

# How to Conduct Competitions, Part I

*An On the Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM*

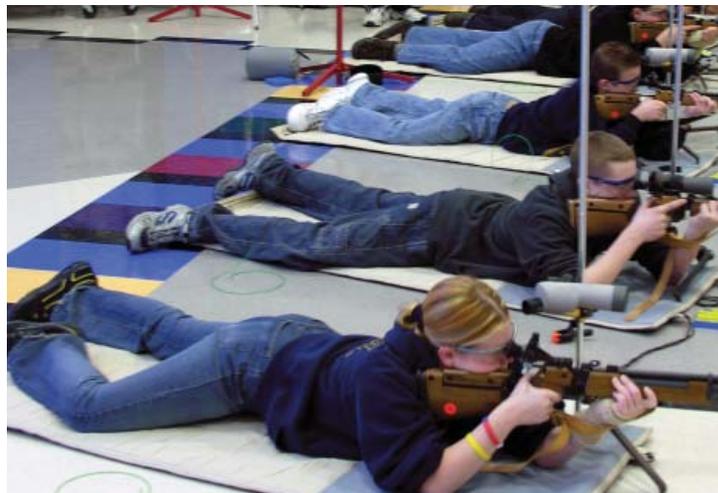
## THE WORK OF THE RANGE OFFICER

This is the first of a series of *On the Mark* articles that will examine all phases of how to conduct competitions. This article looks at the responsibilities and work of the Range Officer and provides guidelines to direct that work.

1. **Range Officer Responsibilities.** The Range Officer (RO) is a key competition official who is directly responsible for the safe conduct of firing on the range during a competition. The RO is also responsible for the application and enforcement of the competition rules that apply during that competition. In most matches the RO is the competition official who has the most direct contact with shooters and in most cases the best opportunities to ensure that all competitors have a fair, enjoyable match.
2. **Range Officer Qualifications & Training.** The most important RO qualification is to have a sincere desire to promote the sport of shooting and help shooting athletes have safe, fair, enjoyable competitions. The second most important qualification is to have a good knowledge of shooting competitions and rules. This knowledge can be gained by having been a competitive shooter or through training. Much can be learned by just going to competitions and observing or volunteering to help. Get a copy of the rulebook and read it. Experienced ROs frequently conduct informal or formal training for parents and volunteers who are interested in serving as ROs. With a desire to serve and a basic knowledge of the rulebook, the next qualification is experience. You gain that by agreeing to serve at competitions where you will quickly learn to apply your knowledge. It is always best to start as an Assistant Range Officer (ARO) so you can work with an experienced RO who will guide you and answer your questions.
3. **How Many Range Officers.** There must be at least one RO who is in charge of the range and firing activities on any range. The number of ROs depends upon the skill level and experience of the competitors. As a general rule, there should be one RO for ranges with 10 or fewer firing points. On larger ranges there should be one additional Assistant Range Officer (ARO) for each 10 additional firing points. If competitors are inexperienced, it may be necessary to appoint additional AROs so that the ratio of AROs to competitors could be as low as one to five. If competitors are highly experienced, it may be possible to operate a large range with one CRO and one additional ARO for each 15-20 firing points. The key is to have enough ROs to assure the safety of everyone on the range and to attend to all of the concerns that competitors may have.
4. **Range Officer Equipment.** Every RO who works on the firing line must have with him/her 1) a copy of the appropriate rulebook, 2) a stopwatch and 3) a small notepad and pencil. In some instances it may be useful to have a pair of binoculars to check targets or a carpenter's angle finder to check prone positions.
5. **Giving Commands and Instructions.** In every competition, the CRO or one of the ROs is responsible for "calling the line," that is, giving the instructions and range commands. These commands have five general phases: 1) Calling shooters to the firing line, 2) Conducting a Preparation Period, 3) Starting fir-

ing, 4) Concluding firing and 5) Conducting a position change or bringing shooters off of the line. Everyone who calls the line must develop a script to follow in going through these five phases of a competition stage or position. A good starting point for a script for three-position air rifle matches is to use the Commands and Actions listed in the chart on "Range Commands" (**Rule 7.12**). Rule 10 in the different discipline NRA Rules outlines "Firing Line Procedures and Commands" that also can be used to develop a script. Keep this script in a notebook and follow it carefully in conducting competitions. A key to the safe and efficient conduct of firing is for the CRO to use consistent commands where competitors know what to expect. Give all commands in a loud, firm, clear voice. Try to establish a command presence while running the line.

6. **RO Duties During Firing.** During firing, ROs must remain on the firing line at all times, constantly observing the competitors. RO responsibilities during firing are 1) to observe competitors' gun handling to assure that muzzles remain pointed downrange or up and that loading and firing is done in accordance with range commands, 2) to always be available to competitors who ask for assistance or who have problems and 3) to assure that competitors comply with applicable rules.
7. **Malfunctions or Problems.** If a competitor reports a possible interruption, malfunction or problem, immediately start your stopwatch and go to the competitor. Approach the competitor so that you can speak with him/her without disturbing other competitors. Particularly with inexperienced shooters, approach on the right side (right handed shooter) so that you can be sure the rifle muzzle remains pointed downrange while you deal with the problem. Determine what the problem is and take appropriate



During firing, Range Officers must remain on the firing line, behind the shooters, observing safety and rule compliance and being available to resolve problems.

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action. Make a record of the problem and the action you took in your notebook. When the problem is resolved, check your stopwatch to see how much time has elapsed and determine whether the competitor is entitled to extra time. Be sure to let the competitor know how much extra time is allowed.

8. **Rule Enforcement.** Rules establish the conditions under which competitors compete to ensure that the playing field is level and that all competitors compete under equal conditions. It is the RO's duty to make certain all competitors follow the rules. When shooters bring their equipment to the line, ROs must check to be sure it was inspected (where there are equipment inspections) and is legal. The time to check positions is during the preparation period and sighters, not later during record shots. If a competitor's prone position is too low or a foot is forward of the firing line in standing, for example, explain the fault and tell the competitor they must correct it (warning). Only if a competitor refuses to correct a position fault should this become an issue for deductions or disqualification. Never wait until record shots are fired to deal with a position fault. ROs should recognize that almost all position faults are innocent violations and that the RO can first serve as a teacher by instructing competitors to correct their faults. **A RO's first duty is to help competitors do things right, not to catch them doing something wrong!**
9. **Irregular Shots.** A common problem occurs during firing when a competitor fires a sighter "out of the box," receives or fires a crossfire shot or fires a shot on the wrong bull. A RO must know the rules for irregular shots and give proper instructions to the competitors concerned on how to proceed. When targets are retrieved, be sure to make notes on the targets if there were any misses in the scoring area, irregularities, crossfires or penalties.
10. **Rules Issues.** If questions or protests come up, handle them politely, calmly and respectfully. Stay calm and in control at all times. A cardinal tenet in such situations is to "**open the rulebook before you open your mouth.**" Listen to the question or protest and invite the person making a protest to examine the rulebook with you. When you make your decision, be sure to point out the rule that you use to make your decision. If there are other ROs on the range always consult with another RO before making a decision.
11. **Physical Fitness and Appearance.** ROs usually work long hours where they remain on their feet all the time. It is essential that they are sufficiently fit physically so that they can be alert and engaged throughout a long day of firing. The RO has a position of authority and is a visible representative of the sport of shooting. ROs must always present an appearance in dress, demeanor and language that is a credit to the sport of shooting and that commands the respect of the competitors.
12. **Summary.** Whenever you work as a Range Officer, remember that your primary objectives are to assure that the competition is safe and that all competitors have a fair, sportsmanlike and enjoyable competition. Range Officers are there to serve the competitors. Enjoy your work as a Range Officer.



When a shooter has a malfunction or problem while firing, the Range Officer must start a stop watch and go to the shooter to determine what the problem is and resolve it.

## How Should Range Officers React in Challenging Situations?

ROs infrequently are faced with situations where they feel competitors are doing something wrong, are not responding to them or where there is a safety concern. Even though such situations may cause considerable stress, the worst way to handle them is to start yelling at competitors or "get in their face." The best way to handle such situations is simply to speak in a clear, firm voice that is loud enough for all concerned competitors to hear. Becoming angry and yelling at competitors will just make them mad too and lead to an unproductive confrontation and situation escalation. In a challenging situation, the one person who must remain under control and in command is the RO. In most such situations being able to give firm instructions with a smile and even a sense of humor will relieve the competitors and bring quick compliance. Be empathetic with the competitor; he/she is under stress and may not realize they are causing a problem. The bottom line for ROs: Stay in control of yourself and never yell at competitors. Just be firm, clear, empathetic and persistent in addressing the situation.