



L TO R: SSG JOSH RICHMOND – DOUBLE TRAP, SGT VINCENT HANCOCK – GOLD MEDALIST SKEET, PFC SHANE HERMAN – TRAP, SSG RYAN HADDEN – TRAP 2012 GOLD WORLD CUP, SSG GLEN ELLER – DOUBLE TRAP GOLD MEDAL 2008 AND CPL JOSH WEBB – TRAP.

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN

WHAT DOES IT TAKE – ASKS JOHN CAFFEY

OLYMPIAN

It's an Olympic year and the excitement of the London Games sees many of us wonder what it would take to compete at the 2016 Olympic Games. I recently had the opportunity to spend time with the United States Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU) and Dean Clark, the head coach of the Army Shotgun Team and a two time Olympian – so I asked the question.

“In my opinion, there are two types of World/Olympic level athletes,” says Clark. “The first always dominates a sport, winning multiple world level medals in one year. This type of athlete is rare – and some disciplines don't have anyone at this

level. It's not uncommon for this type of athlete to win an Olympic medal at their first or second attempt. Normally they display extremely high hand and eye coordination and can perform much better at a game or sport their first time out compared to other athletes that have been doing it for several years. They are highly motivated, train harder and almost always rise to the occasion. They're very competitive in anything they do, have a burning desire to win and have a much better ability to focus on the task than other athletes.

“The second type is what I call the 'average' World/Olympic level

athlete,” explains Clark. “This athlete is representative of most World/Olympic level shooters around the World. They'll average about one world level medal every couple of years. They have a desire to win but normally not a burning desire – and that's the difference. If a shooter has an extensive American style background and about 2-3 years already shooting the Olympic disciplines, on average, it takes about 6 years to reach a National level and about 12 years to reach World/Olympic level – some shooters never make it but can become very proficient at the National level. Even if an athlete displays the traits you want to see, it's sometimes hard to tell how long it will take them to reach the World level. The athlete that dominates a sport can be there in double quick time.”

What type of shooter do you look for to fill a position on the team?

“We like to think that everyone we recruit to the team has a chance to make it to the World/Olympic level and try to keep a cycle going where we have athletes winning at the world level all the time. We try to recruit people who are already performing at the World level, but often have to look at those at National level and sometimes Junior National level. Like any sport, there are recruiting cycles where you will have a 4-6 year period where recruiting is easy and then a 4-6 year period where it's difficult. We're expected to produce results – so the higher level we can recruit to the team, the less training time before they win. Bottom-line, it takes a lot of time to make it to the World level in any sport.”



How does a shooter get started in Olympic Trap?

“The hardest obstacle is finding a place to train. If you live within 150 miles from a bunker you can consider yourself fortunate – there are some States in the U.S. that don’t even have a bunker,” says Clark. “Cost is the main issue – the average bunker will run between \$85-100K depending on machines and electronics.

“If you’re considering Olympic Trap, you should read up on all the rules and conduct of the discipline at the USAShooting or ISSF website. I recommend you join USAShooting and get involved in the Olympic style shotgun sports by shooting smaller PTO (Preliminary Try Outs), Zone and Regional matches. You

can also seek private coaching and clinics.”

As far as the big matches go, which do you look at as a road to the Olympics?

“The three big annual matches in the United States are the Spring Selection, U.S. National Championships and Fall Selection. These matches are used to earn positions on the National Team, U.S. Shooting Team/World Championship Team and Olympic Team.”

I’ve done everything needed, trained hard and am shooting competitively – so how do I make the Olympic Team?

Course of Fire: Men shoot 125 targets in five rounds of 25 over two days. Three rounds are fired on day one and two rounds plus the final of 25 targets are shot on day two. Women shoot 75 targets and 25 targets in the final in one day.

Perfect Match Score: For men, 125 is perfect, 122 is world class. For women, 75 is perfect and 70 is world class.

Finals: After the men’s 125-target match, the top six competitors advance to a 25-target final round. Medals are awarded based on aggregate (match plus final) scores.

Perfect Aggregate Score: 150 for men and 100 for women.

DISCIPLINE DIFFERENCES

International or Olympic-style trap differs from the more familiar American trap format in that International clay targets are thrown at much higher speeds, over much wider angles and to much greater distances.

International rules also limit the amount of shot each shell may hold to just 24 grams (7/8ths of an ounce). Under international trap rules, the clay targets are released instantly upon call from one of 15 different machines and the shooter is allowed one or two shots at each target.

	ATA	OLYMPIC TRAP
Shell Payload	1 1/8 ounce	24 grams (7/8 ounce)
Targets Speed	42mph	62 to 72mph
Max Target Angles	17 degrees right/left	45 degrees right/left
Target Height	9.5'	4.92 to 11.48' (1.5 to 3.5 meters)
Machine(s)	1	15
Roof Height	2.5'	Station/ground level
Shots per Target	1	2

DEAN CLARK INSTRUCTING.



PROFILE **DEAN CLARK**

When Dean Clark started shooting at the age of nine, he was like most kids his age living in a small town in the Midwest, hunting on the weekends with his dad. His local gun club was named Cleveland Winchester Gun Club – and at weekends they held a ‘learn-to-shoot’ course once a month. On Saturdays they taught skeet and on Sundays it was trap. One of the club instructors, Dr. King Heiple, took him under his wing and started coaching him to become a competitive shooter – and his scores started to climb.

In 1972 the Chardon Gun Club in Ohio was awarded a 3 year contract to host the US National Championships. Dr Heiple moved Dean into shooting International Skeet. During the Nationals, Clark met the Army Marksmanship Unit shotgun team which so impressed him that he set his dreams on one day becoming a member and pursuing an Olympic medal. At that time, US Teams consisted of four athletes. One of the team members, Brad Simmons, had an eye injury and couldn’t attend one of the two major overseas competitions that year. Clark was moved up to the

Men’s Open Team and competed in the 1977 Championship of the Americas competition in Mexico City – establishing a new team record. (Bill Clemmons 149, Dan Carlisle 147, Al Mullins 145, Dean Clark 145.) This was the first of six world records during his career.

The Army Shotgun unit made him an offer to become part of their team which he accepted (1978-1981). After his active duty tour, Clark went into Inactive Ready Reserves and shot for the Army Reserve Team while attending college. In 1998 he retired from competitive shooting until being contacted in 2001 to take the position of the then retiring head shotgun coach, Burl Branham, who had been Clark’s coach when he was a member of the team.

Clark’s commitment to the Army Marksmanship Unit is seen in the medal count that keeps growing – the team’s overall medal count has more than doubled in the last 4-5 years. “I’m proud of the team’s accomplishments but the successes are those of each shooter – ultimately the decisions made in competition are those of the athletes.”

“All athletes must obtain a Minimum Qualifying Score (MQS). Doing so ensures the quality of the sport and that the integrity of the Olympic Games is upheld. The MQS is obtained at a major ISSF competition and varies with each event. The MQS for Men’s Trap is 112 out of 125, Men’s Skeet is 114 out of 125, Men’s Double Trap is 118 out of 150. These scores are only issued per country, one year before the Olympics. The United States has to secure country quota spots for each discipline. One quota is the right to send one athlete. Your country must earn positions for participation in the Olympics called country quotas.”

Explain the Country Quota Process.

“To qualify athletes for the Olympic Games, shooters worldwide must secure Olympic quota slots that determine how many competitors from each nation can be sent to the next Olympiad. There are a limited number of start positions at the Olympic Games, so a qualification system has been put in place and is based on what they call ‘Quota Places’ or as we often refer to them, ‘Country Quotas’. A quota place is a ticket to enter the Games – awarded by the ISSF at World Cups, World Championships and Continental Championships (continental matches for the US would be the CAT Games & Pan American Games). Quota places are country-related – the shooter wins a quota place, which is then owned by his/her country. Each country is free to decide how and who gets to fill the quota place that was won. Therefore, a shooter who secures a quota place does not automatically have a start position for him/herself but rather it is used by the country to enter an athlete. The maximum number of quota places that a country can earn is as follows:

UNITED STATES ARMY MARKSMANSHIP UNIT

The history of the United States Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU) is a distinguished one. It was established 1st March 1956 at the direction of President Dwight D. Eisenhower to raise the standards of marksmanship throughout the U.S. Army. Since 1956, members of the USAMU have gained worldwide respect by winning hundreds of individual and team National titles, more than 40 World Championships and 23 Olympic medals.

The USAMU military role is to enhance combat readiness through the unit’s provision of technical and advisory assistance in the development of military match-type small arms, equipment and ammunition. When asked, the Army Marksmanship Unit will co-ordinate and conduct rifle and pistol marksmanship ‘train-the-trainer’ clinics for U.S. military units throughout the world. The unit also has the responsibility to market the U.S. Army by increasing public trust and confidence in Army Marksmanship. These efforts are accomplished through active public information awareness programs. The backbone of these efforts focuses on the accomplishments and capabilities of USAMU shooters and technicians. USAMU soldiers also serve to enhance the public trust and confidence in the



Army’s lethality with small arms.

Besides having seven competitive shooting sections which utilize world class facilities for both training and competition, the USAMU also has a Headquarters, Custom Firearms Shop and Ammunition and Weapons R&D Facilities which consist of 260 acres with 7 ranges and 18 buildings.

Service Rifle, Service Pistol, Action

Shooting, International Rifle, International

Pistol, International Shotgun and Paralympic comprise the shooting sections and are renowned as the ‘best in the world’. Of these teams, only International Rifle, International Pistol, Shotgun and Paralympic are Olympic sports. Support is provided to these soldier-athletes through the Custom Firearms Shop and the support branches of supply, operations and administration.

The Custom Firearms Shop makes or customizes its own small arms and much of its own ammunition. It is made up of gunsmiths, machinists, range technicians and ammunition loaders. This highly qualified group of specialist are the ‘backbone’ of the unit and was the first section formed when the unit was established.

It is the extraordinary combined efforts of the assigned soldiers and civilians of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit that has given it the name ‘The Home of Champions’.

TO QUALIFY ATHLETES FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES, SHOOTERS WORLDWIDE MUST SECURE OLYMPIC QUOTA SLOTS THAT DETERMINE HOW MANY COMPETITORS FROM EACH NATION CAN BE SENT TO THE NEXT OLYMPIAD.

Trap – 2 Men and 1 Woman,
Skeet – 2 Men and 1 Woman and
Double Trap – 2 Men.”

So, how does an individual shooter earn his/her position on the Olympic team through the selection process.

“In this quadrennial there were two selection procedures for the 2012 Olympic Games. One is a points system and the other is a two match selection process. The point system began at the World Cups and World Championships in 2010. Points were

awarded from 1st through 6th place. During 2010, points were worth more for the World Championships places than World Cup places. The same was true for 2011, except the amount of points increased over 2010. Once a shooter reaches the 45 point threshold, they were named to the 2012 Olympic Team provided they had an MQS score and we had a country quota spot for that event.

“Any remaining unfilled country quotas the United States have are then selected through the

combination of the 2011 Fall Selection and 2012 Spring Selection matches. Scores from these two matches are added together and the top six in each event advance to a final round at the conclusion of the Spring match. The top two men and top woman are awarded any remaining positions provided the quotas are available. USAShooting can change this selection procedure for the next Olympic Games if they choose to do so. Changes are announced at the beginning of each quadrennial.” ■