

Dear fellow muzzle loading rifle shooters,

As you know I have been appointed to be the USIMLT long range coach through the next couple of years as we prepare for the 2013 world championships in South Africa. I have been pleasantly surprised at the number of competitors that have shown an interest in these coaching newsletters and the coaching program in general.

Nearly half of those who signed up for these updates are either members of the short range squad (that are preparing for a world championships this fall in Germany), non competitors who have not fired their first match, or competitors who have no intentions of going to SA next year but shoot at their local ranges. This is a good thing! When it comes to the basics we are all in need of the same things. All are welcome, and while I will at times be geared towards the LR squad, I'm sure that everyone else will find nuggets in there that they can use.

This is the off year for the LR squad and I will be working heavily on the basics at times to start with, for this year, but as the year goes along and into next year we will work more on team organization and learning to work together as firing teams. The SR squad does not have firing team matches, so when we get into that stuff you SR guys, and anyone that is not going to South Africa, can just tune us out for a while.

I am the first appointed LR coach, and I feel a great responsibility to get it right the first time. If this works out as I hope, it will become the model we use for years to come, or the foundation to build upon in the future to continually build a stronger team USA. I have spent a long time thinking about and planning this coaching program, and I have a very good idea of what I am planning on doing, but I also realize that no man is a mountain, so I may make mistakes. I will tell you now that I do not push well, but I always except constructive criticism.

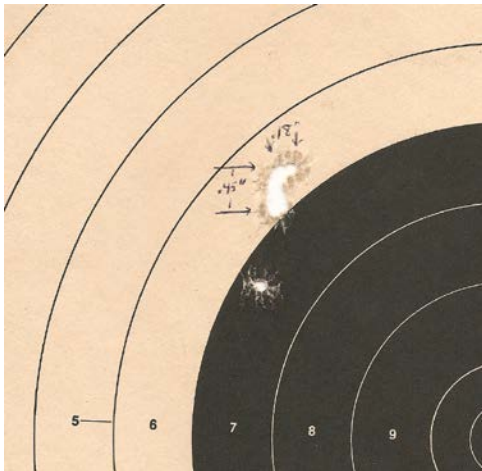
Also, to begin with there will be a lot of various things that you are interested in all at the same time. Each of you have something you would like to learn first. Obviously I will not be able to make all of you happy at the same time, but if you have a specific request for an area to cover, I will do my best to work it in the program as soon as I can.

One of the real challenges we have in the USA when it comes to training or team qualifications, is that our country is so large that it can be virtually impossible for a competitor to attend enough competitions to prove his worth to the team. That is something that I have found to be a challenge for me, and I am in the middle of the country. It is worse for those that are even further from the major competitions. Most of the LR muzzle loading matches are well east of here, and I spent a fortune just going to enough matches that people began to know who I was in this LR muzzle loading sport. It is actually possible to spend more money in a two year world championship cycle just going to matches than you might spend going to the world championships in a foreign country.

For this reason I believe it is vitally important that my coaching plan must work

so that you can develop your skill sets and prove your worth without going to every match that comes along. I tell people all the time that a shooting match is like a test when we were in school, whereas practice is like studying. The more you study, the better you do on the test. Just taking tests, teaches us nothing. My goal is to create a coaching plan that will in theory allow a beginner to learn the basics at home, perfect his skill sets and then allow him to be a useful member of the US team eventually. This is a lofty goal, and one that will not happen overnight. It also will not work if you do not take part and shoot the groups and perform the tests and return the information to me.

I've spent over thirty years as a gunsmith and competitive shooter, studying the science of shooting and what it takes to put every shot in the same hole, and then figuring out how to help others do the same thing. I'll be bringing that experience and those techniques along on this coaching experiment, in an effort to teach you how to do the same things.



I have attached here picture of a group I shot this past weekend to show you what I mean. It is a five shot group fired at 100 yards, prone with a wrist rest. The bottom hole is the fouler and the other four went in the top hole. This gives you an idea what can be done when you apply scientific principals to shooting. It's not perfect yet, but it is probably the limits of my abilities with peep sights. Groups like these always have a certain amount of luck involved, because I didn't mess up for four consecutive shots, but the rifle being that accurate is no accident. It is a simple matter of “isolating, identifying, and eliminating” the causes of shots that do not go in one hole.

Those three words will be used repeatedly. We will change the way we test to isolate various things we do to identify where the problem lies, and then we will eliminate it when we can.

My goals for this coaching plan are;

1. Train the USIMLT team members by providing training aids, advice, guidance, and an open forum for sharing what we learn, in an effort to create a team atmosphere, and at

the same time a little internal competition to be better than we are.

2. Develop statistical histories on the various competitors, so I can provide information to the team leadership to use to select actual firing teams at the world championships, and qualifications for championship participation if needed.
3. To make myself available for group practice sessions, where we will have round table discussions, and on the ground team practices.
4. Encourage non competitors and part time competitors to take part in this program to enhance the sport for them, and encourage future team membership for us.

I will be giving homework (as Ed Decker calls it) at times. These will be tests that we must perform (I will be working through them as well) in order to isolate and identify weaknesses in our shooting. Many of these tests are designed to show an actual skill level for a skill that has been identified as something we need for a team shooter. SO the better you do on these tests, the more we need you on a team, and typically you will do better in personal competition as well.

In future emails I will lay out for you why I have selected certain criteria for team shooters, but this email is becoming plenty long, so I will finish it up by laying out the first test that all shooters must do. It is a baseline accuracy test for you and your rifle.

Most of us have worked on loads, tested bullets and etc, but it is time to see what is working and how well it is working. I shared with you a five shot group with this email. It is nice to shoot five shot groups that are impressive, but they really don't mean much. Our matches are normally a minimum of 15 shots from the time we start shooting sighting shots till the time we finish the target, so baseline groups should always be a minimum of 15 shots. We need to see how well your rifle can perform for 15 shots, but we also need to see how you the shooter can perform over a series of shots.

For this test there is no criteria for special positions or time limits. Use the most solid position you have, be it bench rest, prone with rest like I shoot, or any other way you feel you shoot the most accurately. Take your time and shoot well, but shoot the entire group without stopping for coffee or taking a nap. There is no distance criteria, but a shorter distance is best to minimize the effects of the wind on your group. This can easily be done at 50 yards if you wish.

I don't want to test how well you read the wind, I just want to get a baseline for accuracy potential from you and your rifle. A good rifle/load combination will easily shoot under two minute of angle, (which is the size of the bull on most targets),and actually should group near one MOA, but almost no one does it on a day to day basis. Our initial goal is to see where the problems lie, isolate, and identify them through further testing, then we can eliminate them most of the time. When we do this, the groups get

smaller. Once we get our baseline accuracy to an acceptable point we can start working on our competitive positions, so we can deliver the shots in such a way that we can take advantage of our accuracy potential. If we do not have an accuracy baseline we will never know if bad shots are our position, our load, or our rifle.

Even this test as laid out, still tests more than one thing at a time. It will be testing your ability to perform for 15 shots, the accuracy potential of your rifle, and the accuracy potential of your loads. Once we have this baseline group, then we will begin testing to isolate the problem areas and figure out where the problems lie in those three areas.

I will be working through these tests with the rifle I have been shooting for a long time (and theoretically have the bugs about worked out), but I will also be working through it with a new rifle that will have problems to deal with, and I will share both with you. I also expect you to share your results with me, so we can work through this together.

So your homework for now is to do a baseline accuracy group of 15 shots or more at short range to see where we are at, and we will then begin our work of becoming better competitors. Once you have fired your 15 shot group, save the target or take a good photo of it, because we will be using them later to identify accuracy problems if there are any. You can send them to me if there is a problem and I will help figure out a possible solution. I would like everyone to measure their group and let me know what it measures and what distance it was fired at. I will calculate it to MOA and I will list the group sizes at a later date. I will be kind and not list the names except on the top shooters. ;-)

I visited Germany last year after the Bisley matches, and I got to visit their 100 meter range they practice on all the time. It is nothing but a concrete box with no top. They lay on tables to shoot prone, and they shoot groups all the time. Eventually the better shooters can shoot 100's regularly. In fact one of the Germans commented that it gets boring because they just shoot groups all the time. They are jealous of us because we get to shoot long range matches in the open all the time, but we have so much freedom to shoot on the open ranges at any distance we wish, any time we wish, that we forget to go shoot in the box. Because of this the Germans beat us badly at the shorter distances where technique matters and wind reading does not.

If I can get four people to learn and master the art of shooting from a sling with a highly accurate rifle, we can win the mid range match for the first time ever. I have absolutely no doubt about that. BUT if we continue to shoot as a bunch of untrained and unorganized individuals we will never win the gold against the teams that are competing these days.

Our initial goal is to gain complete faith in the accuracy of our rifle. Without that we can never learn the proper techniques for the various positions we must master, nor can we really learn to read the wind with any great accuracy. We must not have a false faith in the accuracy of the rifle, it must be proven. That is why I start here with this initial test.

For those that have proven accurate rifles, they can begin working on the sling techniques for short and mid range. if you rifle is not under two moa accuracy then sling practice would be futile.

This assignment does not have to be done in a specific time frame, because they still have some snow up north while the southerners have already fired a match or two. I will work through this program with everyone that wants to do so, at their own pace. Some will be in a hurry to get started, and others will never do any of it, but I need to get started for those that have the time and inclination to start now.

Thanks and shoot well,

Lee Shaver

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