

How to Conduct Competitions, Part IV

An On the Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM

How to Conduct Yourself in a Competition

Every competitor who participates in a competition should demonstrate good sportsmanship and ethics. There are some things competitors should do and other things competitors should not do that will make their experiences in competitions good for them and their fellow competitors. This article discusses proper ways to conduct yourself during competitions.

1. **Know What to Expect.** The first step in proper conduct at a competition is to be prepared for the competition and what will happen there. When you decide to go to a competition, contact the match sponsor and obtain a copy of the match program. Study it so you can be prepared for the course of fire that will be fired. Pay careful attention to any special requirements for that range or match; they should always be listed in the program. For example, if all shooters firing on a range are required to wear eye protection, be sure you have eye protection with you and are prepared to wear it.
2. **Enter in Advance.** You can greatly assist the match sponsor if you send your entry in advance. After you obtain and read the match program, complete the entry form and send it in well before the dates of the match. This allows the match sponsor to make better plans for conducting the match. Arriving at a match as a “walk-on” means you could find that the range is already full or that major accommodations will have to be made to find a spot for you to fire.
3. **Arrive on Time.** In properly conducted shooting competitions, the start times printed in the match program are the times when actual shooting starts, not the times when every-



Competitors and coaches should always plan to arrive in sufficient time to be able to check in with competition officials and be prepared for firing before shooters are called to the firing line.

one starts getting ready to shoot. Before you can start actual firing, there are several things you must do to be ready. A good rule of thumb is to plan to arrive one hour before the published start time of a match. During that time, you need to check in with the match officials, pick up your squadding, bring your shooting equipment to the range, get your shooting clothing on and have your equipment ready. On most ranges you will be called to move your equipment to the firing line two to five minutes before your preparation period starts; normally that is done in sufficient time to complete the preparation period before the start time so that the Range Officer can give the command to LOAD and START exactly at the start time.

4. **Safety at the Range.** Target shooting participants distinguish themselves by always paying careful attention to safe gun handling. The last thing anyone on any range wants to do is find themselves staring at the muzzle of a gun carelessly pointed at them. Just as soon as you remove your gun from a vehicle or gun case, be sure its action is open and an ECI or CBI is inserted in it. Keep muzzles pointed up or downrange at all times while carrying guns. No gun handling is permitted prior to being called to take your gun to the firing line. Even then, the first thing that must be done is to ground the rifle or pistol and wait until the Range Officer announces the start of the preparation period when you may handle your gun, get into position, close the action and dry fire.
5. **Moving Equipment on the Range.** Rifle shooters, in particular, have large amounts of gear. When you bring your equipment into the range ready area, put it somewhere that will not block others from moving about the range. Do not take your equipment up to the firing line until the Range Officer tells you to do so. Find out whether the Range Officer wants guns to remain in cases until they are on the firing point or if you can remove your gun from its case behind the firing line. Have your equipment organized so you can set it up quickly and efficiently. And when you are finished firing, leave your equipment on the line until the Range Officer instructs you to remove it. This assures that you will not disturb other shooters who are taking longer to compete their firing. When the Range Officer does instruct you to remove your equipment, do so quickly. If you need to talk to your teammates, do that outside the range after you have removed your equipment, not before you remove your equipment.
6. **On the Firing Line.** Pay attention to where the left and right boundaries of your firing point are. Do not put any of your gear in the firing point areas of the shooters on either

How to Conduct Competitions, Part IV

An On the Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM

- side of you. Rifle events usually start in the prone position where it is especially important to set up your position so that your feet do not bump the shooter next to you. If left and right handed shooters are shooting next to each other, it may be necessary for both shooters to move to the sides of their firing points so that their feet will not touch. Both shooters must adapt; it is not just the left-handed shooter's responsibility to make accommodations for right-handers.
7. **Talking on the Firing Line.** In most cases, talking either to a competitor next to you or to someone behind the firing line is regarded as coaching so this is not permitted. The best practice is to stop talking when you step up to the firing line and to refrain from any talking until you leave the firing line. If you need to talk to someone, you can always raise your hand and talk to a Range Officer first. If you need to talk to your coach, the same applies; raise your hand and ask the Range Officer for permission to step back behind the line and talk to your coach.
 8. **Contact with Range Officers.** A Range Officer's first responsibility is the safe conduct of firing. For this reason, it is important that you follow Range Officer commands and instructions precisely and promptly. Range Officers are also there to enforce the rules and assist shooters if they have any problems. If a Range Officer questions your shooting position or your equipment, respond with courtesy. Normally if a Range Officer asks you to do something, do it. On occasion, you will encounter a poorly trained Range Officer who wants to act like a drill sergeant or who does not know the rules. Stay in command by continuing to respond politely. In most cases that will defuse the situation. Your final defense is that, if you are convinced the Range Officer is not interpreting the rules correctly, you can submit a protest to the match director. Fortunately, that is an extremely rare occurrence.
 9. **Dealing with Problems.** Everyone who fires in matches will have problems at some point. If your rifle malfunctions, if your target is not working correctly or if someone on the firing line or behind the firing line is disturbing you, raise your hand and tell the Range Officer what your problem is. Range Officers will do their best to help. Good sportsmanship and ethics, however, calls on competitors to keep themselves under control no matter what is happening. If something goes wrong, call the Range Officer and work with him/her and your coach to solve the problem in the best way that you and they can.
 10. **When Bad Shots Occur.** If you fire a bad shot, the best way to behave is to act the same as you do when you fire a good shot. Absolutely, do not act out by saying something, throwing something or by trying to take your frustrations out on your rifle or equipment. If you act out after firing a bad shot it may disturb other shooters, which is poor sportsmanship, or it will distract you from your shot plan and performance routine, which can be even more disastrous than your bad shot, or it may simply make your rivals more confident because your acting out shows them you are doing poorly and that they can continue shooting with even greater confidence.
 11. **When You are Shooting Great.** Firing great scores that might win the match or that are a new PR are a cause for celebration. In shooting, good sportsmanship calls for you to save the celebration until you are off of the firing line. A pre-mature celebration will disturb other competitors who are still firing.
 12. **When Handling Targets.** If match sponsors allow or require you to handle targets that you or other competitors have fired, be careful to handle them only by the edges. Absolutely, do not touch the shot holes on either the front or back of the target.. Touching shot holes can be interpreted as an attempt to influence how a shot might gauge. This is illegal and could even cause you or your score to be disqualified.
 13. **When You are not Firing.** If you are waiting to fire or have finished firing and are standing behind the firing line, it is OK to talk quietly to your coach or to other shooters. It is not OK, however, to talk so loudly that it disturbs other shooters.



If competitors are required to handle fired targets, they must be absolutely sure they handle targets only by the edges and do not touch shot holes on the front or back of the targets.

How to Conduct Competitions, Part IV

An On the Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM

14. **When You Disagree with Your Score.** If you feel your target was scored incorrectly, you normally have a right to examine your target and “challenge” the scoring of a target or a single shot. In most matches, shots that were gauged or plugged may not be rescored. Only shots that have not been gauged may be challenged. Proper ethics says that you should challenge only those shots that truly are close enough to warrant gauging. Particularly in air rifle shooting, many competitors do not know how scoring works and often think their shots will score higher than they actually do. It is not good sportsmanship to ask scorers to recheck every shot that is even remotely close.
15. **When there are Finals.** If the match you attend has a final it is important that you try to be on hand for the final even if you do not qualify for the final yourself. This is a way to show respect for the shooters who shoot high scores and who make the final. During a final it is common practice to applaud when tens are announced.
16. **After the Match.** One of the best ways for you to leave a lasting positive impression on the match officials who conduct the matches you compete in is to make an effort to approach them after the match and to thank them for putting on a good match. In almost all cases, the officials at the matches you attend are volunteers who dedicate substantial amounts of their time to making it possible for you to shoot in competitions. The only reward most of them ever receive is the thank yous they hear from competitors and coaches.

A Competitor’s Bill of Rights

When you compete in matches, you are expected to conduct yourself in accordance with the rules and the principles of good sportsmanship and ethics. As a competitor, you also have a right to expect that match sponsors will live up to certain requirements that you as a competitor have a right to expect. Among them are:

1. **No Surprises.** The course of fire, conditions of the competition and any special requirements of any match must be clearly spelled out in a match bulletin that is available in advance.
2. **A Competition Conducted by the Rules.** The rulebook that will be used must be specified in the match program. Competition officials in that match must follow the rulebook and never make up their own rules.
3. **Courtesy and Respect.** The officials who run the competition must treat all competitors, coaches and parents with courtesy and respect.



Competitors in competitions should always show respect for Range Officers and competition officials who are working the match.

4. **Fair and Equal Treatment.** Conditions of firing and scoring should be the same for all competitors. No competitors should be given favored treatment or firing conditions. If there are differences in relays or firing conditions, these positions must be decided by the drawing of lots.
5. **Accurate, Fast Scores.** After you fire, you should expect that your targets will be scored accurately and quickly and that your targets will be available for inspection and challenging in case you disagree with the scoring of your targets.
6. **Explanation for Any Adverse Actions.** If a Range Officer or other match official should make a decision that is adverse to your interests or that penalizes you, you have a right to expect a clear explanation, based on applicable rules, regarding why such action was taken.
7. **A High Quality Competition.** Every competitor in a competition has a right to expect that each time they enter a shooting competition, that the competition will be conducted according to the rules and in accordance with the highest standards for a target shooting competition.