

## January 2021

First, "Happy New Year" and welcome to 2021, a year for change! Looking back on 2020 there is nothing we need more than change. We need to get our lives back to normal and we need to give our game a boost. It is dying and it is not from Covid, it is dying because participants are leaving and going elsewhere or just not giving it a chance. There is a myriad of reasons – cost, time, age of competitors. But nonetheless it is akin to being on hole 16th of an 18-hole golf course. I have spent the past month brainstorming with as many minds as I could as to what has happened, and the main response may surprise you. Our game comes across to new shooters as boring and not much fun. We all may enjoy the shooting, camaraderie and seeing friends at other clubs but the new shooter knows none of this..... yet.

Speaking with gun dealers the likes of John Herkowitz, Robert Paxton and representatives at Elite Shotguns, it may or may not surprise you that 80% of their sales are coming from sporting clays and "multi-purpose" shotguns. The "new kid on the block", sporting clays, controls the clay target game and the question is, why? The answers are easy – the variety of stations and courses make every time out different and exciting. Sounds like another game that I have played competitively, golf. Think of it, for the most part in golf there are no two holes exactly the same (unless it was planned to be that way), just as in sporting clays courses and stations. Another reason is the time it takes to shoot a competitive event. A day of skeet usually consists of 2 events at 1 ½ hours per each, plus a 1 ½ hour break in between, then waiting for possible shoot-offs, plus driving time. Sounds like an 8-hour day to me. Sporting clays is about 3 hours shooting, no shoot-offs, then driving time home. If we are trying to draw in younger shooters, because we need them, what sounds better to a new wife or the wife with 1 or 2 children at home – gone for 8 hours minimum for skeet or 4 ½ hours maximum for sporting clays? Now multiply that by two if you are shooting both days. Oh, by the way most sporting clays events are one day and done. Now take another aspect, the cost. Though an event of sporting clays is more expensive than one event of skeet but as mentioned above multiply the skeet event fees by 2 or 4 and this does not even include the cost of reloading 4 gauges of shells as opposed to just one hundred 12-gauge shells.

So how do we fix this. The Board of Directors, thru research done by Tom Pavlack and Andrew Bielman, has come up with 2 ideas to possibly draw in more new shooters and get the existing shooters to participate more. The first idea is a change to the way our current



State Teams are selected by allowing shooters to drop their lowest one or two event scores in each gauge depending on the number of targets shot in the respective gauges. If you shoot between 1000 to 1300 targets in a gauge, you would be able to drop 1 event and you could drop 2 events if you shoot over 1300 targets in a gauge. This will hopefully encourage shooters to compete more, perhaps earlier or later in the year and at other clubs to reach these goals without the fear of a bad score or two bringing their average down. This change will go into effect this year.

The second idea is a new "parallel" State Team. This team for 2021 will be tested and run along "with" not "instead" of our current method for selecting a team by average, based on performance and participation. It utilizes a point system that the state of Mississippi has been using to select their All-State Team since 2011. A link on the MSA home page will explain all this in depth, but the short of it is, it is similar to how the NSSA selects their All-American teams. This model awards points for where you place in an event. Think of it, you could be shooting at an event in February break a 93 to win the 12 gauge and receive as many points as you would breaking a 100 in June to win an event. Also, you will be awarded more points for shooting inside "our" state as opposed to outside the state based on a multiplier for each. The goal is to encourage more participation in the "off" months throughout the year and shooting at "our" different clubs. I hope this will start to get us away from what I consider to be the biggest necessary evil in our game, the dreaded "average card watching". Many shooters will not shoot in the winter, not shoot at a club because of the weather or background, and why? Because of the "average card". We will greatly value your feedback as this program evolves throughout the year. As you can see the Board of Directors is trying to come up with ways to give our game a vaccine to get it healthy. Now it is up to you to come up with the second

## President's Message

vaccine.

Through my conversations, with more learned people than myself, I have gleaned – and we all know it – that it all begins at the club level. We need all our members from the top on down to be ambassadors of the sport and not just with lip service. Get involved at your club with a league, take a new shooter on the field and give pointers, or even just introduce the game to someone new. Once you get the hook set then explain to them about registered competition. Let the people know that all the shooters competing are not all AAA or AA, that we are not this elite group of shooters that sits in a corner where they do not have a place. We must impress on new shooters also that "Skeet Is Not A Game of Perfect" a play on a golf book by Bob Rotella. Sure, we are trying to do the best we can, but any instructor will tell you that you cannot go on the field thinking I want to break 100. Most of the time less than 10% of all the scores in a registered shoot are perfect, so that leaves a lot of room for most of us. Let them know that. I also believe that is another factor in sporting clays popularity – you rarely hear or read about a perfect score being shot in an event.

Finally, in the past few years, we have lost 4 clubs for registered competition. West Walker and Bay County, and this year Genesee and Jackson County are not throwing registered targets. If you go a little further back, you can add Cass City and Reed City to the list. How many of you tried to shoot at these venues and why didn't you? You cannot say because of the travel because we all travel to clubs that we like but we may have never given these other clubs a chance. I have had some great times shooting, camping and having breakfast at some of the clubs that I mentioned. Bay County had one of the best shoots and, in my humble opinion, one of the best backgrounds in the state. But how many of you knew that? Along with the non-participating clubs' others are floundering on the edge. I know one thing for sure if this continues, we will all be able to sell our loaders and get into sporting clays or, even worse, trap! I for one am not ready to throw in the towel as I hope all of you are not either. Skeet needs the proverbial "shot in the arm" and it is not just the people at the top, it is each and every one of us. Well, enough of my New Year's rant. It is time to do and not talk because if all we do is talk; we will not be able to do.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at [ricktraw@gmail.com](mailto:ricktraw@gmail.com) with your ideas or thoughts. Maybe YOU will supply that needed shot in the arm!

*- Rick Trawinski*