A Plea for Improved Scoring
By Gary Anderson, DCM

Ten-meter air rifle targets and 50-foot smallbore targets are very difficult to score accurately because the scoring rings and 10-dots are small and easy to misjudge. It is not surprising then that many match sponsors and coaches score these targets inaccurately, with a result that scores given are usually higher than scores fired. This article seeks to challenge everyone who scores targets to place greater emphasis on learning how to score accurately to assure that paper target scoring becomes significantly better than it is now.

As a result of administering postal competitions with thousands of participants every year and of providing results services for several major air gun competitions, the CMP staff has accumulated considerable experience in scoring targets and in evaluating the scoring done by match sponsors. We know that many air rifle targets are not being scored accurately and that most of these errors can be eliminated by better knowledge of how to score and by better training of scorers. A few examples should illustrate our concern and conclusions.

The CMP acts as the clearinghouse for Three-Position Air Rifle National Records that are fired under National Three-Position Air Rifle Council rules. The process of submitting National Records for approval also requires match sponsors to submit the targets. Two recent four-person team records were scored too high, by a minimum of six and 13 points respectively. A couple of recent individual record scores are also in danger of being rejected because they were scored too high. In evaluating these potential record targets, no shots that were marked as having been gauged and judged by at least two scorers were determined to be incorrect even if there were concerns that the scorers’ decisions were correct. The shots that were scored down were in almost every case, shots that should have been gauged, but were not.

Accurate scoring begins with using the correct scoring gauge and knowing how to read that gauge. All air rifle shots except shots in the 1 and 2-rings must be scored with a 5.5mm “outward gauge.” New scorers must be taught to begin by studying the scoring rules. Rule 8.0 in the National Standard Three-Position Air Rifle Rules governs air rifle scoring. Pay particular attention to the diagram on how to read an outward gauge. To score a higher value, the outer edge of the gauge must be tangent to or inside.

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the outer edge of the second scoring
ring away from the value being deter-
mined.

A primary reason why inaccurate
air rifle scoring takes place is that scor-
ers do not know how to look at a shot
hole and properly determine whether
it should be gauged. The examples
provided with this article demonstrate
how initial appearances can be de-
ceiving. In each of these shots there
is some visual indication that the shot
might score the higher value. We have
found that many scorers simply “eye-
ball” shots like this and decide they
are “in” without even gauging them.
In each case, the gauge shows that the
shots are clearly “out.” A lot of extra
points are being given to shooters be-
cause of this error.

One of the primary reasons why
looking at air rifle shot holes is so de-
ceptive is due to the poor quality tar-
get paper available in the U. S. Air
rifle pellets typically cut shot holes
that are larger than the 4.5mm pellet
on virtually all U. S. targets. As it
punches through the paper, the pellet
tears small bits of target paper fibers
from outside of the pellet diameter to
leave an enlarged shot hole. We have
seen several shot holes so large that
the 10-dot is obliterated; yet the shot
still scores a nine when a gauge is in-
serted.

Accurate scores are determined by
how far the center of the shot hole is
from the center of the target, not by
whether an enlarged shot hole touches
a scoring ring. The scoring gauge can
accurately find the true center of the
shot hole, but because the outside of
the shot hole may be larger, accurate
scoring can only be done by using an
outward scoring gauge that is 5.5mm
in diameter, not 4.5mm, and by read-
ing the gauge on the outside of a scor-
ing ring that is not damaged by the
pellet hole.

Good scorers understand that shot
holes may be larger than 4.5mm and
that they must gauge every shot that is
doubtful. Do not determine whether a
shot is doubtful by looking at the in-
side of the shot hole. The illustrations
here show how deceptive that can be.
Instead, look at the outside of the shot
hole. If there is not a distinct black
gap between the outside of the shot
hole and the inside of the outer scor-
ing ring, the shot is doubtful and must
be gauged.

If scorers understand that air rifle
shot holes are typically larger than
4.5mm and that looking at the outside
of the shot hole is a surer way to de-
terminate whether a shot hole is doubt-
ful and must be gauged, and if they
do this with an outward gauge that is
properly read, most of the errors in
scoring we have seen would be elimi-
nated. After all, the objective of target
scoring is to give the shooter the score
they actually fire, not an inflated, false
score.

#3: It appears that this shot touches the
9-ring, but look at the outside of the
hole—the outside edge is very close to the
7 ring—it must be gauged.

#3 gauged: The gauge shows that this shot
is also out—it’s an 8. A visual “touch” can
be very misleading—always gauge these
shots anyway.

#4: Here’s another shot that looks like it
might touch the 10-dot, but in air rifle scor-
ing, never assume that it does.

#4 gauged: It’s obviously a nine—again
not even close! Just because it looks like
it touches does not prove anything—only
the gauge does.