



Shotgun

By Bret Erickson, Four-time Olympian

FINDING A GOOD COACH



With the changing of the guard and Mark Weeks taking over the USA Shooting National Shotgun Coach position and appointing a new regime of assistant coaches under him, I thought I would talk a little bit about coaching in this article. There are an increasing number of coaches in our sport, which shows that our sport as a whole is growing, with more and more people wanting to get involved. This is a great time to be involved in international shooting with ample opportunity for coaching, sponsorships and media attention. When I started 25 years ago, none of these things were available.

I strongly urge you to check into the background of any coaches you may want to use or hire. I have commented many times that a person does not have to be an Olympic or world champion to be a great coach, but I believe that any good coach must have some experience in his or her sport. It is tough to teach fundamentals if you have never shot the game. For instance, it is virtually impossible to explain to a student about the pressure you feel in international competitions if you have never been there. The assistant coaching staff Mark has chosen all have different experiences and a great amount of knowledge to bring to the sport. I tell all my students that no one person has all the answers, it is up to you to decide who the best person is to give you that piece of the puzzle to become the best shooter that you can be. As coaches we need to realize our limitations so that if we take a student to the highest level we are capable of, we should all leave our egos behind and try to get that shooter to someone who can further their ability to excel.

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By Mark Weeks, National Shotgun Coach

TIPS FOR SELECTING A COACH

As National Coach I can't be everywhere at once, so I rely on assistant coaches to help pick up the slack. As Bret mentioned in his article, I have chosen a group of assistant coaches who offer all different types of coaching styles and experience. Because not everyone can readily adapt to one particular coach or coaching style, I feel that it is crucial to have a variety of coaching choices for my shooters. Even though the experience and coaching styles differ among each of my assistant coaches, one thing we all agree upon is the importance of fundamentals. With every great shooter in the world comes great fundamentals; it is the foundation of a good shooting career. If you do not know the basics and are unable to consistently repeat them, then there is no reason for us to teach you advanced shooting techniques.

One of the things that has excited me most since I started coaching is the number of new shooters entering the sport. While there is no secret to reaching Olympic gold except for lots of hard work, time, and dedication, good coaching can be a big boost to a beginning shooter. A few pointers for selecting a coach include:

1. Make sure that you check the background of the coach you are looking to hire. For example, verify their experience in the sport. It is imperative that a coach has experience in actually competing in the sport in order to understand what they are teaching.
2. Find out who else the coach works with and ask those people for their opinion on how well your coach teaches.
3. Make sure you are comfortable with the price the coach plans to charge you.

4. Meet the coach before you take a lesson. If you do not click with the coach, then you will not be happy. You will not trust a coach if you don't mesh well with them. Trust is the key to any coach/shooter relationship.

5. Don't expect your coach to work miracles! While a good coach can help improve your skills, there is no replacement for hard work, dedication and shots down range.

In addition, I am always available to answer questions and give advice. Please do not hesitate to contact me at mark.weeks@usashooting.org. You can also contact my assistant coaches, listed below. I wish you good shooting and hope to see you on the competition field in the future!

Bret Erickson - Bret has been on 25 National teams, 14 World Championship teams and four Olympic teams. He was assistant coach and trap team leader for 22 years at the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit in Fort Benning, Ga. He is currently the manager of Willawalla Creek Shooting Center, Saint Jo, Texas (a regional training center for USA Shooting). Contact information: (706) 577-1963, www.breterickson.com.

Dan Carlisle - Dan is the only person to win the USSCA, SCA and NSCA National Championships, the only person to earn a position on

the NSSA, ATA, NSCA, SCA, USSCA All-American teams and is the only person to win back-to-back national championships in trap and International Skeet. On the international scene, Dan holds an Olympic medal from the 1984 Olympic Games, won the gold medal at the Pan American Games in International Trap and is an International Trap Team World Champion. He is also the personal coach to Glenn Eller, 2008 Olympic Gold Medalist in Double Trap. Website: www.shootsporting-clays.com.

Dwayne Weger - Dwayne has 20 years of competition experience. He was a National Team member and is a USAS certified coach. He was also the Team Leader for the 2008 U.S. Olympic team for Shooting. Email: dweger@coppellconst.com

Joe Bernoflo - Joe also has 20 plus years of experience in shooting. He is a USAS certified coach and has taught many Junior Olympic Team camps.



Skeet shooter Caitlin Connor and Mark Weeks at the 2009 World Cup in Minsk.



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