

Let's Get Technical

In 2012, I will be among the many volunteers to be arriving in London to act as a Technical Official at the 2012 Olympic Games.

My discipline is pistol shooting, and this is where my area of expertise will be employed.

Firstly I should outline how the shooting sports fit into the games themselves. Since the modern games began in 1896, shooting has been one of the sports represented. Only in two years, 1904 and 1928, was shooting absent from the list.

There are three distinct and separate shooting disciplines; these are shotgun, rifle, and pistol. I think we can all recognise the shot gunners shooting at clay targets as a familiar and well available sport nationwide. The rifle shooters use .22 cal rimfire rifles in standing, kneeling and prone positions, aiming at ringed targets of different sizes dependent on the discipline being shot. Actually, electronic targets will be in use at the Olympics, but the principle is the same. Pistol shooters will be using .22 cal pistols, but only in the standing position. It is currently quite difficult to train for the pistol events, as cartridge pistols have been banned in this country since the dreadful massacre at Dunblaine.

Now this is where I, and quite a few of my retired police colleagues come in. As there are no longer sport pistols in this country, the number of individuals who have experience in the sport is dwindling. Knowledge of the International Sport Shooting Federation rules is essential so we have to keep up to scratch and pass all the appropriate exams. As the sport has dwindled in the UK there are a few of us who have kept up our pistol shooting by other means. We have to go abroad to participate in .22 pistol, or centre fire pistol (the latter not an Olympic discipline) events. Some of us still do that, when time and money allow.

On the other hand, we can still participate in air pistol, or 50 m pistol using a specially adapted pistol in the latter case. These are still legal in this country and are Olympic disciplines.

So the choice of who would act as judges, technical officials and range officers is in fact quite limited in the UK. Couple this to the fact that we know each other, and have worked together before, make the choice of the officiating team relatively simple. But boy was the exam hard!

Keeping the competitive edge sharp is imperative. We all choose different paths to do this. I chose to take up muzzle loading. Yes folks, back to the old duelling pistols and early revolvers, using black powder. I used to think, as many still do, that these old pistols were inaccurate, and that if you shot them you had to wear contemporary clothing. Not so!

In came the MLAGB, or the Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain. I was introduced to the Association by my late, dear friend, Colin Jackson. He actually fired his last shot in an international competition in Germany, into the ten ring before collapsing with a heart attack! For Colin, the best shot, and, if you have to go, the best place!

I discovered very early on that these old pistols, can take the centre out of a target if you do your job right. I also discovered that the black powder event is the senior event in Europe. Sort of like the Navy over the Air Force.

I have since travelled the world competing in many World and European Championships.

From a police pensioner's point of view, there is also another fascinating angle to the black powder shooting. There are two sides to the sport. One involves shooting modern reproductions of historic firearms, but the other is shooting the original article. Yes my friends, original pistols, rifles and shotguns, made well over a century ago.

So what is so fascinating about using old weapons? The answer is simply, if you look after them, they appreciate in value! In the current economic climate and low interest rates I can enjoy a sport knowing that my relatively major investment is safe. In fact there is a high probability of making money on that same equipment when I come to sell it. I actually bought a Japanese matchlock pistol for under £1000, and have since been offered over £4000 for it. Amazing!

So, in August this year, I took the international team of the Muzzle Loaders Association of Great



John on target



Part of the medal haul



A remington pistol

Britain, as team captain, to Hamina, Finland, for the European Championships. The team won eight gold medals, six silver, and 5 bronze. One of the bronze medals was mine for the Remington Event. This is an event using original revolvers at 25m and 50m.

We are now about to start Olympic preparation in earnest.

John Emerson,
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For the results of the European Championships visit: www.mlagb.com/index.htm or www.mlaic2011.fi/en/home