



TOURNAMENT Preparation AND Ethics

New to shooting tournaments? This level of prep isn't for everyone, but if your goal is to be a serious contender, here's what you need to know.

BY PAUL GIAMBRONE III

It's your first tournament, and boy, are you excited to get there! I can admit that I was a hot mess at my first tournament. I was only 9 years old, but still, it was like I hadn't even shot before — and my scores reflected that sentiment. That first tournament experience is a special and stressful one. There are several things each shooter can do to help reduce the stress and make it a more fun and pleasurable experience.

The first thing I would recommend is finding a medium or larger shoot that is near you and just go to watch for a day or two. You can see the registration process and note what is expected of you when you register and how the standard procedures go with the squads and shoot-offs. If that is not logistically possible for you, go to one of your local clubs that is having a tournament. Again, I want you to see the registration process, notice how the squads take the field (and the times they shoot) and pay attention to what the shoot-off procedures are.

You may have to do this a few times before getting a good feel for everything, so take as much time as you need. You might even want to help your local club a few times before entering your first tournament. This will help take some of the edge off when you attend your first official tournament. You will have a good idea of what is expected of you and understand the squadding procedures and how shoot-offs operate. You can also get help while you are there (when registration

slows down) and get the person in charge to help you register with your state association and the NSSA. You cannot shoot registered targets unless you are member of the NSSA. You will also be required to register with your state association so you can shoot targets within your state. And of course, once you are registered, you can shoot registered targets pretty much anywhere.

I know, that is like hanging a juicy steak right in front of you and telling you that you can't eat it — but I promise it will help you get settled in before shooting your first tournament.

Another great idea is to have a really solid routine when you shoot and have confidence in your fundamentals. Trust me: If you have any doubts in your game, they will only be magnified when you have someone standing next to you keeping your score. We need to have a solid game plan for each and every target on the field, that way when we get put in that stressful environment, we have

foot position, and I've already picked out my hold points and verified my look points while the person in front of me was shooting. This way, I can get on the station, set my feet, get in my stance while loading and closing my gun, go to my hold point, set my eyes and call for the target. All of that only takes me four or five seconds because I worked hard on doing that in practice and got comfortable

with it.

Lastly, I used to pretend I was shooting in a tournament during some practice sessions early in the year. I would shoot 100 targets Saturday morning, another 100 Saturday afternoon, then shoot some doubles at 3, 4 and 5 at the end of the day, and did all of this simulating my 12- and 20-gauge events. On Sunday, I would go shoot 100 in the 28-gauge that morning and then 100 .410 that afternoon, then would shoot some doubles on 3, 4 and 5 at the end of the day with both gauges. Again, the idea is you are simulating your tournament experience to the best of your ability. Once you are completely confident in your game and your routine and you are efficient with time, you are ready! Go for it and have some fun. That doesn't mean you need to be shooting high

90s or 100s, either. You could be waiting a long time before shooting your first tournament if you wait for that.

Once you are ready, it is a good idea to plan out which shoots you would like to attend in the upcoming season and try to get with a group of shooters to create a squad. At most shoots, five-man squads are given preference over single shooters and squads of only a few shooters. In the December/January timeframe, I send out the tournaments I will be attending to all of my squad-mates so we can see who will be going where that year. Once I have five shooters at each shoot, I will start filling out all the paperwork for those tournaments and send in all of our names at once, along with the deposits for all of the shooters. This makes it much easier on



▲ Socializing is great, but don't get so distracted that your round takes longer than it should.

something to fall back on — our fundamentals.

Having a solid mental routine really helps because it gives you something to focus on instead of standing there thinking about your score. This also helps you stay efficient with time. The last thing you want to do is be the person on the squad that takes more than the allotted time and puts the entire shoot behind schedule. We are allotted 10 seconds per target, and that is plenty of time — more than necessary. On average, I take between four and five seconds per target, and I am a very methodical shooter. However, when I enter the station, I have my ammo in hand, I know my



▼ Before a big tournament, it's a good idea to shoot a few practice sessions as if they were a real tournament, including doubles.

BONUS TIP FROM PAUL

You need to have a plan. Just like when we shoot, we need to plan out our tournaments, what we do at the tournaments and how we are going to do everything once you are there. You need a good routine to stick with in order to shoot your best! The routine includes what to do before the tournament, what to do at the host club before the tournament starts and what to do during the tournament. Be sure to be at the club early, keep everything moving at a good pace and be respectful of others. Make sure you are getting plenty of rest and stay hydrated!

the people running the shoot. Remember, most of them are volunteers, so try to help them out as much as you can.

If you need help locating some shoots, check with your state association, the NSSA website, this magazine and maybe the club's website. There are plenty of tournaments held all over the country each year (well, in a normal non-pandemic year!), so there is no a shortage of tournaments. You might have to do some networking to get five shooters, but stay persistent and you'll find a solid group to shoot with. Remember, the people in skeet are what makes our game great, so don't be afraid to reach out.

All right, you have a tournament coming up next weekend. Go practice! Go finalize any issues you have and make sure you are confident going in. Once the tournament finally arrives, the first thing I recommend is getting to the club a day early to register and shoot some practice. If that is not possible, getting there the night before (if you are traveling) is good as well. First thing the next morning, get out to the club to register and shoot some practice. I like to register first. When you go to register, have your averages ready (if applicable). If this is officially your

first, let the person in charge know so they can guide you the correct way. Once you are registered, check out the fields you shoot on, and if they are available, go practice on those fields! Again, the idea is to get you as comfortable and confi-



▲ If you have a full squad you will be shooting with, it saves tournament staff some time if you register together ahead of the event.

dent as we can before the event starts. Don't wear yourself out shooting practice, though — be sure to save plenty of energy for the actual tournament. I usually shoot four to six boxes of practice the day before the tournament starts and maybe a couple the morning of, and that's it.

Once I am done practicing, I get away from the club, grab some lunch and relax at the hotel until it is time to go shoot doubles. Our squad usually gets to the club around 30 to 45 minutes before our scheduled shooting time. This allows us plenty of time to get our stuff together, select the lens color we want to use that afternoon, and go watch some targets. We like to watch targets to allow our eyes to wake up and see if there are any adjustments we might want to make to the targets. Yes, you have the right to make adjustments to the targets if they are not flying in the hoop. Keep in mind that if it is really windy,

tions 2 through 6 to establish our hold points. Again, we are doing this quickly. Once we do that, we have shooters on stations 1, 4 and 7 to set the targets. Once we are happy with the targets, we then begin promptly. That process usually takes us five to seven minutes, and that's it. Once we start, we don't stop. We go straight into the next round with little time wasted between rounds to help keep our rhythm going and to keep our field on time or ahead of schedule. Don't forget about your referee, either! Bring them some water before starting the next round.

Also, while we are waiting to shoot, we are very respectful

that might not be possible, in which case we just try to get them close enough and go to work. We want to keep the tournament running on time or ahead of time if possible.

Once the squad in front of us is finished shooting, we take the field. We set our things down and then we usually walk sta-

of the squad in front of us. We keep the volume down when we talk, and we stay out of their way and their vision. They are working very hard at what they are doing, and who are we to disrupt that process, right? Once we take the field and set the targets, we also check the squads next to us. We don't

want to be throwing a bunch of targets when they are on station 6 (field to our left) or on station 2 (field to our right). Be mindful of them when you are setting targets and also when you start the round. It is tough when you are station 2 and the squad next to you is on station 6. If they are on station 5 or 6 when we are about to start, we usually wait a few minutes to let them clear so we don't disrupt them and they don't disrupt us.

Once on the field, be very aware of your volume. When

next field is working on. The last thing I would want to do is make a guy miss on 6 when he is working on this personal best or perhaps his first 25 straight.

When you take the field or exit the field, check around the fence and make sure you aren't getting in their peripheral vision while they are trying to shoot a low house. That is very distracting, so please double-check before you dart out there. Lastly, be respectful of your referee as well. They have a very tough job. Don't try to get one over

If we are going to talk about skeet, we have about 30-45 minutes to do so, and then that's it — no more skeet. Take a break! Our squad usually goes to get something to eat (small portions) and goes back to the hotel to rest. Again, the idea is to get your mind off skeet and take a break. You only have so much mental energy in a day, so conserve as much as you can for your afternoon event and for shoot-offs.

Speaking of shoot-offs, check to see when the last rotation

have a buddy go let the other field know you are in another shoot-off and will be to their field ASAP. Once I am done shooting for the day, I am officially off the clock, so it is now time to socialize and enjoy the people of the game. **CTN**

▼ Respect your referee, keep things moving, have fun, and take a break from skeet at the end of the event if you can. A meal and some rest time will get you prepped for your afternoon event or shoot-offs.



we set the targets and are going through the round, we try to keep our voices down so we aren't bothering the squad next to us. When you are on station 6 and the squad to your right is finishing the round, it is very easy for that squad to start talking loudly about their previous round. That is rude. The last thing I want to hear when calling for my low 6 in the last round is how the guy next to me just missed three the previous round. The bottom line is to just be aware of your surroundings — you never know what the shooter on the

on the referee about a piece that you saw or try to steer them one way or another in a decision. They are the final call. If a shooter on our squad chips a target, we may yell "dead bird," but if the referee says sorry, they didn't see the piece, that's where we leave it.

When you are finished shooting, make your way back to your vehicle and get all of your things put away. Once we are done, we generally leave (unless we are the last flight and shoot-offs start soon). I want to get away from skeet for a bit and give my mind time to rest.

goes out, and be sure to be back to the gun club at least 30 minutes before shoot-offs start. Then just follow the same process — get all your gear together and be ready to go. Once they start calling out the shoot-offs, pay close attention to your field assignments. Shoot management has a lot going on at that time, and it can be very stressful for them, so let's make it easier on them by paying attention. If you get called to multiple fields, they will usually tell you which field to go to first. If you are unsure, you can check with the chief referee or

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