Dear Colleagues

**Some shooters refuse to shoot in a teams’ match**

**Problem:**  a small number of Australian shooters now politely decline to be considered for a teams’ match. These are not teams that represent a rifle club, but are much more serious teams that represent a district rifle association, a state and even the Australian Rifle Team. The reason given is that these shooters consider the coaches to be insufficiently skilled.

This article examines the decisions by these shooters. If they can be justified, then a remedy should follow by which rifle shooting may be returned to the status of other sporting activities, where selection in a team is an honour bestowed by a club, DRA, state or nation.

**Discussion:**   the writer enquired about these shooters from colleagues who knew them and as well, had for many years participated in state teams, Australian teams and Commonwealth Games teams. In short, it was considered that those who decline to be selected in a team should be considered on a case by case basis. All agreed however, that there are numerous people who can only be described as idiots, whose statements should be given no further thought. Otherwise, there are some shooters who are justified in declining to shoot in a team.

A common situation occurs in teams’ match shooting where a coach is often:

* one of two good shooter-coaches who coach each other, then one continues to coach the rest of the team
* a person with an outstanding shooting history, who chooses to specialize in coaching rather than shooting
* a good shooter from the past, who may now only coach under medical advice
* a B Grade shooter, who was never much good as a shooter, but convinced selectors that he is good at coaching
* an executive member of the board of a state association, who neither has the skill to shoot or coach, but talks around team selectors, who appoint him as a coach in a state team, followed by selections in later years.

As a result, very few excellent coaches are available for teams’ matches, who can undertake all of:

* estimating wind strength
* strategic timing for the release of shots as wind changes occur
* rectifying technique difficulties for shooters during a shoot, e.g. rifle not supported dead still, change of the natural point of aim, inadequate trigger-release, absorption of recoil by the hands and incorrect sighting
* teaching and managing shooter’s technique difficulties between teams’ matches.

**Observations:**   a situation has existed for many years, where selectors have preferred to describe team coaches as wind coaches. A wind coach is a person who is not capable of coaching shooters in the techniques of shooting. The selection of such a coach, who routinely diagnoses and repairs deficiencies in shooting techniques, would instantly supersede those recognised as wind coaches. In any event, a committee of administrators often does not have the skill to understand the difficulties experienced by shooters, much less coach a skilled team on the firing point. Hence, some shooters who are capable of excellent team shooting, consider they would be wasting their time and ammunition if they were to participate in a team where coaches understand little about the difficulties experienced by shooters.

This situation could well be considered another way. Most shooters have no routine for monitoring and adjusting changes of the natural point of aim as they occur. As well, most TR and F Class shooters have an inadequate trigger-release technique, which results in groups that measure 2 or 1 MOA, respectively. As well, the majority of fullbore TR shooters can be seen supporting their rifle using a technique which is unable to keep the rifle still enough to produce a 1 MOA group.

Despite easily observed deficiencies in shooters and coaches, selection panels are unable to competently select the coaches and shooters for a team. This occurs because selectors themselves are not elected on the basis of their skills as shooters or coaches. In their administrative responsibilities, they are likewise unable to show any ability to rectify obvious shortcomings in this sport. That is, many shooters and coaches appear to be largely unable to perform their functions competently.

It should be noted that a sport-wide coaching scheme was operated throughout Australia until the death in 1991 of its principal advocate, Mr Jack Findlay, of the South Australian Rifle Australian and member of the Board of the NRAA.

**Conclusion**:  a situation exists where a small number of shooters appear to be justified in declining to shoot as a member of a team. This is due to the limited number of individuals who are capable of selecting team members. Likewise, there are a limited number of coaches skilled in wind-reading and the teaching of shooting techniques.

It is suggested that the board of each state rifle association and the Board of the NRAA, should undertake a national coaching program, e.g. as devised by Mr Jack Findlay in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Sport. The absence of funding by the Commonwealth Department of Sport and Recreation is no reason for not undertaking the program at State level. Funding available in the previous program was used almost exclusively for air travel, accommodation and attendance at the Australian Institute of Sport.

To manage such a program, suitably experienced persons in each State should be approached, who are able to competently perform the skills required of coaches and shooters (wind and remedial):

* technique errors while in a teams’ match (TR, F Class)
* change of natural point of aim (TR, F Class)
* inadequate trigger-release (TR, F Class)
* support of a rifle without it being dead still (TR)
* absorption of recoil by the hands (TR)
* inappropriate selection of sight components (TR)
* use of sights to achieve the smallest groups (TR, F Class)
* the strategic release of shots with the timing required to counter wind changes (TR, F Class).

Upon attaining these essential standards of performance in teams’ matches and individual shooting, it is considered that the reasons for shooters declining to be selected will cease.

The present situation, where a widespread sporting organization no longer possesses such fundamental skills, is a matter which may be rectified by a person known as an institutional strengthening specialist. Such remedial management of institutions has for many years been undertaken by The World Bank and the Government of Australia when providing bilateral assistance to developing countries.

Best regards

Geoff