

Pistol Opportunities for Juniors

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By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus



More competition opportunities are now becoming available to junior pistol competitors in the USA. Here, junior air pistol athletes are shooting a final in the January 2015 Camp Perry Open.

Junior pistol shooting is the most under-developed of the three junior shooting sports disciplines, rifle, pistol and shotgun. This ***On the Mark*** article is the first of a two-part series on junior pistol shooting. This article defines “classical bulls-eye pistol shooting,” examines its history and then describes appropriate courses of fire, junior pistol instructional programs and competition opportunities. The second article in the next ***On the Mark*** will cover specific pistol marksmanship skills young pistol shooters must master to take full advantage of these opportunities. The objective of this series is to encourage more local programs to promote junior pistol and more young athletes to try target pistol shooting.

Target pistol shooting offers many rewarding opportunities for youths who want to compete in the shooting sports. Progressive Position Pistol (PPP) Programs are now used in some 300 local programs. 4-H Shooting Sports Clubs offer target pistol instruction in many states. Four-fifths of the states conducted State Junior Olympic Pistol Championships this year. Pistol is a collegiate club sport with programs in 90 colleges and

universities. The Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP), National Rifle Association (NRA) and USA Shooting (USAS) all have Junior pistol events in their National Championships. Five of the 15 Olympic Shooting events are pistol events.

Junior target pistol shooting also faces daunting challenges. Developing high performance pistol skills requires more training time and hard work than it takes to reach a similar level in rifle or shotgun. Pistol shooters don't have performance aids to boost their scores like the supportive clothing rifle shooters have. There are legal constraints that prevent youth from shooting pistols in some states. Rifle is a popular school sport, but pistol shooting is not. Many shooting clubs sponsor junior rifle programs, but only a few support junior pistol. Today in the USA, there are too few junior pistol programs and far too few junior pistol shooters.

On the positive side, pistol shooting offers some appealing advantages. Equipment costs for a fully equipped pistol shooter are one-fourth or less of the costs for a fully equipped rifle or shotgun shooter.

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Pistol training is much easier to do than rifle or shotgun training because doing dry fire or air pistol practice at home is a simple matter of uncasing the pistol and starting to work. Coaches, juniors and their parents should also realize that one of the advantages of junior pistol is that with fewer participants the chances for a young athlete who wants to work really hard to make the National Team or Olympic Team are much greater.



Alex Chichkov, USA, won two Junior Men's World Championship titles during the 2014 World Shooting Championship.

Classical Bulls-eye Pistol and the Olympic Path

There are two fundamental types of target pistol shooting in the USA, classical bulls-eye pistol shooting and two-handed practical, defense, silhouette or speed shooting. An insightful analogy for comparing the two is to compare soccer with American football. American football is popular in the USA and Canada. Soccer is popular all over the world. Two-handed pistol events are usually shot on steel or hit-miss targets and have competition events in the USA and a few other countries. Classical bulls-eye pistol shooting is shot on ring targets with the more difficult standing one-handed stance and has competitions all over the world.

This article is about classical bulls-eye pistol shooting because this form of pistol shooting embraces the oldest, most challenging and most revered traditions of target pistol marksmanship and fully supports following the Olympic Path. The features that distinguish classical pistol shooting are:

- **SHOOTING WITH ONE HAND.** The classical concept of pistol design is of a gun to be held and shot with one hand.

- **SHOOTING STANDING.** Shooting is done in the standing position while holding the pistol with one extended arm.

- **PRECISION SHOOTING.** Shooting is done on graduated bulls-eye targets that award higher scores for greater precision.

- **SHOOTING WITH OPEN SIGHTS.** Accurate aiming with traditional open sights is an added challenge; optical aiming aids are not permitted.

- **SHOOTING AS A SPORT.** Classical pistol marksmanship skills are practiced strictly as a sport and not as military, police or personal defense skills.

A key distinction for bulls-eye pistol shooting is that it offers participants opportunities to follow the "Olympic Path," where they can pursue the supreme challenges in sports. Pistol is one of three Olympic shooting disciplines and is practiced in more than 150 countries. The Olympic Path is a succession of training and competition programs in the USA that can lead young shooters from their first instruction to progressively more challenging steps that can ultimately lead to winning a place on USA National Teams that compete in World Cups, World Championships and the Olympic Games. Junior pistol programs should give youths the possibility of following the Olympic Path.

Classical Pistol History

Flintlock

target pistols with rear sights to facilitate aiming began to appear in the second half of the 18th century. 18th and 19th century target



2014 Junior Women's World Air Pistol Champion LIN Yuemei, China, displays the classical, one-handed pistol stance.

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KIM Jangmi, Korea (center) won the Women's 25m Pistol event in the 2012 Olympics when she was 19 years old. CHEN Ying, China (left) and Olena Kostevych, Ukraine (right) were the silver and bronze medal winners.

pistols were closely related to dueling pistols. Percussion dueling pistols and dueling practice on targets became forerunners to early forms of today's rapid-fire pistol events. Breech-loading single-shot pistols developed in the late 19th century with target features like adjustable sights, carved grips and finely adjustable triggers were used in 50 meter and 50 yard precision pistol contests.

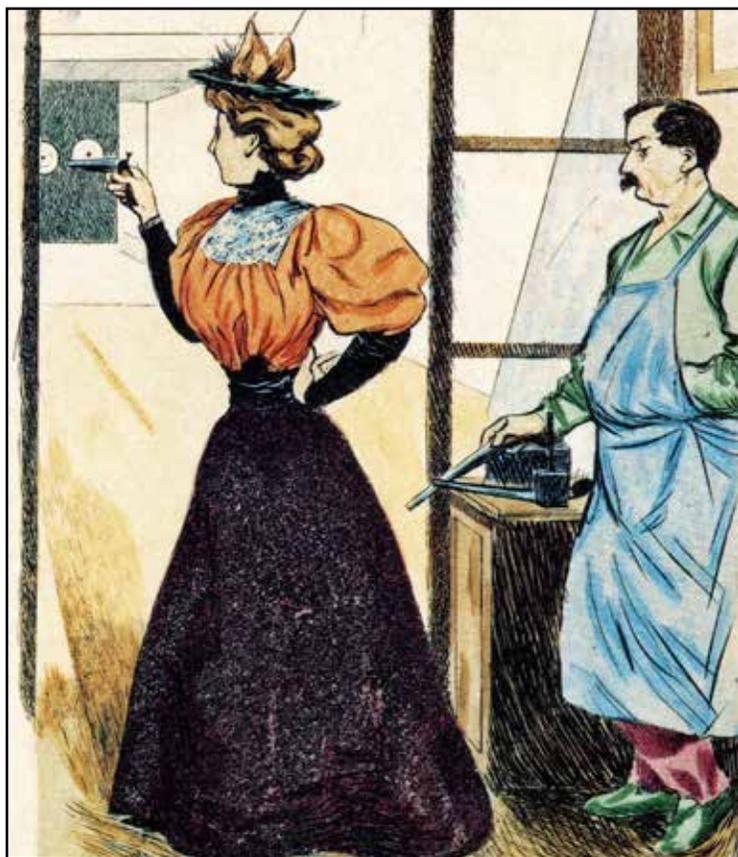
Pistol shooting in the United States attracted much early fame from exhibition shooting. In the 1880s, "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Annie Oakley brought attention to accurate pistol shooting through "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" exhibitions. Both Cody and Oakley accomplished their marksmanship feats while shooting pistols with one hand.

There is evidence that women enthusiastically participated in target pistol shooting as early as the mid-1800s, particularly in France and Germany. National shooting federations, however, did not actively encourage women's participation with women's pistol events until well after World War II. Change began in 1958 when the World Shooting Championship program first included a separate women's pistol event. The big change came in 1984 when separate women's pistol events were added to the Olympic program.

In the late 19th century, target pistol shooting was popular in many European countries including France. One famous early pistol shooter was French nobleman Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympic Games, who was a seven-time national pistol champion. When the first Modern Olympic Games began in 1896, de Coubertin supported the inclusion of two rifle and three pistol shooting events on the

program. The World Shooting Championships had been inaugurated in 1897 and a 50-meter "free" pistol event was added to that program in 1900. A 25m rapid-fire pistol event appeared in 1935. Center-fire pistol was added in 1947, the first women's pistol event came in 1958 and the first air pistol event in 1970. The Olympic program change that had the biggest impact was the introduction of 10m air pistol events for women and men in 1988.

The National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice (predecessor to the CMP), the United States Revolver Association, the NRA and, most recently, USAS have governed and promoted USA national target pistol programs. The National Board awarded the first Distinguished Pistol Badges in 1903 and conducted the first National Trophy Pistol Matches in 1904. The Pistol National Match Course was standardized in the 1920s. The NRA inaugurated its National Pistol Championship in 1936. The United States Revolver Association, which was founded in 1900, was the USA's early promoter of international and Olympic pistol events. After World War II that responsibility transferred to the NRA and in 1994 to USAS.

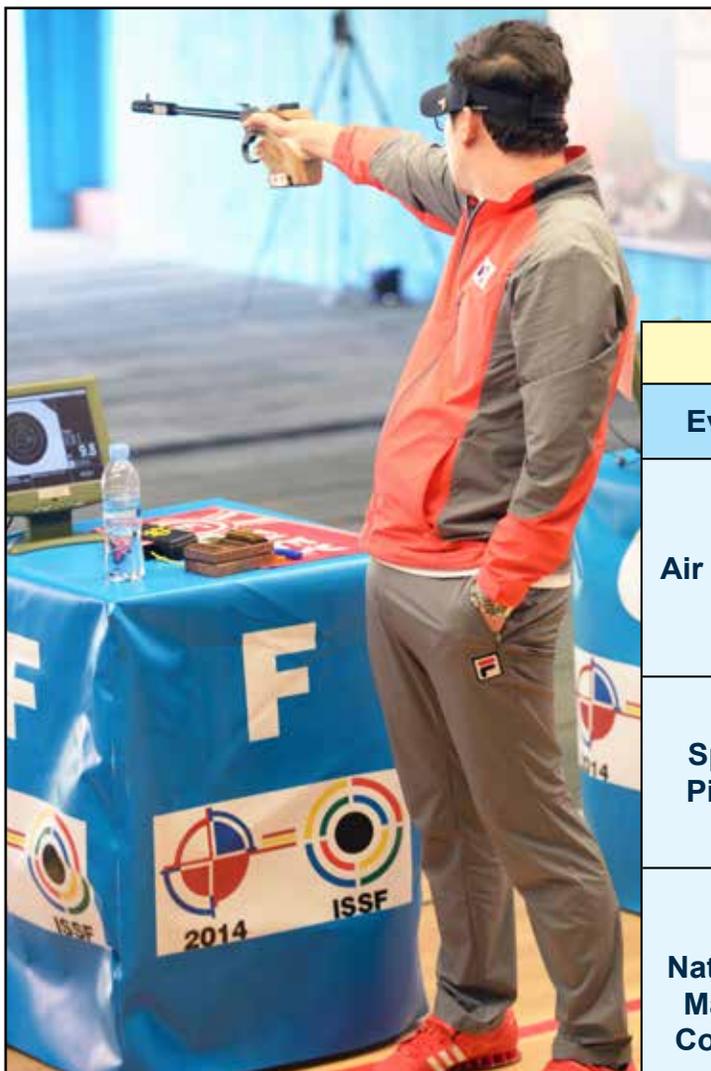


A woman shooting a percussion pistol with a bent-arm position in an 1850s French shooting gallery.

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These .44 cal. Gastinne-Rennet target dueling pistols were formerly owned and shot by Olympic Games founder Pierre de Coubertin. These pistols are now displayed in the German Shooting Museum in Coburg, Germany.



JIN Jongoh, Korea, winner of three Olympic gold medals and two World Championships, has been the greatest precision pistol shooter in the world during the last 10 years.

The greatest pistol shooters in modern Olympic and World Championship history were Ralf Schumann of Germany, who won three Olympic gold medals in rapid-fire pistol, and JIN Jongoh of Korea, who won three Olympic gold medals in 10m and 50m precision pistol events.

Pistol Events for Juniors

There are four bulls-eye pistol courses of fire that are most appropriate for junior pistol programs. These events include two types of shooting, precision or slow-fire, and rapid-fire.

Organizations that promote junior pistol need to decide which of these events to feature in their programs. Decisions should be based on these alternatives:

Air Pistol or Rimfire Pistol. If a shooting club has a 50-foot indoor range or a 25 and 50-yard outdoor range, they can shoot .22 cal. rimfire pistols. The best choice for most programs, however, is to start juniors with air pistols. 10-meter air pistol ranges can be set up in many locations, ammunition costs are about one-fifth of the cost of smallbore practice ammo and all-year training is possible.

PISTOL EVENTS FOR JUNIORS

Event	Distances	Pistol	Type of Fire	Course of Fire
Air Pistol	10 meters	4.5mm air pistol	Precision	Instructional matches: 20 or 30 shots Competition: 40 shots (W) and 60 shots (M)
Sport Pistol	25m or 50 ft.	.22 rimfire semi-auto	Precision and Rapid-Fire	30 shots precision plus 30 shots rapid-fire (low gun ready position with 3-sec. exposures)
National Match Course	50 & 25 yds. or 50 ft.	.22 rimfire semi-auto	Precision, Timed and Rapid-Fire	30 shots: 10 shots slow-fire 2x5 shots in 20 sec. 2x5 shots in 10 sec. (Low-gun ready position preferred)
Precision	50m, 50 ft.	.22 rimfire	Precision	40 or 60 shots

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In the low-gun ready position, the athlete's arm that holds the pistol must be lowered to a 45-degree angle before the targets turn or the time starts.

Mixed or Separate Male and Female Events.

Junior pistol competitions in most countries except the USA have separate junior male and female events. Separate junior female events could give more incentives for females to participate.

Ready Position for Timed and Rapid-Fire. When junior pistol shooters are ready to shoot Sport Pistol or National Match Course events, program leaders must decide whether to teach the low or high gun ready position for timed and rapid-fire. In the high gun ready position, which is used in NRA National Match Course events, competitors start with loaded pistols aimed at the target. In the low gun start, competitors begin each series with loaded pistols down at a 45-degree angle. They can raise their pistols up to the targets only after the targets turn or the firing time starts. The low gun start position is compatible with the Olympic Path; the high gun start position is not. The low gun start is used in all USAS and collegiate events. CMP Rimfire Pistol events for juniors switched to a low gun ready position in 2015.

Metallic or Optical Sights. Lots of adult pistol shooters shoot pistols with optical sights, but for juniors, this is not the way to start. Juniors should start with pistols that have traditional, open, metallic sights. Metallic sights provide a better platform for learning fundamental skills needed in classical bulls-eye pistol such as sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control and shooting a hold or area of movement.

Advanced Junior Events. As the best junior shooters advance, progressive junior programs should also introduce them to advanced events. These events include 25m Rapid-Fire Pistol where five-shot series are fired at five different targets in times of eight, six and four seconds. Juniors who demonstrate an aptitude for high precision shooting should be introduced to the 50m Pistol event that is normally shot with single shot pistols.

PROGRAMS FOR LEARNING PISTOL SHOOTING

Youth who want to learn target pistol shooting need a program that offers basic instruction and an introduction to competition shooting. Junior pistol instructional programs must take juniors who have never fired a pistol and teach them the skills that will allow them to complete basic courses of fire (see "Pistol Events for Juniors" above). Junior pistol programs that fulfill this objective and can start youth on the Olympic Path include:

PPP – Progressive Position Pistol. This is a grassroots air pistol program designed by USAS and the NRA "to introduce young pistol shooters to competitive pistol target shooting and give them a natural progression into the Junior Olympic competitions sponsored by USAS and the conventional pistol competitions sponsored by the NRA." Download the **Progressive Position Air Pistol Rules** at http://www.usashooting.org/library/Youth_Development/PPP_Rules_v_18_June_2014.pdf. Since very few young pistol shooters begin with sufficient arm and shoulder strength to hold a pistol steady enough with one hand to fire accurate shots, this program takes new shooters through a developmental sequence:

1. **Basic Supported.** Athletes hold pistols with two hands while sitting and supporting the butt of the pistol grip on a support placed on a table or bench. A counterbalanced "T-stand" may be used as an alternate support. The maximum age is 13.
2. **Standing Supported.** Athletes hold pistols with one hand while standing and supporting the pistol in a counterbalanced T-stand. The maximum age is 15.
3. **Sub-Junior International Standing.** Athletes hold pistols with one hand and no support while standing. The minimum age is 13 and the maximum age is 14.
4. **International Standing.** Athletes hold pistols with one hand and no support while standing. Athletes ages 15 to 20 are eligible.

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The PPP basic supported position allows very young shooters who do not yet have sufficient arm strength to hold a pistol with one free arm to experience the first challenges of target pistol shooting.

Junior Pistol Clubs. There are a small number of CMP, NRA and USAS shooting clubs that offer junior pistol programs. The fact that there are so few clubs with junior pistol programs is one of the great weaknesses in the USA pistol program. There are approximately 2,000 clubs with junior rifle programs that could be **junior shooting clubs** offering both rifle and pistol. There also are far too few adult bulls-eye pistol clubs that support junior pistol programs. If USA pistol fortunes are going to change, junior rifle clubs must consider becoming Junior shooting clubs and more senior pistol clubs must support junior pistol shooters.

4-H Shooting Sports Pistol Program. The National 4-H Shooting Sports Program has a long history of supporting youth pistol shooting at the grassroots level. 4-H wants its members to have a variety of shooting sports experiences; target pistol shooting is one of them. The 4-H program now primarily utilizes their version of the PPP progression and offers instructor training courses to certify shooting sports instructors to teach pistol marksmanship in local 4-H Shooting Sports clubs.

Individual Junior Pistol Shooters. There are youths all over the USA who want to become target pistol shooters. Their problem is they don't live in a community where there are PPP, 4-H or junior pistol clubs. Until this dearth of local opportunities changes drastically, the most promising source of young pistol shooters may be individual juniors and their parents who are willing to practice pistol shooting on their own. To do this, all they need are air pistols, places at home where 10m ranges can be set up and good basic instruction. It is possible to learn pistol skills while shooting and practicing alone.

Pistol Strength Training.

Advancing in pistol shooting requires young athletes not only to practice pistol skills, but also to engage in an exercise program to strengthen their arm and shoulder muscles. Pistol athletes must have sufficient strength to be able to lift and hold the pistol on the aiming point long enough to allow the firing of accurate shots. Pistol athletes as young as 12 should be taught to do arm lift repetitions with their pistols after they finish a practice session or on days when they are not shooting. In a simple holding exercise, lift the pistol to the target and hold the aligned sights on an aiming area

for 10 seconds or longer (adjust holding time according to the athlete's strength). Then lower the pistol for a 15-20 second rest and repeat. Gradually increase the number of lifts per training session. Cathy Arnot, USA Shooting Team exercise physiologist, has posted an excellent presentation and resource on "Physical Conditioning for Pistol Shooting Athletes" on the USAS website at <http://www.brainshark.com/usashooting/pistolexercisescnd>.

JUNIOR PISTOL COMPETITIONS

Junior pistol shooters must have good competition opportunities to measure their real progress. The junior pistol competition situation in the USA is not great, but there are increasing numbers of local, regional and national pistol matches for juniors or that are suitable for juniors. Here are competitions that are most appropriate for junior pistol participants.



Lydia Patterson, Kansas City, Missouri, represented USA junior pistol athletes in the 2014 Suhl Junior Cup, the 2014 World Junior Championships and the 2015 Munich International Air Gun Championships, where she placed 4th and 10th in the 10m Air Pistol Women Junior events.

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Junior Pistol Virtual Matches and Postals. Virtual matches allow two or more teams to shoot at the same time on their home ranges while comparing scores via an Internet connection and a shared results system. The pioneer in developing virtual matches has been the Orion Results Center. Traditional postals still involve shooting targets on home ranges and mailing them to someone who scores the targets and produces a results bulletin. Virtual matches permit firing under shoulder-to-shoulder match conditions. Virtual matches or postals that can be fired on home ranges are a great way to get started in competitions or to find competitions when enough competitions are not available. Junior pistol programs should consider the following (see the chart for contact information):

- **Orion Monthly Virtual Air Pistol Match.** Clubs that use the Orion Scoring System can sign up to shoot in monthly 10m air pistol events for individuals and teams. The course of fire is 40 shots and there are international standing, standing supported and basic supported categories.
- **CMP Aces Postal.** This quarterly postal offers air pistol events. Competitors can fire on electronic targets and submit score documentation or order targets from the match sponsor that must be returned to the sponsor for scoring with the Orion Scoring System.
- **National PPP League.** The National PPP League is a collaborative effort between USA Shooting, Georgia Competitive Shooters and the Orion Scoring System that utilizes a new, exciting competition format. Two-person junior air pistol teams from anywhere in the country compete against each other in a series of virtual win-loss games. Each week there is a new set of games. Teams are squadded into divisions of relatively equal skill level and PPP category. Teams are ranked within their division according to their win-loss record. The Spring 2015 season runs through May. The Fall season will start in September 2015.

- **NRA Open Air Pistol Postal.** The NRA offers an annual postal with 60-shot junior men and 40-shot junior women 10m air pistol events.

State Junior Olympic Championships. USAS sanctions State Junior Olympic Pistol and 25m Sport Pistol, with separate junior men and junior women events. Approximately four-fifths of the states



Logos of national virtual matches and postals available for junior pistol shooters: Orion, CMP Aces and National PPP League.

offer junior pistol shooters in their states shoulder-to-shoulder championships that also serve as qualifiers for the National Junior Olympic Championship at Colorado Springs.

CMP 22 Rimfire Pistol EIC Matches. The CMP is inaugurating a new 22 Rimfire Pistol Distinguished Badge in 2015 that offers 22 Rimfire Pistol Excellence-in-Competition events at ranges throughout the country. A 30-shot National Match Course is fired. This program is open to adults and juniors, but it is ideally suited for juniors because the ready position to start timed and rapid-fire series is with pistols lowered to a 45-degree angle. This makes these matches more relevant for junior shooters who also want to compete in USAS and collegiate shooting pistol matches.

PPP National Championship. USAS and the NRA sponsor an annual PPP National Championship with junior competition in the supported, mixed supported and international standing categories. In 2014, they took this concept one step further by offering a two-site Championship that is conducted simultaneously at Colorado Springs and Fort Benning. Scores fired at the two sites are uploaded into the Orion Results Center to produce overall live results.

WHERE TO FIND JUNIOR PISTOL COMPETITION INFORMATION:

- Orion Monthly Virtual Matches, <http://www.orionscoringsystem.com/orion/MonthlyVirtualMatches.aspx>
- CMP Aces Postal, <http://thecmp.org/air/cmp-aces-postal/>
- National PPP League, <http://www.usashooting.org/membership/youth-programs/youthpistol>
- NRA Postal Matches, <http://compete.nra.org/nra-postal-matches.aspx>
- USA Shooting State Junior Olympic Championships, <http://www.usashooting.org/membership/youth-programs/youthpistol>
- CMP 22 Rimfire Pistol EIC Matches, <http://thecmp.org/competitions/cmp-pistol-program/>
- PPP National Championship, <http://www.usashooting.org/membership/youth-programs/youthpistol/2015-ppp-national-championships-20150311100756>
- CMP National Trophy 22 Rimfire Pistol Matches, <http://thecmp.org/competitions/cmp-national-matches/national-pistol-matches/>
- NRA National Pistol Championship Junior Matches, <http://nationalmatches.nra.org/>
- NRA National Indoor Air Pistol Championship, <http://www.orionscoringsystem.com/team/MatchPage.aspx?MatchID=1.1003.565339562.1>
- National Junior Olympic Pistol Championship, <http://www.usashooting.org/7-events/njosoc>
- USA Shooting National Championship Junior Events, <http://www.usashooting.org/7-events/match-information>

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CMP National Trophy Junior Events. The CMP National Trophy Pistol Matches conducted during the National Matches at Camp Perry offer three events for juniors only. All are fired with .22 caliber smallbore pistols and, starting in 2015, will require a low gun ready position (arm down at 45-degree angle) to start timed and rapid fire series. The Junior President's Pistol Match features a 40-shot course while the Junior National Trophy Pistol course is 30 shots. The third event is a two-person team match where both team members fire the 30-shot National Match Course.

NRA Indoor National Air Gun Championship. The NRA Nation Air Gun Championship includes both air rifle and air pistol events for juniors and adults. The 2015 air pistol phase of this Championship involved seven different match sites, all using Orion Scoring Systems and the Orion Results Center to produce a unified, live results display.

NRA National Championships. The NRA National Pistol Championship that takes place during the National Matches at Camp Perry offers unique opportunities for juniors who have been introduced to 3-gun bulls-eye pistol shooting. The NRA 2700 3-gun aggregate for .22 rimfire, center-fire and .45 cal. pistol events offers junior awards. The NRA also offers a 2700 aggregate for shooters who fire 22 Rimfire pistols only.

NATIONAL JUNIOR PISTOL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Junior pistol shooters who qualify for higher level championships or who are placing high in local and regional competitions will want to focus their training on preparing for major national competitions that are normally restricted to athletes who qualify or who are performing at the highest levels among junior pistol shooters.

National Junior Olympic Championship. Young athletes must qualify to advance to this Championship through State Junior Olympic Championships. Junior Olympic pistol events include air pistol and 25m sport pistol events for men and women juniors. State qualifying takes place early in the year with the National Junior Olympic Championship taking place at the U. S. Olympic Shooting Center in Colorado Springs in the spring, usually in April.

USAS National Championships and Team Trials. And for the very best junior pistol athletes, there are the USAS National Championships and National Team Trials. These competitions select



The 2014 World Championship award ceremony for the Junior Men 50m Pistol event where China, Russia and Korea won the team medals. Chinese junior pistol shooters won three of the five junior team gold medals in the Olympic pistol events.

the juniors who will become members of the National Junior Team as well as the junior pistol athletes who will represent the USA in ISSF Junior Cups and the ISSF Junior World Championships.

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.

