Trophy that recognizes the most successful nation in each World Championship.

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Air rifle and pistol events were added to the Olympic Program in the 1980s. They are one of the main reasons Shooting became one of the world's most popular sports. The athlete in this photo is 2021 Olympic 10m Air Rifle Men gold medalist Will Shaner, USA, shown during a pause between shots in that Olympic final.



During the 1976 Olympics Games in Montreal, Margaret Thompson-Murdock, USA, became the first woman to win an Olympic medal in Shooting with her silver medal finish in the 50m rifle three-position event.

- **Growth in Shooting Events.** The ISSF's program of events gradually expanded from its two original events, 300m rifle and 50m pistol, until today when it recognizes 20 rifle, pistol, shotgun, running target and target sprint events. Through the 1960s, the 300m rifle event was the "queen of rifle events." 300m rifle lost that elite status because too many countries could not build 300m rifle ranges and because center-fire ammunition was so expensive. Its last appearance in the Olympics was in 1972, 50 years ago. A dramatic change in ISSF events began in 1966 when a 10m air rifle event was added to the World Championship Program. Air rifle was added to the Olympic program in 1984; air pistol was added in 1988. Air gun events can be organized in any country in the world and have contributed much to Shooting's universality.

- **Gender Equality.** Shooting began as a so-called "man's sport." Women were never officially excluded, and in the 1960s, a few women began to qualify for their national teams and participate in World Championships and Olympics. Margaret Thompson-Murdock of the USA pioneered the way for women athletes by qualifying for USA 50m and 300m rifle teams that won gold medals in the 1966 World Championship. In 1976, she became the first woman to win an Olympic medal in Shooting when she placed second in the 50m three-position rifle event. The ISSF had already introduced separate women's events in its World Championships in 1958 and in subsequent years, the ISSF proposed that there be separate women's Shooting events in the Olympics. The first women's events in the Olympic Games were in 1984, but it was not until 2018 that the ISSF proposed a fully gender equal Olympic Shooting program to the IOC. The 2021 Games in Tokyo were the first Olympics with equal numbers of men's and women's events and equal numbers of men's and women's participation quotas.

- **Becoming a Spectator, Television and Media Sport.** A major ISSF change during Olegario Vázquez Raña's presidency was its transformation from the traditional ways of conducting competitions to becoming a spectator and media friendly sport. Paper targets and scoring after a competition were replaced by electronic targets and scoring with instant displays of official results. Electronic targets were sufficiently developed so they could replace paper targets in most 1992 Olympic rifle and pistol events. For the first time in Shooting history, scores were final as soon as they flashed on athlete and spectator monitors.

Waiting by the main bulletin board for winners to be identified was replaced by event finals² where medalists were celebrated when the last shots were fired.

Finals where the top eight athletes in a qualification event finished the competition by firing ten additional shots to decide medal winners were introduced in the 1986 World Championship and 1988 Olympic Games. Finals were very controversial when they were introduced, but they were soon accepted because they did so much to make Shooting a spectator and media sport. True finals where finalists fire a new event with no qualifying scores being carried forward, however, were not adopted until 2013. Start-from-zero finals first appeared in the 2014 World Championship and 2016 Olympics.

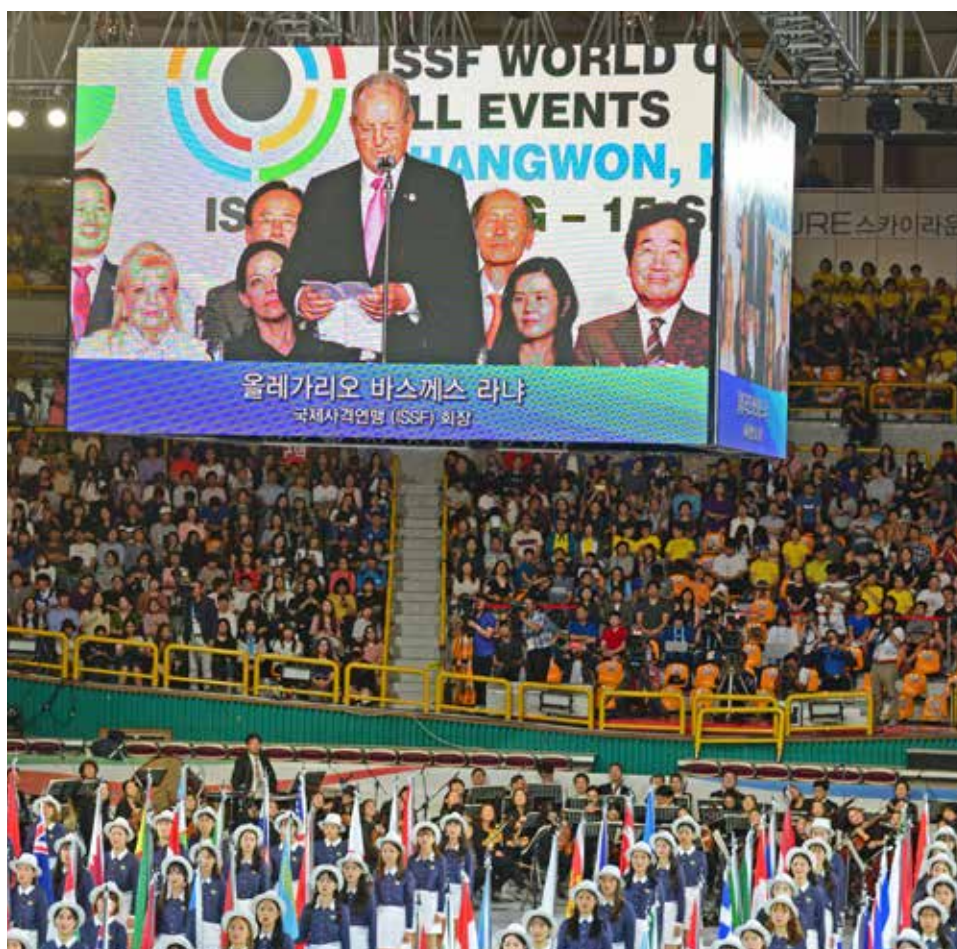
• **The Battle Against Doping and Cheating.** One of the most critical battles in Olympic sports is controlling efforts to give certain athletes unfair advantages over other competitors. In Shooting there are two ways to cheat, by doping and by using performance enhancing equipment. Doping in Shooting is done primarily with beta-blockers. To control doping, medalists and random selectees in all ISSF Championships now undergo anti-doping testing.

Performance-enhancing equipment primarily concerns rifle clothing. Rifle competitors can gain significant advantages by using jackets and trousers that are stiffer or thicker than what the rules permit. To control this, the ISSF adopted no-tolerance equipment control testing to determine if athletes are using jackets or trousers that are too stiff or too thick.

• **Becoming a World Sport.** The ISSF's transition from being a Euro-centered organization to becoming a world sport was another significant change. From its founding in 1907 until 1980, all ISSF Presidents were European. The election of Olegario Vázquez Raña of Mexico as President in 1980 occurred in part because he marshalled support from American and Asian federations and involved them in ISSF governance.



Electronic targets and finals changed Shooting into a true spectator sport. This special finals range in New Delhi, India, showcases an Indian landmark, the Taj Mahal, in a theater-like setting designed for spectators and television productions.



ISSF President Olegario Vázquez Raña is shown speaking during the Opening Ceremony of the 2018 World Championship in Changwon, Korea. Vázquez Raña set air rifle world records in the 1970s and he became a highly successful businessman in Mexico. He served as ISSF President from 1980 through 2018.

² The Summer 2022 issue of *On the Mark* has a comprehensive article on "Finals in Shooting."

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Vázquez Raña's leadership and vision transformed the ISSF into a true world sports organization. His final term of office ended with his retirement in 2018. He was succeeded by Vladimir Lisin, a Russian oligarch who won a closely contested election in that year's ISSF General Assembly by only four votes. Notwithstanding his narrow mandate, Lisin initiated a series of governing and technical rule changes that enhanced the authority of the Executive Committee and made significant competition rule changes. 3x40 rifle events have now become 3x20 events; finals now typically end with gold medal duels between the last two finalists.

HOW THE ISSF IS GOVERNED

Constitution and General Assembly. The ISSF's primary governing document is its **Constitution**. The most recent version was approved by the 2019 ISSF General Assembly. Theoretically, the "supreme authority" of the ISSF is its **General Assembly** which meets once every two years. Each member federation nation can send two voting delegates to the Assembly. The Assembly controls the **Constitution** and elects the President, Vice Presidents, five members of the Executive Committee and the Chairmen of all Committees, except for the Athletes' Committee, whose members are elected by eligible athletes.

ISSF Council. The ISSF has a Council made up of the Officers, Executive Committee Members, Chairmen of its

Statutes and Medical Committees and representatives of each of its five Continental Confederations. The Council has authority over the Federation's General Regulations, Anti-Doping Rules, and its Code of Ethics. Under pre-2019 Constitutions, the Council was the ISSF's rule-making body, but its authority, and that of the Technical and Section Committees, was greatly curtailed by the 2019 **Constitution**.

Executive Committee. The Executive Committee includes the Officers, Chairmen of the Technical and Athletes Committees, five representatives of the Continental Confederations and five representatives-at-large elected by the General Assembly. The Executive Committee now appoints the Secretary General, who under previous Constitutions was elected. The Secretary General manages ISSF administrative and legal functions. The Executive Committee determines which Shooting events are recognized by the ISSF, approves technical rules for those events, selects federations to host ISSF World Championships and World Cups and appoints Technical Delegates and Juries for ISSF Championships. Since the authority to determine events, event rules and Championship hosts are among an IF's most critical functions, the Executive Committee may actually be the most powerful body in the ISSF.

President and Vice Presidents. The ISSF President presides at all meetings of the General Assembly, Council and Executive Committee. The President represents the ISSF in all international sports organizations. Vice Presidents' duties vary and depend upon what the President allows or asks them to do.

Athletes Committee. Athlete participation plays a prominent role in the governance of modern Olympic sports. The ISSF has a 10-member Athletes Committee. Seven are elected by athletes; three are appointed by the Executive Committee. The current Chair of the ISSF Athletes Committee is Kim Rhode, five-time Olympic medalist in double trap and skeet from the USA. The Athletes Committee Chair is a member of both the Council and Executive Committee.

Committees. The ISSF now has twelve different Committees. Committee Chairmen are elected by the General Assembly; Committee Members are elected by the Council. Membership on ISSF Committees is highly coveted because Committee Members receive priority consideration in the selection of Jury members for World Championships and the Olympics. The Technical, Rifle, Pistol, and Shotgun Committees were formerly very active in making rules for their respective disciplines, but that role diminished after the 2019 Constitution was adopted.



Vladimir Lisin from Russia is the current ISSF President. He is one of Russia's wealthiest billionaires. He is chairman and majority shareholder of Novolipetsk, one of the four largest steel companies in Russia.

ISSF FUNCTIONS

The primary functions of International sports federations are to: 1) **recognize national member federations**, 2) **recognize specific events** within their sport, 3) **establish and enforce regulations and rules** to govern their sport, 4) **designate and manage championships**, and 5) serve as an **Olympic sport governing body**.

Recognizing National Federations. USA Shooting (USAS), which is headquartered at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is the ISSF member federation in the USA. USAS gained that status because the **U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC)**, which is the National Olympic Committee in the U. S., recognizes USAS as the **National Governing Body (NGB)** for Olympic Shooting. This recognition is based upon criterion in federal law.

For example, the law requires that Olympic sports governing bodies must have a minimum of 20 percent of their Boards of Directors made up of active athletes. The National Rifle Association (NRA) was the Shooting NGB in the USA through most of the 20th century, but the USOPC revoked the NRA's NGB recognition in 1994 and created USAS to be the Olympic Shooting NGB.

USA Olympic sport NGBs like USAS are responsible for training and selecting athletes who represent the USA in Olympic, World Championship, Continental Championship, and other international competitions as members of U. S. National Teams. National Team members are selected through competitive trials.

Recognizing Shooting Events. The ISSF currently recognizes 20 different rifle, pistol, shotgun, running target and target sprint (*running and air rifle shooting*) events.



This chart shows ISSF relationships with other international and national organizations involved in governing international shooting. The IOC recognizes the ISSF as the Olympic Shooting IF. The ISSF recognizes Continental Shooting Organizations and National Shooting Federations to govern shooting in the five continents and 150 nations.

THE ISSF

Shooting Events Recognized by the ISSF

**Asterisks designate 2024 Olympic events*

- 10m Air Rifle*
- 50m Rifle 3 Positions*
- 50m Rifle Prone
- 300m Rifle 3 Positions
- 300m Rifle Prone
- 300m Rifle Standard Rifle
- 10m Air Pistol*
- 25m Pistol*
- 25m Rapid Fire Pistol*
- 25m Center Fire Pistol
- 25m Standard Pistol
- 50m Pistol
- Trap*
- Double Trap
- Skeet*
- 10m Running Target
- 10m Running Target Mixed
- 50m Running Target
- 50m Running Target Mixed
- Target Sprint (running & air rifle)

But each event may be conducted as separate events for 1) men individuals, 2) women individuals, 3) mixed teams (*one male and one female*), 4) men's teams and 5) women's teams. Most of these events can also be conducted as junior events for U21 and U18 juniors.

Establishing Regulations and Rules. The ISSF has a complex set of regulations and rules governing the conduct of its shooting events. There are **General Regulations** governing the organization of Championships. There are **Eligibility Rules** governing who may compete and how sponsors may be advertised. There are **Technical Rules** governing the conduct of each event and the equipment that may be used in them.

Conducting Championships. The ISSF designates and directly supervises the conduct of World Championships and World Cups. For many years there was one combined World Championship for seniors and juniors every four years, but recent changes have separated open/senior World Championships from Junior World Championships. In addition, separate World Championships for Rifle/Pistol and Shotgun will now be held every second year after major World Championships. National Federation hosts selected by the ISSF Executive Committee are responsible for providing the venue and staff to conduct the competitions. The ISSF supervises championships by appointing Technical Delegates and Competition Juries.

Olympic Sport Governing Responsibility. The IOC decides which sports and events are in the Olympic Program and how many athletes and officials each sport may bring to the Games. International Federations (IF) like the ISSF “*assume the responsibility for the control and direction of their sports at the Olympic Games.*”³ IF rules govern the conduct of each sport's events in the Games. The IF also selects the Technical Delegates and Jury Members who work with Olympic Organizing Committee personnel to conduct the competitions.

The CMP National Matches include a 50m Smallbore Rifle Position Championship that is conducted according to CMP Smallbore Rifle Competition Rules, which are based on ISSF and USAS Rules. This Championship was a USAS Ranking Match.



Today each sport must have an Olympic qualifying system approved by the IOC. Shooting will have 340 athlete quotas for the Paris 2024 Games. Shooting is one of 28 sports on the Program, with six men's, six women's and three mixed team events. Olympic Shooting events are determined by tradition, popularity, and universality (*which events can be practiced all over the world*). IOC rules now require gender equality in events and athlete quotas allocated to each event. That led to major changes in 2018 when men's 50m rifle prone, 50m pistol and double trap were dropped from the Olympic Program and replaced by three mixed team events, 10m Air Rifle, 10m Air Pistol and Trap or Skeet.

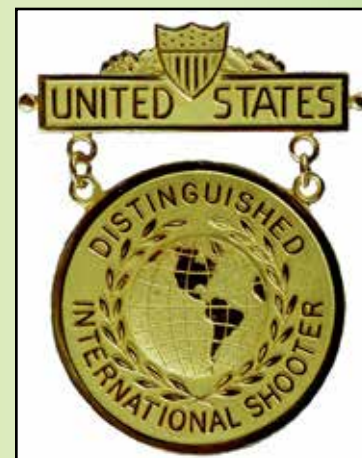
How the CMP Relates to the ISSF and USAS

The CMP supports competitions in a wide array of shooting disciplines that include both non-ISSF events like Highpower Rifle, Vintage Military Rifle, and Service Pistol and events like **Air Rifle, Air Pistol, and Smallbore Rifle Position** that essentially follow ISSF rules. One of the CMP's biggest shooting constituencies is the **Junior Three-Position Air Rifle** program that is modeled after Olympic smallbore position and air rifle events. The CMP and USAS were the two lead organizations in forming the **National Three-Position Air Rifle Council** that governs Junior 3-Position Air Rifle competitions. The CMP's prestigious Distinguished Badge program includes the **Distinguished International Shooter Badge** that can only be earned by USA athletes who win medals or multiple high place finishes in ISSF or WSPS international championships (*see inset*).

The CMP cooperates with USAS in many ways that promote shooting activities linked to the ISSF. The CMP's **National Air Rifle and Air Pistol Championships** during this year's National Matches were USAS Ranking Matches for their National Team Selection system. **National Three-Position Air Rifle Championships** conducted by the CMP offer qualifying opportunities for the USAS National Futures Team. Through programs like these, the CMP functions as a grassroots developmental program that offers additional competition opportunities for athletes who also compete in USAS competitions and national team trials. This allows the USAS to focus more resources on training and supporting the elite athletes who will represent the USA in the Olympics and International Championships governed directly by the ISSF.

³ From the *IOC Olympic Charter*

The U.S. Distinguished International Shooters Badge is arguably the most difficult of all the Distinguished Badges to earn. This Distinguished Badge may only be awarded to USA athletes who win medals or high place finishes in ISSF or WSPS (para-shooting) Championships. This badge was initiated by the CMP's predecessor



government organization, the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice. The first International Distinguished Badge was presented by President John F. Kennedy in 1963. To date, 513 rifle, pistol, shotgun and running target athletes have earned this prestigious badge. A detailed history of this badge is posted on the CMP website at <https://thecmp.org/wp-content/uploads/USDISHistory.pdf?vers=041019>.

About the Author

Gary Anderson, Director of Civilian Marksmanship Emeritus, retired as the full-time CMP Director at the end of 2009. He continues to work with the CMP as the senior marksmanship instructor. During his remarkable career, he won two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships. He served as a Vice President of the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) from 1990 through 2018. He is a former Nebraska State Senator and Past President of USA Shooting. He 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."

In 2014, the CMP expanded its world-class air gun center at Camp Perry and renamed the facility the Gary Anderson CMP Competition Center, in honor of Anderson's contributions to the organization and the marksmanship community.

