Olympic Shooting Sports History

USA Shooting’s history dates back to the inaugural Olympic Games in 1896 when two brothers representing the United States, Sumner and John Paine, won gold medals in the Free Pistol and Military Revolver events respectively. The legacy and excellence of the Olympic Shooting Sports in America continues today with U.S. Shooting Team members winning 103 medals in Olympic competition – more than any other country.

French pistol champion and founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, participated in many of these early competitions. This fact certainly contributed to the inclusion of five shooting events in the 1896 Olympics. Over the years, the events have been changed a number of times in order to keep up with technology and social standards. For example, targets that formerly resembled humans or animals in their shape and size are now a circular shape in order to avoid associating the sport with any form of violence.

Olympic Shooting Sports Historical Facts

- With the exceptions of the St. Louis 1904 and Amsterdam 1928 Games, Shooting has been featured on every Olympic program since the first modern Games in 1896. Women’s events were added to the schedule at Los Angeles 1984.

- Live Pigeon Shooting was held only once in Olympic history, in 1900. The object of this event was to shoot and kill as many birds as possible. This was the first and only time in Olympic history when animals were killed on purpose. The birds were released in front of a participant and the winner was the competitor who shot down the most birds from the sky. The participant was eliminated once they missed two birds. Nearly 300 birds were killed. The event turned out to be quite messy in the end with dead or injured birds on the ground and blood and feathers all over the place. An award of 20,000 Francs was the prize for the winner, though the top four finishers agreed to split the winnings.

- The duelling pistol event was held twice, in 1906 (at the Intercallated Games - not officially recognized by the IOC) and 1912. This event required competitors to shoot at mannequins dressed in frock coats. There was a bullseye were on the dummy’s throat. The event was held over 20 meters and 30 meters.

- From 1908 to 1948, Olympic shooters competed in Running Deer events, a hunting-inspired competition. Shooters fired at moving deer silhouettes placed from 100 meters away, scoring points only by hitting within one of three concentric circles placed in the deer’s vitals.

Olympic legend Carl Osburn is pictured center holding a rifle.
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Year | Overall | G | S | B | Notes
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2008 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | **Highest medal output since USSR-boycotted 1984 Games**
2004 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **Matt Emmons** wins Prone Rifle gold
2000 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | **Nancy Napolski-Johnson** captures a gold medal for Team USA in 10m Air Rifle
1996 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | **Kim Rhode** captures the first of four medals as a 17-year-old in Atlanta
1992 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | **Bob Foth**, current National Paralympic Coach for USA Shooting, captures silver medal in 3P rifle
1988 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | **Erich Bußling** wins the USA’s lone medal – silver - in 10m Air Pistol
1984 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | First year women’s shooting events were added to the Olympics
1976 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **Margaret Murdock** became the first woman in shooting to earn a podium spot after earning the silver medal in 3P rifle
1972 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | **Lones Wigger** wins the second gold medal of his career and third overall medal
1968 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | Skeet introduced to the Olympic program
1964 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 3 | Shooting icons **Gary Anderson** and **Lones Wigger** capture three medals
1960 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | Army Marksmanship Unit begins to make mark on U.S. Shooting Team
1956 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | USSR dominates winning medals in six of seven events
1952 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 50-meter 3-Position Rifle event part of Olympic program
1948 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | The X-ring becomes a permanent factor in Olympic shooting
1924 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 2 | Program featured two high power, two smallbore rifle events, one pistol event and two shotgun events
1920 | 23 | 13 | 4 | 6 | Most extensive Olympic shooting program ever with 21 events
1912 | 14 | 3 | 4 | 3 | **Walter Winans** won gold medals in shooting and in sculpture
1908 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Team participation funded by E.I. du Pont de Nemours Powder Company, United States Cartridge Company & Winchester Repeating Arms Company
1896 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | U.S. squad included 14 people

**Total** | **103** | **47** | **28** | **28**

**MEMBERS OF THE 1976 U.S. OLYMPIC SHOOTING TEAM. MARGARET MURDOCK (MIDDLE, THIRD FROM RIGHT) BECAME THE FIRST FEMALE TO WIN A SHOOTING MEDAL—SILVER IN 3P.**

This talented team also brought home three golds, another silver and one bronze throughout the Games.