

Junior Shooting Around the World

Junior Shooting Around the World A Look at Worldwide Junior Shooting Activities and How They Impact Junior Shooting in the USA

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus



Here, qualifying competition in the 10m Air Pistol Mixed Team event is taking place during the 1st Junior World Championship for Rifle and Pistol in Suhl, Germany. The USA 1 team of Kellie Foster and Jack Leverett III is on the left.

Junior shooters today have more opportunities to advance and succeed in their sport in more countries around the world than ever before. This **On the Mark** article describes many of those opportunities and how youth in other countries and the USA are benefitting from them.

There is lots of evidence that worldwide junior shooting is advancing. Three junior-aged athletes won four medals in the 2016 Olympic Games--Virginia Thrasher, USA, gold; Anna Korakaki, Greece, gold and bronze, and Vitalina Batsarashkina, Russia, silver. Young rifle and pistol shooters just finished their first Junior World Championship in Suhl, Germany. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) launched the Youth Olympic Games in 2010 and Shooting is on the program. The IOC and Olympic sport governing bodies like the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) are changing their event programs so women and junior girls will have equal opportunities to participate in all countries. The ISSF initiated a Junior World Cup program in 2016. Many countries now provide meaningful financial and coaching support to develop junior athletes in Shooting, mostly through government

funding. Results produced by junior shooters are getting better and better all over the world.

Why is "Junior Shooting Around the World" important to junior shooters and their leaders in the USA? There are three primary answers: 1) Shooting is an Olympic sport and living the Olympic dream by practicing shooting is still the single most powerful reason why youth want to learn how to shoot; 2) the competition scores of the world's best juniors can inspire USA juniors to work harder to achieve higher results and 3) American youth are excited about participating in a sport where they can aspire to not only make their school shooting team and possibly shoot in college, but where they could even qualify for the USA National Shooting Team and compete in the Olympic Games.

Olympic Shooting Program Changes

The IOC governs the Olympic Games and decides which sports and events are on the Olympic Program. When the IOC adopted its Agenda 2020 in 2014, it

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2020 Olympic Games Shooting Program

Men's Events:

- 10m Air Rifle
- 50m Rifle 3-Positions
- 10m Air Pistol
- 25m Rapid-Fire Pistol
- Trap
- Skeet

Women's Events:

- 10m Air Rifle
- 50m Rifle 3-Positions
- 10m Air Pistol
- 25m Pistol
- Trap
- Skeet

Mixed Team Events (1 M & 1 W)

- 10m Air Rifle
- 10m Air Pistol
- Trap



Teams from Russia and India battled in the Air Pistol Mixed Team gold medal match at the 2017 Junior World Championship. India won, 7 points to 4. Air Rifle and Air Pistol Mixed Team events will be new events in the 2020 Olympics.

mandated that all Olympic sports, including Shooting, must change “to achieve 50 percent female participation in the Olympic Games.” One of the most important IOC standards for evaluating proposed event changes is to “ensure the Olympic program remains relevant to young people by ensuring innovation and adapting to modern taste and new trends.” Gender equality, appeal to youth and modernization are critical criteria for deciding Olympic Shooting events.

The IOC Executive Board made final decisions regarding the 2020 Olympic Shooting Program on 9 June. They approved a program that gives women “equal participation opportunities,” is more oriented towards youth and can more readily be practiced in more countries.

The 2020 Olympic Shooting Program has six men's events, six women's events and three mixed team events. The three Mixed Gender Team events that were added are 10m Air Rifle, 10m Air Pistol and Trap. Three previous

men's events were deleted, 50m Rifle Prone, 50m Pistol and Double Trap, primarily because of low popularity with the public. The prone and pistol events ranked last and next-to-last among the 15 Olympic Shooting events in the IOC event-based analysis of 2016 TV viewers and Internet searches.

Mixed Gender Teams have one male and one female athlete. In the Rifle and Pistol events, they shoot side by side in a 50 shot (2 x 25) qualification. The top eight teams advance to a semifinal to decide two teams to compete in the gold medal match and two teams for the bronze medal match. Scoring in the medal matches will use a point system. Team members each fire a shot and the team with the highest two-shot total receives one point. Seven points are needed to win the medal match.

Mixed Team events were first included in the 2014 Youth Olympic Games. There and in subsequent testing, they proved to be very popular with youth and exciting to spectators. No decisions have been made yet regarding the inclusion of these events in USA junior championships, but the appeal of two team members shooting together in a dynamic competition format promises to be highly attractive to juniors.

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Nikola Foistova and Filip Nepejchal from the Czech Republic won gold medals in the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event at the 2017 Junior World Championship.

The Youth Olympic Games

The **Youth Olympic Games (YOG)** vision is to inspire young athletes around the world to participate in sport and live by Olympic values. The YOG combine an elite international youth sports competition with cultural and educational programs to encourage participants to play an active, constructive role in their communities. The YOG promote themes like Olympism, skills development, a healthy lifestyle and social responsibility. Detailed information about the YOG can be found at <https://www.olympic.org/factsheets-and-reference-documents/youth-olympic-games>.

YOG athletes must be between the ages of 15 to 18 on 31 December of the year of the Games. Previous YOGs were held in Singapore in 2010 and Nanjing, China in 2014. The 2018 YOG will take place in Buenos Aires where 4,000 athletes are expected to compete in 41 sports. The YOG program includes Shooting, which has six 10-meter events, Air Rifle Men, Air Rifle Women, Air Pistol Men, Air Pistol Women, Air Rifle Mixed Teams and Air Pistol Mixed Teams. Shooting has 80 participation quotas, 20 for each individual event. Qualifying for the 80 quota places is done through continental qualifying competitions.

There will be a YOG qualifying competition for the American Continent next May at Fort Benning, but no USA juniors will be able to qualify because the U. S. Olympic Committee supports YOG participation for only a few sports and Shooting is not one of them. *Note: The USOC did not respond to a request to clarify USA participation in the 2018 YOG.*

Junior Rifle & Pistol World Championship

The biggest and most important junior shooting competition in 2017 was the ISSF's **1st Junior World Championship for Rifle and Pistol**. Until this year, Rifle and Pistol Juniors had only one World Championship opportunity every four years and that was for junior events that were part of the big World Shooting Championship, which takes place every four years.

The ISSF now expects to adopt a Championship program with World Championships in every odd-numbered year and Junior World Championships in every even numbered year. To begin the transition to this new World Championship plan, the **1st Junior World Championship for Rifle and Pistol** took place in Suhl, Germany this year. There will be junior events in the World Championship in Changwon, Korea next year. After that, the new cycle will begin with another Junior World Championship in 2020.



The welcome gate in the main plaza of the Suhl (GER) Shooting Sports Center that hosted the 1st Junior World Championship for Rifle and Pistol on 21-30 June 2017.

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The 2017 Junior World Championship hosted 543 athletes from 65 nations who made 1,164 starts in 15 different rifle and pistol events. Those athletes enjoyed a complete World Championship experience. An Opening Ceremony with full Olympic pageantry took place in Suhl's central plaza where spectator stands and every open area were filled with spectators. The ceremony featured a parade of nations, the customary speeches and Olympic-type oaths taken on behalf of the athletes, coaches and judges.

The competition program included the 10 current Olympic Rifle and Pistol events, three non-Olympic events (50m Rifle Prone Women, 25m Pistol Men and 25m Standard Pistol Men), 3-person team competitions in each individual event and 10m Air Rifle and 10m Air Pistol Mixed Team events. It is interesting to note that average entries in the 10m events were 66 percent higher than average entries in the 25m and 50m events. Female entries in the 10m events were 21 percent higher than male entries. 10m events and equal participation by women are clearly hallmarks of the future in Shooting. All events concluded with post-competition equipment testing, anti-doping tests and Victory Ceremonies.

China's junior athletes dominated by winning 21 total medals compared with second place India's eight medals and six medals each won by Ukraine and Russia. The USA finished 14th in the Medal Standings with two silver and 1 bronze medals, all for team events.

The USA entered a small delegation in the Championship with six pistol and five rifle athletes. Leading the USA team was Olympic gold medalist Virginia Thrasher who was the USA flag bearer in the Opening Ceremony. Thrasher made the final in the 10m Air Rifle Women event with a 419.9 (her qualifying score in the Rio Olympics was 416.3) and finished 5th in the Final. Other USA finalists were Morgan Phillips who led the 50m 3x20 qualifiers with a 589 and finished 4th and Sarah Choe who posted a 383 qualifying score in the 10m Air Pistol event and finished 8th. Jack Leverett III finished 5th in the 25m Pistol Men Junior event with a personal best 581.

Overall scores in Suhl were very high. For example, Thrasher's impressive 419.6 Air Rifle qualifying score was third behind two Chinese athletes who both scored over 421. Several junior gold medal scores were actually higher than gold medal scores in 2017 ISSF World Cups. Almost every event had qualification scores that would have made finals in 2017 World Cups.

Virginia Thrasher and Will Shaner shot together as USA Team #1 in the Junior World Championship Air Rifle Mixed Team event.

International Junior Championships

One of the most important changes in junior shooting opportunities in the 110-year history of the ISSF occurred in 2016 when the first **ISSF Junior World Cups** were staged. Junior World Cups are now a permanent part of the ISSF Championship program and the ISSF plans to authorize two or three Junior World Cups every year.

The list of international shooting championships with junior events is growing. Continental Shooting Championships in Europe, Asia and America include junior championship events. There are several other international shooting competitions that are either exclusively for juniors or that include junior events. USA teams occasionally participate in some annual international junior competitions like the Meeting of the Shooting Hopes in Plzen, Czech Republic, and the International Season Start for Juniors in Dortmund, Germany.

How Other Countries Develop Juniors

Any discussion of junior development opportunities around the world raises questions about how different countries develop junior shooters. The most effective national junior development programs are sports schools, shooting in the schools programs, shooting club junior programs and family support.



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International Junior Championships in 2018

- **14-18 March. World University Games; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.**
- **20-29 March. Junior World Cup in Rifle, Pistol & Shotgun; Sydney, Australia.**
- **7-15 May. Youth Olympic Games Qualifying for the Americans; Fort Benning, USA.**
- **23-29 June. Junior World Cup in Rifle, Pistol & Shotgun; Suhl, Germany.**
- **31 August – 14 September. World Shooting Championship with Junior Events; Changwon, Korea.**
- **6-18 October. Youth Olympic Games; Buenos Aires, Argentina.**
- **27 October – 5 November. Championship of the Americas with Junior Events; Guadalajara, Mexico. (Europe and Asia also have continental championships with junior events)**

Here are brief summaries of junior development programs in leading shooting nations.

China. No country produces more outstanding junior shooters than China. Their most recent junior heroes included YANG Haoran who won the 10m Air Rifle Men World Championship as an 18-year-old and eight World Cup gold and silver medals while he was still a junior. The foundation of the Chinese development program is its sports schools. There are 3,000 sports schools in China and many of them offer shooting programs for youth starting at around age 12. Funding for these schools comes from the government; selected youth have to supply the motivation and will to work exceptionally hard. Gaining admission to a school sports program, nevertheless, is selective and often requires the young athlete to live away from home in a boarding school. Training in shooting is intense. A typical routine involves four or five hours of shooting each day for five or six days a week plus two hours of physical training plus school work. Chinese junior shooters are better because they work harder—it's that simple.

Russia. The Russian Shooting Union reports that if a young person in Russia wants to become a shooting athlete, they and their parents must also apply for admission to a

sports school. The sports school system was founded in the Soviet Union to develop medal contenders in international sports who could bolster the prestige of the communist system. The new state in Russia kept the sport school system active even during difficult economic times after the fall of communism in the 1990s. It also continues to be possible to earn a college degree as a shooting coach so well trained shooting coaches are available for Russian sports schools. The schools receive sufficient government funding so young athletes can have suitable guns and equipment as well as travel opportunities for competitions.

Germany. With 15,000 shooting clubs, Germany has the most highly developed shooting infrastructure of any country in the world. Juniors in Germany are trained through shooting club youth programs. Club programs start with light beam guns for youth as young as six or eight. There are legal restrictions; juniors can only start air gun shooting at age 12 and smallbore rifle or pistol shooting at age 14. The German Shooting Federation has a comprehensive coach training program that offers government-authorized training and licensing for club youth trainers. Every shooting club must have a licensed youth trainer before they can offer junior shooting training. The German Federation builds on the work of club youth trainers with a national network of coaches who work at the national, state and regional levels.

Korea. Korea is another international shooting power that relies on a strong junior development program. Korea topped the Shooting medal count in the 2012 Olympic Games with three gold medals and two silver medals, including a gold medal won by 18-year-old KIM Yangmi in the 25m Pistol Women event. The Korean system is more accurately described as a shooting in the schools program. Schools that offer shooting as a school sport receive government support to obtain air rifles and pistols as well as necessary rifle clothing. Korean school shooting programs have paid coaches and there is a national competition program for school shooting teams.

India. Perhaps unexpectedly, India is on its way to becoming a world shooting power. This is partly because youth in India are wild about shooting. The IOC event-based analysis that was completed during and after the 2016 Olympic Games showed that Shooting generated nearly three times more Internet searches in India than it did in the next closest countries, the UK, USA and France. When the IOC asked youth all over the world what their favorite Olympic sports were, Shooting ranked higher in India than in any other country. Junior shooter development in India takes place mostly in shooting clubs, but also in an expanding schools program. Substantial government

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stipends are available for juniors who attain high performance levels in club competitions. Pooja Ghatkar, the bronze medal winner in the 10m Air Rifle Women event in the 2017 New Delhi World Cup, demonstrates the impact of this funding. She is the daughter of a rickshaw driver who could not afford to support his daughter in a sport as expensive as shooting.

United States. The development of USA juniors who can compete successfully in international competitions faces daunting challenges created by insufficient funding, competition from other shooting sports activities and non-supportive arms industry priorities. The most productive junior programs for preparing athletes who can follow the Olympic path are junior shooting clubs, JROTC units and 4-H Shooting Sports clubs. There have been successes, the most noteworthy being Virginia Thrasher, who won the 10m Olympic Games gold medal in the 2016 Olympic Games at the age of 19. Thrasher followed a development path that included membership in an excellent junior shooting club, lots of 3-position air rifle and junior smallbore position competitions, attendance at CMP Junior Rifle Camps and shooting on the NCAA Champion West Virginia University Rifle Team. Indeed, the NCAA College Rifle program is a very important athlete development program for the USA, but it unfortunately only supports rifle.

Family Support. Family support plays an important role in the development of almost all world-class athletes, but there is a unique version of family support that stands out. This is where the father or mother of a young athlete becomes their coach and personally guides their development. The leading example of family support as a means of athlete development is Greek shooter Anna Korakaki who won gold and bronze medals in pistol events at the 2016 Olympics as a 20-year-old. She was named the 2016 Female Shooter of the Year by vote of a panel of international coaches, athletes and media representatives. Korakaki's coach is her father Anastasios Korakakis who taught her pistol shooting at their local shooting club, acts as her technical coach and accompanies her to international competitions, often at their own expense.

Government funding and support is a decisive factor in developing outstanding young shooting athletes like the ones we see emerging from the Chinese, Korean and Russian systems, but all of these methods of development have the potential to produce World and Olympic Shooting champions.



The German Shooting Federation employs trained shooting coaches who visit shooting clubs to assist club youth trainers in working with talented junior shooters.



The Junior World Championship offered team competitions in each event. The winning teams in the 25m Pistol Women Junior event were 1) China (center), 2) Thailand (on left) and 3) India (on right).

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Rifle and Pistol Finals in the 2017 New Delhi, India World Cup took place in this breath-taking shooting theater that features a huge image of India's iconic Taj Mahal. Young shooting athletes can look forward to training and competing in facilities like this that are making Shooting more dynamic and attractive.

Using the ISSF Website as a Coaching Resource

One of the best ways junior shooters, coaches and parents can benefit from international senior and junior championships is to study the scores, photographs and video images that are available for each championship. Olympic, World Championship and World Cup competitions as well as Junior World Championships and Junior World Cups are governed and supervised by the ISSF. To support them, the ISSF sends a five-person television crew to each Championship to Livestream all event finals through the ISSF website. The ISSF TV Crew also produces videos that are posted on the website and in YouTube where they are available for viewing on demand. The ISSF provides a professional photographer who makes hundreds of photos of the top athletes. These photos are posted on the ISSF website where anyone can download them. The ISSF also provides a communications specialist who writes press releases for distribution to international media and a professional announcer who gives public commentary during event finals.

The products of this team of professionals are available through the ISSF website for use by any interested athlete, coach or fan. The scores, photos, videos, social media posts and the latest news releases are available at <http://www.issf-sports.org/>. To obtain content produced for past Championships, it is necessary to click on "Calendar" on the website home page. Then identify the year and open the calendar for that year. Next find the listing for the Championship. The top row of calendar listings is for ISSF Championships. Click on the arrow for the first day of the Championship.

That will open a complete posting of results, stories, videos and photographs for that Championship.

There is a treasure trove of information available in these archives that can be used to study shooting positions and techniques as well as to allow the excellence of the world's best Shooting athletes to inspire young athletes to work hard and excel.

About the Author

Gary Anderson, Director of Civilian Marksmanship Emeritus, retired as the full-time CMP Director at the close of 2009. He continues to work with CMP as the senior marksmanship instructor. During his remarkable career, he won two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships. He is a Vice President of the International Shooting Sports Federation, the President of USA Shooting, a former Nebraska State Senator and was one of the two Olympic Games Technical Delegates for Shooting during the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

In June, 2012, the International Olympic Committee awarded Gary Anderson the IOC's highest honor, the Olympic Order, "for outstanding services to the Olympic Movement."

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

