

The World's Greatest Competitive Shotgunners - by Russell Mark

- #1 George Digweed - England - Sporting Clays / Double Trap**
- #2 Michael Diamond - Australia - International Trap / Double Trap**
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#1 George Digweed - England - Sporting Clays / Double Trap

Let me ask a hypothetical question to help justify my number one choice; If your families life was in mortal danger and if their only chance of survival were dependent on someone with one shot breaking a clay target crossing directly in front of you released from a twenty metre high tower at a distance of fifty metres whom would you select to shoot it for you? If this question was serious and every shotgun competitor on earth were asked for his or her response I would be willing to wager who the most popular answer would be. George Digweed.

George does things with a shotgun that defies logic. He is the world's most successful competitor in the history of the shotgun sports.

Sporting Clays can no longer be considered as the poor cousin to any of the other clay target shooting disciplines. The Federation Internationale de Tir aux Sportives de Chasse (FITASC) World Sporting Championship is held on a rotational basis in all corners of the earth and has a world-class entry of great shotgunners. Often the field contains well over one thousand competitors. The only other major clay target competition that has greater numbers is the annual Grand American Amateur Trap Association tournament. Unlike the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) the FITASC World Sporting Title does not restrict its entry to only three competitors per country therefore creating a far higher standard of competition. To win this event just once is a remarkable achievement as it involves a huge variety of shots with vastly different shotgun pointing skills. I could only imagine how the records would be totally changed and dominated by Italians if the ISSF changed their three competitors per country rule.

Unfortunately Sporting Clays does not get the worldwide exposure that the ISSF events receive as it is not an Olympic discipline. The lack of international media however does not make this event any easier to win. It is still quite unbelievable that the ISSF have not tried to capture the massive amount of sporting shooters around the world by trying to introduce an Olympic event that caters for this type of shotgun shooting. Despite this George Digweed, who has never competed in an Olympic Games, is the worlds most famous shooter and is a household name across every shotgun shooting code in all parts of the planet.

Digweed has won so many "world" events there is some confusion regarding the total.

According to the "English Sporting Clays" website George has won the World FITASC Sporting Title a record 9 times. 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2010, and 2013. He has won the World English Sporting Championship a

record 9 times also. 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2014. These two events are regarded as the two major and most prestigious World Sporting Crowns on offer and for the purposes of this list these are the two competitions I have based my rankings on. This is not devaluing in any way the other titles that can be classed as “world” events, but when making comparisons for a list like this a “line in the sand” must be drawn somewhere or comparisons lose their transparency. Digweed has won countless other British, European, Grand Prix and indeed “World” events which are just too numerous to mention here.

George’s longevity at the very top of the sport is quite remarkable. Although he had won many other competitions prior, the 1992 World FITASC Title at the Okemo Ski Resort at Vermont, USA was the event that really stamped his authority on Sporting Clays. He repeated this victory in 1993 and 1994. In fairness Digweed dominated FITASC Sporting events in the 1990’s except for John Bidwell’s back-to-back wins in ’95 and ’96. He also added four of his eleven FITASC European Titles in this decade. George won the first of his nine World English Sporting Crowns in 1998. It wasn’t until Richard Faulds and then fellow countryman Ben Husthwaite started winning open World Sporting Clay events at the beginning of the twenty-first century that Digweed had competitors that could continually match his high scoring capabilities at both of these sporting disciplines. Digweed, Faulds and Husthwaite remain the only three shooters on earth to have their names on both the FITASC and English Sporting World Championship trophies.

Digweed’s most recent World Championship was the 2014 World English Sporting Title against 840 competitors at the famous E.J. Churchill Shooting Ground in England. This was twenty-two years since his first major victory. George won the gold medal by a massive 9 points. He has the uncanny ability to demoralize his opposition when he is in form.

Digweed has also won the World Compak Sporting Championship and in this discipline of the sport he has twice shot a perfect 200/200.

To further justify George’s number one ranking on my list I didn’t have to look too far outside of the mainstream shotgun disciplines. My list is based on the statement “the greatest competitive shotgunners” not just the greatest competitor in a distinct discipline. George’s ability to point a shotgun accurately transcends many different events and uses.

In 2007 the first ever “World All Round Shotgun Championship” was conducted over four days in Dallas, USA. It comprised everything from American Skeet, FITASC and 5 Stand Sporting, ATA, Helice, and Flyers to the ISSF disciplines of International Trap and Skeet. George won the title by nearly 20 targets. That is a victory on the verge of being embarrassing to his opposition. The competitors that finished from 2nd to 5th place were four world-class shotgunners that included Jon Kruger, Bill McGuire, Scott Robertson and Gebben Miles. The Americans decided to run the Championship again the following year so Digweed went back and won it again. This event now ceases to exist.

In 2011 at a game fair in Bisley, England George shot a clay target at 130 yards in front of a huge crowd whilst filming a TV show. This broke his previous record of 118 yards set a couple of years prior in the USA. Both shots became popular “Youtube” video hits.

A few years ago George and his wife Kate visited me in Melbourne. We had lunch and then went to my local club for a bit of fun. I watched George standing on the verandah of our clubhouse shooting low left hand targets thrown from the Olympic Trap layout. He hit ten in a row that we later measured at 74 metres (81 yards). It was a shot that was to the point of being unbelievable if you didn’t witness it because the target was facing edge on and launched at over 100 kilometres per hour. For the record he used 28 gram 7 ½ size shot trap loads. Tragically he did this with my own Beretta S05 shotgun. I didn’t even attempt the shot. I certainly know my limitations.

Digweed is just as good at some of the domestic shotgun disciplines also having won the British Open Skeet Championship with a record score, but to be quite honest I don’t think there is any event with a shotgun he would not be competitive at.

At one stage George even held the British record for the most wood pigeon shot in one day, which was 661 birds. He has had a “personal best” on crows of 585 kills. The stories about George’s exploits shooting “impossible” shots on clay targets and wild game all over the world go on forever, but he has also crossed over to the rigid International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) disciplines with immediate success.

In 1993 the ISSF announced that the discipline of Double Trap was going to make its Olympic debut at the 1996 Atlanta Games. There was a flood of sporting shooters trying the new event. England’s Mickey Rouse, who had not long before won the World FITASC Sporting Championship, quickly made his presence felt in the fledgling sport, but nobody made a

bigger impact in their first year than Digweed. At his ISSF World Cup debut competition at Fagnano in Italy George stole the show by not only winning the gold medal, but also setting a new world record. I was in the unfortunate position of having to sit in the seat directly in front of a “very happy” George on the bus ride back to our hotel after the medal presentation. It was the longest hour of my life. I remember the slow painful twenty-hour birth of my children as a faster experience. George is renowned for his quick wit and is the master of the rapid one line response. One of my Australian teammates on the bus that evening jokingly suggested he was quite lucky to have won today and George without hesitation responded by saying “if you fall asleep tonight and even dream that I was lucky to win today you better wake yourself up and apologize to me”. I still use that comeback line to this day.

I am not sure if George’s heart was really in the ISSF disciplines and he never again medalled in Double Trap. He did however make another final in a World Cup a decade later in Lonato, Italy. His passion has always remained with Sporting Clays.

Over the years George has been successful with a variety of shotguns. His early success was with a Beretta 682 and then he moved to the Spanish manufacturer Kemen where it was rumoured he nearly sent the company bankrupt with the amount of “loyalty prize” guns he was owed. These days he uses a Perazzi MX2000. The last time I ran into him his barrel of preference was 32” choked full and full although he did have a brief stint using longer 34” tubes.

I got to know George quite well when he competed in the ISSF events in the early 1990’s. He is extraverted and can be loud and outspoken at times. He is a ruthless competitor and has a great knowledge of the history of our sport, but most of all I enjoyed his tremendous sense of humour. In Cyprus at an event in 1994 George and I had shared a few practical jokes on each other at the range. Australians and the English naturally try and have fun at each other’s expense. I had the upper hand on Digweed after Michael Diamond and myself had successfully suckered him into believing our famous mysterious bag carrying German hitchhiker story whilst travelling on the ISSF bus to the range one morning. That night George invited me to dinner with him and two of his teammates Mickey Rouse and Kevin Gill at a very crowded Greek restaurant in Larnaca. We enjoyed a few red wines and traded some memories when George convinced me to play a game of “coin catching”. The coins were to be launched from my forehead and caught in a funnel that George had appropriated from a chef in the kitchen and had stuffed down the front of my trousers. We had the whole rooms attention. Nobody was eating his or her meals as George and I were providing all the free entertainment.

After I had easily caught about 14 coins Digweed made a ten-pound wager I couldn’t catch 20 in the funnel at one time. He claimed that amount of coins was impossible as he had never heard of anyone doing it in the fifteen years he had played this game, but he did compliment me that I was one of the best at this activity that he had ever seen. I was very confident I could and was keen to take some English currency off him. I pushed my head backwards and focused on the ceiling whilst I perilously balanced the pile of coins all over my forehead. Just before I let fly with the coins to win the bet George casually leaned forward from his seat and emptied the remainder of my bottle of red wine into the funnel straight down the front of my pants. Wearing that smug grin of his he happily handed over the ten quid in front of hundreds of dinner patrons who were rolling around on the floor with laughter. I had paid the price for some earlier fun at his expense. I swear if Digweed were 150 pounds lighter I would have punched him in the head. I regard myself as a reasonably intelligent person therefore I still find it hard to believe I was stupid enough to fall for Digweed’s trick that evening. The next day at the range George proudly and loudly told everybody he could find about the previous nights activities. I heard he was even seen telling of my embarrassment to the little Cyprian kids whose job it was to reload the clay target machines. They couldn’t even understand or speak English. I like George; it’s hard not too. I just wish he were a little smaller!

More than any other person George Digweed has been responsible for the massive growth in Sporting Clays worldwide. AJ Smith certainly started the growth in the disciplines popularity outside of Britain, but George has taken the event to a new level. There is no part of the globe he has not competed in. From Russia and the USA, to New Zealand and South Africa George has travelled to and won. His personality is as large as his appetite and his attendance at any competition will guarantee a huge profile for the event. Digweed has the unique skill, character and charisma to make clay target shooting enjoyable to watch. Not every great shooter has the capability to be entertaining whilst they compete. He is the only shotgun shooter on earth that can command an “appearance fee”. When George shoots people go and follow him.

There is another phenomenon that George possesses. Sadly if another competitor happens to win a significant title and Digweed was not in the field then the victory seems to have less prestige to some extent. For the longest time this was also the case in any golf tournament that Tiger Woods did not participate in. The American International Skeet shooter Matt Dryke enjoyed much of the same type of strange compliment in the 1980’s when he was clearly at his dominant

best. Very few competitors ever gain this type of respect on the world stage. Digweed has had it for over twenty years in Sporting Clays. The first question often asked at the end of a competition is "What score did George Digweed shoot?" In many ways this is the greatest accolade a competitor can ever be given.

When George started competing he had the benefit of a multitude of great British sporting competitors to measure himself against. Nearly thirty years later the United States have made huge inroads into this discipline and there are plenty of talented young United Kingdom, Australian and other European shooters competing admirably, but Digweed at age fifty remains the one that every competitor fears, respects, tries to emulate and is gauged by.

Digweed's Sporting Clays record as it stands today may never be beaten. Realistically only Richard Faulds may threaten it. Eighteen of the world's two most recognized annual World Sporting Championships and over one hundred other world-class victories that may be considered as major titles in any other shotgun discipline. The world's greatest ever golfer is Jack Nicklaus who also has eighteen major victories to his name and in golf there are four major titles per annum on offer.

The competitions I am commenting on here are only George's gold medal victories. I have no clue how many silver and bronze medals he has amassed over the past three decades. Of course Digweed may add more titles to his resume as he is still ranked the number one Sporting Clays competitor in the world.

After taking all of this information about George Digweed into account and indeed the superb records of the other nineteen nominees that I have previously mentioned, there can be no reasonable argument about Digweed's ranking on this list of competitive shotgun shooting greats. He has to be number one. To place him anywhere else would be logically impossible. A lower position would have to involve bias, emotion, ignorance, stupidity or plain jealousy. We may never see anyone with George Digweed's shotgun pointing ability again. I certainly feel grateful to have lived and competed in the same era where someone has raised the standard of shotgun shooting to an amazing new level.

Digweed is an avid English cricket supporter and he does hold a unique record that is mentioned in the famous statistical cricket book "Wisden". When he was younger playing for Sussex in a league game he bowled 5 overs for 5 maidens (an over where nobody scored) and took 8 wickets. Not too bad indeed!

George's little brother is John Digweed, one of the world's most popular and successful record producers and DJs.

In 2009 Digweed was deservedly awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) for services to sport.

The former English butcher was born in 1964 and lives in Kent.

In my opinion George Digweed is the world's greatest competitive shotgunner of all time.

Michael Diamond - Australia - International Trap / Double Trap

Michael Diamond has the greatest record of any International Trap shooter in history. No matter what way you look at Michael's performances you must come to the same conclusion. There has simply been nobody better in this discipline.

The International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) conducts four major competitions. The Olympic Games, The World Championships, The World Cup Final and The World Cup. A handful of shotgun shooters have won each of these events once. Michael Diamond is the only male trap shooter to have won them all. He has won them all twice. Diamond has a staggering 43 medals from these four events.

In my competitive life I have been blessed to see Michael's career from the very beginning. I have been able to observe first hand the rise of the world's greatest ISSF shooter.

Michael Diamond was already an accomplished Australian DTL competitor when he first travelled with the Australian ISSF Team as a 15 year old to a World Cup in South Korea in 1987. He was there to gain some "experience" as a Minimum Qualifying Score (MQS) competitor. This to be the only time in his career that he would be forced to compete in the MQS category. Two months later he won the junior event at the World Championships in Venezuela. Two years later in 1989 Diamond won the ISSF's first official Junior World Trap Championship at Montecatini in Italy. By the start of the 1990 season he was still eligible to compete as a junior competitor under ISSF rules, but he was just too good to have him in the Australian Junior Team. He competed at the Moscow World Championships for the first time as a senior male finishing in the top twenty.

1991 was the year Michael Diamond really blossomed. The first World Cup of the year was in Mexico City and he was still a teenager when he shot 191 to miss the final by one point. The following week in Los Angeles I was lucky enough to hold onto the lead in the Trap competition and won the World Cup, but the real story was Michael who went from last place going into the final to the Bronze Medal position by shooting a perfect 25. It was his first final as it was for his future archrival, Giovanni Pellielo from Italy.

Australia hosted the World Titles late in 1991 and Michael was in great form. Again he bypassed the juniors and shot in the Men's competition. He shot 192 points in qualifying only to be denied the gold medal by a point by another great Italian, Marco Venturini. Both of them shot clean rounds in the final. Only Miroslav Bednarik has won the World Trap Championship as a junior. Michael came as close as anyone since the Czech ace claimed the title in 1985.

1995 provided the first defining moment in Michael's career. At the World Cup in Seoul he put together a masterful display in the qualifying rounds to amass a score of 124 on a difficult range. He held the final together well enough to win with 146, one point ahead of Italians Marco Venturini, Marco Tittarelli and myself. A further point back was Pellielo and American Brian Ballard. It was his first World Cup victory and he grew in confidence from there. I don't think he looked back. He had the belief in himself from this moment.

The Atlanta Olympics in 1996 was historic. Only months prior he changed shotguns from his Beretta ASE 90 to a Perazzi MX8. He had instant success. Michael shot 124 in qualifying and a further 25 in the final to win gold ahead of Americans Josh Lakatos and Lance Bade. It was a heart breaking last few targets for Michael's teammate John Maxwell who was shooting right beside him. Maxwell missed his 23rd and 24th target to slip from certain Olympic Silver to fourth.

1997 was an unusual year for Michael because he missed out on qualifying for the Australian Trap Team to compete at the World Championships in Peru. He turned his attention to Double Trap and made that team instead and then in 1998 won the Cairo World Cup and then the World Championship Double Trap Title in Spain setting a new qualifying World Record along the way. Diamond with Adam Vella and myself finally won Australia's first ever ISSF World Team Gold Medal in Barcelona also.

I could fill the memory on my computer up with stories about Michael Diamond, but I will let Michael save those details for when he writes a book. If he does put his story to print then it will be a best seller and more than likely a movie as well! However three years Diamond really dominated the world stage were from 1999 to 2001 and there are a few stories worth sharing.

The 1999 World Titles were at Tampere in Finland and it was tough. The weather was poor and the Trap event was so heavily attended it was spread over three days. After the second day Michael wasn't sitting in a great position on a

score of 95/100. It put him in a tie for 15th place with just one round to go the following morning. He thought he was done, I probably thought he was done and most of his competitors foolishly thought he was done also. Michael decided to go out to dinner and enjoy a relaxing bottle of wine. It turned into a very late dinner and a very big bottle of wine. Not too long before he had to shoot he made it back to the hotel for a brief nap. The last day was full of misty rain, no sun and lots of wind. One by one the competitors in front of Michael missed giving him the chance to shoot-off for a place in the final if he could hit a perfect 25 in his last round. He managed to break them all and then proceeded to knock out two other shooters in a miss and out to steal the sixth position in the final. This still put him three points behind Alexey Alipov of Russia. You guessed it. Michael shoots all 25, Alipov only hits 22 and everyone between them crashed out. The sudden death shoot-off was a foregone conclusion. Although the Russian put up a fight it was Diamond's destiny and Michael won his first ISSF Trap World Championship. It remains the solitary major trap event Alipov has not won. Diamond's last round of 25 also knocked Alipov's team down to the Silver Medal and won Australia their first ever World Trap Team Gold Medal. The Russian vodka at their team dinner would have tasted bitter that night I imagine.

The Sydney Olympics was a tough event for Michael personally. His father Con who was his friend, coach and mentor had passed away a couple of month's prior. Michael started the event poorly by his standards with 47/50 in his first two rounds. The targets appeared to be very fast and with a difficult background they were hard to see leaving the bunker. Diamond never missed again. He ran the last 100 straight to win by 5 in memory of his dad.

In 2001 the World Title was in Egypt and the week prior we had an event in Cyprus. Our team had a short evening flight from Nicosia to Cairo so we could arrive the night prior to the official practice day. We managed to miss our flight and had to get a plane to Athens to try and catch another connection. We didn't make it and were forced to spend the night at the Greek airport hoping to get an early morning flight. I remember Michael falling asleep on the floor of the terminal only to be awoken by three-airport policeman kicking him in the ribs. A heated exchange followed and I learnt my first Greek profanity as Michael is fluent in the language. Sadly there were no seats on any flight the next morning so we missed training altogether. Michael turned up on the first day of competition and you again can guess the rest. He won the World Championship after another miss and out shoot off for the gold medal, this time against the American Bret Erickson.

Michael went on to win the 2007 World Title in Cyprus by executing a perfect 25 straight single barrel in the final. In 2012 at the London Games Diamond was unlucky not to add to his Olympic Medal haul. After shooting all 125 in qualifying he finally finished fourth as he did at the previous Olympics in Beijing. His 2014 form would suggest he is on target to add to his medal tally in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

Diamond is famous for his tremendous second barrel. I have no hesitation in suggesting that his percentage hits on the second shot when he needs it is the highest of all time. If the ISSF did not introduce a "single barrel final" rule change in 2005 I am sure Michael's record would be even more incredible. A further rule change in 2013 forcing competitors to surrender their qualifying scores when entering the final certainly will not work in Diamonds favour either as he often enters the final as the highest qualifying scorer.

Michael is not renowned for great amounts of time training at the range firing off hundreds of rounds in practice, but what he doesn't do at the gun club he makes up for in the gym and riding his bike. At his peak I don't know of any shooter that trained harder on his strength and aerobic fitness. He would often take his own bathroom scales to every international competition so he could maintain a constant body weight. He would take them in his "carry on" luggage thus driving the airport security staff crazy when they went through the X Ray machines. I did love his dedication to physical strength and fitness and I know some of his habits rubbed off on myself when I was younger.

Apart from his amazing ability there is one more memory I have of Michael Diamond character worth sharing. I have been with him when he has won and shared his glory and I have been with him when he has lost and shared his disappointment. He is the same to his competitors whether he wins or loses. I have yet to hear him offer an excuse why he missed or didn't perform to his ridiculous high standards. Michael is the most gracious champion I have ever met, but when he does suffer a defeat he is the first to put out his hand and congratulate the victor with a smile and encouraging words. This lesson he no doubt learnt from his father and his attitude should be used as a role model to any young competitor.

For many years we roomed together and I still say, that apart from my wife, he is my favourite competitor to share with. He is always positive in his attitude and no matter what the event is he never spends the night prior talking about what may happen tomorrow. His conversations more often than not were based on luxury boats, fast cars or in recent

years his children. I have not yet heard him speak in any detail about any of the multitude of events he has won. Michael's modesty has no equal.

Diamond's average score for his 6 Olympic appearances is a massive 97% or 121.25 / 125. Coincidentally this is exactly the same World Championship average score that Italy's Giovanni Pellielo has.

Michael continues to compete with the same Perazzi MX8 that he used at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. He replaced the stock in 1998 and has not changed it since. The gun has not yet been introduced to oil or grease.

He remains the only shooter to win a medal whilst wearing a pair of "Ray-Ban Aviator" sunglasses.

Diamond now coaches extensively and currently works contractually with the Singapore Shooting Team.

When he is not competing Michael has a passion for fishing. He has a large game boat called "Pump Action".

The Australian Government awarded Michael with the OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia) for his services to sport.

Michael and his wife Cathy have three daughters. He was born in 1972. He lives with his family on the New South Wales Central Coast.

Michael Diamond is the greatest ISSF shotgun competitor of all time.

Kimberly Rhode - USA - International Skeet / Double Trap / American Skeet

Five Olympic Games, five Olympic Medals. No other shotgun shooter male or female in any event can claim this. For the record no shotgunner has won four consecutive medals either. Giovanni Pellielo won a medal at the Sydney, Athens and Beijing Games. He is the sole competitor to win three in a row. The most remarkable fact about Kimberley Rhode is that she accomplished this feat having barely turned 33 years of age.

In 1989 aged ten Kim hit her first 100 straight at American Skeet. Seven years later in 1996 she won her first Olympic Gold Medal at Atlanta in the Double Trap event. It should not have been a surprise to anyone as the year prior in 1995 at the Seoul World Cup she won the bronze medal and she had not yet turned 16 years of age.

At the Sydney Olympics in 2000 the International Sports Shooting Federation (ISSF) introduced female events for Trap and Skeet as well as Double Trap. Kim's background was in American Skeet where she was coached by such greats as Wayne Mayes. She didn't take long to make the transition and was in Sydney shooting both Skeet and Double Trap. She missed the Skeet final by a point, but managed to win the bronze medal in Double Trap. Again at the Athens Olympics in 2004 she competed in both disciplines taking her second gold medal in Double Trap, but this time making the Skeet final and finishing 5th.

For the Beijing Olympics in 2008 the International Olympic Committee wanted a reduction in the amount of Shooting competitors at their Games so the ISSF sacrificed Women's Double Trap. This left Kim with only one Olympic event to concentrate on and she went very close to winning her first Olympic Gold Medal in Skeet. She lost a 3-way shoot-off to the Italian Chiara Cainero and had to settle for silver ahead of Germany's Christine Wenzel.

The loss no doubt motivated Rhode as four years later in 2012 she would hand out the greatest lesson in Olympic Shooting history to her competitors. On the road to London she won her first World Championship at Munich in 2010, her first World Cup Final in Al Ain (this completed a set gold medals from all four of the ISSF major events) and no fewer than four World Cup Gold Medals including a World Record of 99/100 at Tucson just prior to the Games.

It is also worth noting that after the Beijing Olympics she had her favourite eighteen-year-old Perazzi shotgun stolen from her pickup truck. Assuming she was never going to see it again Kim broke in a new gun. Eventually months later the shotgun was recovered, but she was shooting so well with her new firearm she decided to retire the old one. It proved to be a great decision.

The London Olympics arrived with Kim as an overwhelming favourite. On a cold, dark and wet typical English day Kim Rhode embarrassed her opposition by shooting 74/75 in the qualifying rounds. It was a simply awesome performance and if there was any doubt about her legendary status in the sport it was put to rest with the perfect score in the Olympic Final. She equaled her own World Record and of course created a new Olympic Record. The staggering statistic is that she won by a massive 8 points from her nearest rival Wei Ning from China. She didn't need to shoot the last three stations.

Rewinding the story a little. Whilst Kim was setting the World Record at the World Cup in Tucson in March 2012 she decided to enter the Trap competition as well. If she could shoot above the Minimum Qualifying Score of 58/75 it would give her eligibility to shoot the same event at the London Olympics. She easily made the score and went onto the Games and shot 68, only two points from the final. She is the only female shotgun competitor to contest three different events at the Olympic Games. No doubt there will be some nervous female trap shooters in the USA if Kim decides to win a medal in a third discipline. Nobody has accomplished this feat at Olympic level.

Without being disrespectful in any way, Kim Rhodes in my opinion isn't quite the "natural" shooter like Richard Faulds or Todd Graves. Kim has achieved her success through an enormous amount of hard work. The quantity of cartridges she fires at practice is well documented with days of 1000 rounds not uncommon. Kim has had many coaches in her time, but none better than her father Richard who still trains with her to this day.

The greater majority of the USA Shooting Team over the past three decades have been based either at the US Olympic Training facility in Colorado Springs or at the US Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia. Kim is an exception as she has been located in Los Angeles for her entire career and her training has been largely funded through her family or private sponsorship.

Rhode used a Perazzi shotgun for most of her career, but changed firearms in 2014 to the new Beretta DT 11. She silenced any critics by winning the first two World Cups she entered with the new firearm at Tucson and Munich.

She is loyal Winchester Ammunition user and after her win in London she became only the fourth person in the companies 148 year history to have their image appear on a cartridge box. The others being company founder Oliver Winchester, legendary actor John Wayne and President Theodore Roosevelt.

Kim held many junior world records when she shot American Skeet. She was a Junior American Skeet World Champion. She has not shot a registered target in this discipline since 1996.

She is a keen car collector and restorer. She has 14 vintage cars in her garage that includes a 1965 AC Shelby Cobra and her latest, a 1928 Ford Model A Roadster.

In 2007 Kim was named by the ISSF as one of their four greatest shotgun shooters of all time. She has achieved so much more since she received that honour seven years ago.

Rhode is an avid big game hunter with one of her rifles of choice being a side by side .375 Searcy. She is also a loyal member of the US Republican Political Party having the honour of being a guest speaker at the parties convention in 2012.

Kim was married to her long time boyfriend Mike Harryman in 2009. During a brief hiatus after the London Olympics they had their first child, a son Carter, in 2013.

Rhode has redefined the term “determination”. She is without doubt the greatest female shotgun competitor of all time. Her story is far from over.

Kim Rhode was born in 1979.

Leo Harrison III - USA - American Trap

Leo Harrison was always going to be high up on this list, but where to place him caused me the same amount of grief as what legendary American Skeet Shooter Wayne Mayes gave me. Generally to be at the top end of my Top 20 list a competitor must have been world competitive at more than one discipline. Harrison and Mayes broke the mold to a degree as they were just so good at the discipline they chose to do it was impossible to leave them out. I am sure both would have been competitive at anything they participated in. Mayes had achieved an Amateur Trapshooting Association (ATA) Grand Slam, but I have no record of Harrison competing at anything other than ATA and some Down The Line (DTL) events in the southern hemisphere. In the end my decision is entirely subjective. One thing is for certain; both Harrison and Mayes were worthy of a top 10 ranking. The ATA is the world's biggest competitive shotgun National Shooting Association and Harrison is its most successful and honoured member.

There are too many records and titles Harrison owns in the ATA to list here. He first won a place in the All American Open Team in 1976. Once he made it he never again missed out. He was in the team every year for the remainder of his career. He captained the team a record 12 times.

The High Overall (HOA) Title at the Grand American is awarded to the best shooter over all the major events of the annual tournament conducted in August. In total there are 1000 targets, a combination of Singles, Doubles and Handicap (27 yards). Leo won this event 15 times with a career best score of 992/1000. It is the largest annual shotgun competition on the planet as this event has several thousand competitors enter every year. In total he won 25 major Grand American Titles. This is also a record. He won the All Around Title (the combined total of the three major events Singles, Doubles and Handicap) 5 times and the Doubles Crown on 4 occasions and shared the Clay Target Championship once.

In 2008 in the Clay Target Championship at the Grand American (an event that is conducted over 200 targets Single Barrel from 16 yards) Leo and Foster Bartholow shot an incredible record of 900 consecutive targets in a sudden death shoot off before they were declared joint winners.

Harrison's first major title at the Grand was the Doubles Title in 1978 as a 21 year old and his last was the HOA 34 years later in 2012. Only Joe Hiestand comes close to Leo's record at the Grand American with 20 major titles. Ray Stafford has at present 32 years between his first and last win at this tournament and has 14 major titles.

For 33 consecutive years Leo averaged over 99% in Singles for the year. In 1987 he won the Singles Averages for the year with 99.74%. He won the highest yearly average at handicap (27 yards) in 2009 at over 97%. Anyone who thinks ATA is easy should try and shoot 97/100 from 27 yards single barrel just once. Averaging this over a year in all weather conditions is incredible. He also won the yearly average in Doubles in 2006 with 99.09%. These three averages across all three disciplines remain in the top 10 of all time.

Leo was a prolific winner at many other tournaments outside of the Grand American. Despite the countless wins at the Satellite Grand and State Championships he also won National Trap Titles in New Zealand and Australia. In 1980 he won the High Overall Title in Perth, Australia at their National Championships. Back then the HOA included an American Skeet competition which Leo had no problem posting a score that kept him more than competitive.

He was a gentle giant of a man. He was shooting a 30" Beretta DT 10 for many years that looked like a matchstick against his enormous frame.

Harrison had a particular passion for coaching. He conducted clinics right throughout the United States. His articles in the trap shooting magazines received wide acclaim, as did his instructional videos. He knew he had a gift and was happy to share it with anyone that asked, particularly juniors and beginners. I always smiled when he wrote about not only the best way to shoot targets, but the best places to eat near the venue that was conducting an upcoming trap shooting tournament. Leo knew his food.

During the preliminary days of the Grand American Tournament in August 2013 Leo fell ill. He was taken to hospital and all the signs were that he was going to recover. Tragically on August 22nd he succumbed and passed away.

The world had lost one of its all time great shotgun competitors at just 56 years of age. There was a sense of shock and disbelief when the news of his passing spread. I think there was a certain feeling of immortality attached to his amazing ability.

Harrison was winning events of the highest caliber to the very end. As a final testament to his amazing ability was the fact that he had gained enough All American Team points in 2013 to qualify for the 2014 team even though he didn't compete in the season ending Grand American Tournament.

Leo was a hugely popular competitor. He had friendships all over the world, but on his first trip to Australia in 1980 he met one of Australia's greatest ever trap shooters, former World DTL Champion Bill Iles. Bill and Leo formed a close relationship when Iles became a regular visitor to the Grand American Tournament. In 1994 Iles nearly created history when he finished runner up to Ron Alcoriza in the Clay Target Championship. To this day Bill is the highest placed non-American in this event. Leo returned to Australia in 2008 to attend a ceremony inducting Bill into his own National Hall of Fame. While he was "downunder" Leo managed to add another Australian Title to his collection. Sadly Bill and his family were in Sparta at the Grand American Tournament when Leo's health declined and were with him when he passed away. Bill's son, Chris, was a pallbearer at Leo's funeral in his native Missouri.

There is virtually no list of notable American Trap shooters that does not have Leo Harrison on it. I am sure in the future there will be an award at the Grand American Tournament to further honour his contribution to the sport of trap shooting.

He was an avid coin collector when he wasn't shooting clay targets. He often attended coin shows and had a great collection of American Gold and Silver coins.

Harrison was inducted into the ATA Hall of Fame in 1998.

Leo's wife Karla still attends many of the annual competitions Harrison contested throughout his remarkable career.

Leo Harrison III was born in 1957 and was raised in Hannibal, Missouri.

Matthew Dryke - USA - International Skeet

Matt Dryke does not hold the record for the most victories or medals at the Olympic Games, World Championships or to my knowledge any other event. However there may be no single shotgun shooter on earth that has ever influenced a shooting discipline like Dryke did to the International Skeet event in the early 1980's. To say that Matt was unique is an understatement. He had his own technique that took him to the very top of the world. He was undoubtedly one of the greatest shotgun pointers in the history of the sport. Dryke was the first person to turn shotgun shooting into a spectator sport. His story is one of my personal favourites.

Matt Dryke was coached by his father Chuck. They started the Sunnyside Shooting Range in Washington State that still operates today. Together the pair honed Matt's style into a unique "squatting" position. He always looked in total control as he tracked the targets across the Skeet field with his 28" barrel Remington 3200. It worked extremely well for Dryke and everyone who was anyone in the Skeet world would have tried Matt's technique at some stage after watching his results. Chuck was particularly keen to promote the use of target acquisition. His coaching concentrated on improving a competitor's use of vision as much as technique and gun fit. Chuck's range was famous for the methods used in this area.

Dryke joined the United States Marksmanship Unit as a teenager in 1977. The Army made him an offer to join after watching Matt compete at the Olympic tryouts the previous year. It didn't take long to make his presence felt. Surrounded by the likes of Al Mullins, Dean Clark and Dan Carlisle the USA had a first class Skeet Team and quickly were crowned World Champions at the 1979 tournament in Montecatini, Italy. Up until 1983 the ISSF had four-person team competitions and this suited the Americans perfectly. In the individual event Matt shot 197/200 to finish 4th, one point behind the winner.

1980 would see Matt Dryke at his best, but unfortunately politics and sport became intertwined and the USA pulled out of the Moscow Olympics in protest of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. This left Matt with no international platform to show his skills until the 1981 Championship of the Americas Title at Sao Paulo in Brazil. He shot the lot, 200/200 and a new world record. Even though the ISSF had no regular World Cup competitions (these started in 1986) everyone in the shooting world would now know the name Matt Dryke. I have often wondered how Matt's record would have looked if he had started his career a decade later.

The 1982 World Championship at Caracas in Venezuela must still be talked about to this day at Fort Benning. Dryke shot 198/200 to finish 5th, but his teammates Carlisle and Clark finished 1st and 2nd after shooting 199/200. (Carlisle shot a Remington 1100 semi auto). No need to mention who won the teams event. Fort Benning became the epicentre of World Skeet Shooting with good reason.

1983 saw Dryke step it up a gear if that's possible. He won the Pan American Games with 199/200 then cleaned up at the World Championships in Canada with the individual gold medal and another USA team victory. All eyes were on Los Angeles for the 1984 Olympic Games. Matt didn't disappoint the hometown crowd and cantered across the finish line to shoot 198 and win the Gold Medal also equaling the Olympic record.

Matt slowed down in 1985 and hardly competed, but he did retain his Championship of the Americas Title with a 196 at his home range in Fort Benning. By the time the 1986 season arrived Dryke was fully charged to win the USA an Olympic Quota (starting) position at the World Championships in Suhl, East Germany. The ISSF introduced their new finals system and the crowd to watch Dryke in the last round was enormous. In qualifying Matt shot 199/200 then he hit 25 perfectly in the final to set a new world record and push Italy's latest Skeet shooting sensation Andrea Benelli into second place. The standard of shooting at this World Championship was incredible. In the Trap competition Czechoslovakian legend, Miroslav Bednarik, shot the same score as Matt to win also.

There seemed to be no stopping Dryke. It appeared he had the ability to win when he wanted to and he always had a little more petrol left in the tank when needed. At the 1987 World Championships they finally found a way to combat Matt Dryke.

The 1987 World Titles were held at Valencia in Venezuela. Not the greatest shooting range in the world, but adequate. The referees were not so. It was to be the scene of the darkest moment in the history of the ISSF. After qualification Dryke and Benelli were tied on 195. Again the finals range was packed with spectators to watch what was to be the most talked about ISSF Final of all time. Benelli let a target fly in the middle of the round and Dryke remained solid.

Benelli cleaned station 8 and all that there was left to do was watch Dryke do the same and he holds onto his World Title crown. The referees had obviously made up their minds before Dryke stood on the pad 8 because as soon as he fired at his next clay the main referee called "lost". Pandemonium broke out. The Venezuelans clearly cheated as Dryke definitely hit the target. Nobody from the ISSF would take control of the situation and overturn the corrupt referee's decision despite hundreds of people protesting. The range was on the verge of a riot. After thirty minutes of fighting and arguing Dryke reluctantly entered a "miss and out" shoot-off. On Station 2 Matt let the high house hit the ground and Andrea Benelli was declared World Champion. (The photo on the bottom right hand side of the collage is a never been seen before photograph of the moment Matt missed the high house on Station 2 in the sudden death shoot-off. Benelli is standing in the background)

The fun and games didn't stop there though. At the prize giving presentations Dryke refused to stand on the dais and receive his silver medal. The official photographs will only ever show Benelli on the top of the podium and Cuban Alfredo Torres in third position. When Benelli was awarded the gold medal the crowd yelled abuse at the Italian. I have never witnessed a scene like that before or since. It was a very sad day for the shooting sports.

My good friend, 1984 Olympic Bronze Medallist, Luca Scibanni Rossi was in the Skeet Final that evening in Valencia and we have had countless arguments about this incident. I agree with my friend that you cannot blame Andrea Benelli for the incident, but it must have felt a hollow victory.

The following day the Trap competition was due to start and Great Britain's Ian Peel turned up with the word "Italy" crudely written in chalk on the back of his British shooting vest as he thought that may help his score. He was asked to remove it, but not before nearly every competitor on the ground shook his hand.

This is exactly what happened in 1987. Let nobody tell you differently. The bottom line is that Matt Dryke was robbed of a World Championship. It is a travesty of justice that the ISSF do not record it as such.

There were no winners from the unfortunate events in Venezuela. Andrea Benelli is not a cheat nor did he bribe the referees. Andrea is a great guy, but what was he to do? He may not even have seen Dryke shoot at low 8. Benelli was also a victim here although it may not have appeared so at the time. I was happy to see him win the World Title in Russia three years later and then to even greater heights when he won Olympic Gold at Athens in 2004.

I am not sure how the incident in Venezuela affected Matt. There are people much closer to him than myself that could answer that I am sure, but 1988 was a poor year by his standards with a placing of 24th at the Seoul Olympics. 1989 saw a return to form with Dryke winning gold at "back to back" World Cups in Mexico City and Osijek, Yugoslavia. He left the Army and very quickly some "social indiscretions" caught up with him. Dryke passed a positive urine test after some recreational substances were detected and he was forced to have two years on the sidelines. He was back in time for the 1992 USA Olympic Team Trials for the Barcelona Games. He promptly made the team and shot well to finish in 6th position. Chinese female shooter Shan Zhang made history by taking the Gold Medal. Dryke retired from international shooting on that day.

Matt competed in a few flyer competitions after he retired and with a great deal of success. He at least won one major "calcutta" event that I am aware of earning him a substantial amount of prize money. I am sure it wasn't his only win.

Dryke's technique was a pleasure to watch and as previously mentioned many shooters wanted to duplicate it. Often the only people that benefitted from this were the imitator's chiropractor who had the job to reposition the spines of those that tried to shoot like Matt.

He was nearly as famous for his trick shooting ability. In his show that he performed with the US Marksmanship Unit Matt often would shoot a perfect round of skeet whilst sitting on a unicycle. He could do this in under a minute.

Dryke was certainly one of a kind. He competed hard and definitely played hard. There are many stories of Dryke's partying and drinking habits before, after and often during his competitions.

Matt Dryke had charisma and an air of confidence around him. He turned clay target shooting into an event people wanted to watch. He was a true legend of the sport.

Matt's father Chuck passed away in 2012. The only time he watched his son compete at a major event was at the 1984 Olympics. His sister Ellen competed for the United States on several occasions.

Matt met his wife Yvonne in 1995. She was a Peruvian Pistol shooter. They married in 2002 and have a daughter.

The ISSF World Championships or any World Cup event has never been conducted again in Venezuela.

Sadly Matt has not been of good health in recent times.

Matthew Dryke was born in 1958 in Sequim, Washington where he lives to this day.

Richard Faulds - England - Sporting / Double Trap

Anyone who ever watched Richard Faulds shoot as a junior Sporting shooter knew that he was destined for great things. It was just a matter of “when” not “if”.

The first time I can remember watching Richard Faulds shoot at a clay target was high on a cliff face at the 1994 World FITASC Sporting Championships at Mt Gambier in southern Australia. I had no idea who the young skinny boy was that was shooting in a squad of competitors containing a close friend of mine. I commented to somebody that the young man looked like he knew what he was doing and he might make a decent shooter one day. That “somebody” turned out to be Richard’s father Bruce who was one of the British Team administrators for many years. Unbeknown to me he was already the reigning Junior World Champion and when he grew up he was to become a giant “headache” to me personally.

Faulds won four consecutive World FITASC Junior Titles from 1993 to 1996. The British had so much depth that it was no surprise Richard was producing world-class scores so young. In 1993 the International Shooting Sports Federation introduced a new event onto their Olympic roster called Double Trap and that aroused Faulds’s curiosity, as Sporting was unlikely to gain Olympic status anytime in the foreseeable future. He quickly made the British Junior Team and finished 4th at the European Championship in Portugal in June 1994 and the following month he won the Junior Bronze Medal at the World Championships near Milan in Italy.

Richard Faulds was never going to stay in the junior division for long and when the Atlanta Olympics arrived in 1996 the nineteen year old found himself as part of the Great Britain Team. He finished a very creditable 5th after making the final.

Faulds quickly learnt the art of competing and when he went back to Atlanta in 1998 he was a different person winning the ISSF World Cup with a new world record score of 193. The same year he won the Italian World Cup in Lonato and finished 3rd in the World Championship at Barcelona.

By the time the 2000 Olympics arrived Richard had the benefit of four tough years competing and the experience of participating in an Olympic Final four years earlier. He won Britain’s first shotgun Olympic Gold Medal in since John Braithwaite in 1968. I finished second to him on this occasion after he defeated me in a sudden death shoot-off. Ironically eleven years later he won an Olympic Quota (starting) place for Great Britain in Sydney when he won the 2011 World Cup. On that day I led going into the final also. Needless to say I was getting sick of the Sydney / Richard Faulds love affair!

Richard won a further World Cup at Suhl, Germany in 2008 when he equaled his own world record score. Later that year he again made the Olympic Final in Beijing to finish in 6th place.

Richard Faulds set the benchmark for many great British Double Trap shooters and his success certainly paved the way for his countryman and teammate Peter Wilson to win in front of a home crowd at the 2012 London Olympics.

Double Trap maybe where Richard Faulds achieved worldwide fame, but Sporting is his true natural game. He has won the World FITASC Sporting Clays crown on four occasions, 2002, 2005, 2007 and 2008. Faulds has won the World English Sporting title on five occasions, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2008, and again in 2013. 2000 was a tremendous year for the Faulds household as he was also made a “Member of the Order of the British Empire” (MBE) for his services to sport on the back of his Olympic Gold Medal.

Faulds is one of only two Sporting shooters on earth to win both the World FITASC and World English Sporting Title in the same year. He has done this on three occasions. In 2002, 2007 and 2008. The other competitor to hold both titles simultaneously is George Digweed. He achieved this milestone once. The year was 2001.

There is nobody that makes shooting extremely difficult sporting clay targets look as easy as Richard Faulds does. He has a perfect gun mount that he executes with a minimum amount of effort and energy. I know many people that watched him win the World FITASC Sporting in 2008 at Limassol, Cyprus where he shot a new world record score of 198/200 after missing his very first target. Most commented it was the greatest exhibition of shotgun shooting ever. His arch nemesis, George Digweed, was one of them.

Faulds was never keen to travel too far abroad early in his career, but of late he has been making regular and successful trips into the United States exploiting their ever-growing Sporting Clays market. I am not sure if we will ever see Richard shoot Double Trap again, but hopefully if he doesn't he will be devoting more time travelling further around the globe chasing Sporting competitions. He is a pleasure to watch whatever he decides to compete at. I always admired his composure under pressure.

When Richard went to the Atlanta Olympics he turned up with a Kemen shotgun that had the tightest trap chokes I had seen for a long time. The gun looked like it was held together with pieces of electrical tape and wire. He then shot with a 32" barrel Beretta ASE Gold and DT 10 for many years, which originally were choked just as tight. Currently he is competing successfully with a Caesar Guerini shotgun.

I would rate Faulds as one of the finest sportsman I have met. A perfect gentleman in every sense of the word from the way he conducts himself on the range to the way he dresses when he competes. He is certainly a fitting role model for any young or new competitor and an ideal choice to be awarded an MBE.

Before the Sydney Olympics in 2000 he spent quite some time with me training at my range in Melbourne. One afternoon my father decided to take Richard and his coach, Ian Coley, out fishing in the middle of Port Phillip Bay in his brand new boat. After only a short time the boat started filling rapidly with water. My father had forgotten to fit the plug into the bottom of his new vessel. A mad panic ensued, but the tragedy was narrowly avoided. Richard always thought it was part of a conspiracy I had planned for him.

I have many terrific memories with Richard and have had some great conversations with his mother Sue over the years. Richard's father passed away in early 2010. He would have been very proud of his son's achievements. Richard however was not the first World Champion in the Faulds household. Richard's half-brother Steve, was the World Lawn Mower Racing Champion long before Richard ever won a World Shooting Title.

These days Richard and his wife Tanya own the Owls Lodge Shooting School near Barton Stacey in England.

Richard Faulds was born in 1977.

Giovanni Pellielo - Italy - International Trap

There are few people that have been more determined and consistent at International Trap than Italy's Giovanni Pellielo. His record over the past two decades has been exceptional.

At the 1990 European Championships at Uddevalla in Sweden, Giovanni Pellielo announced his arrival to the shooting world. It was much the same as the great Czechoslovakian trap shooter, Miroslav Bednarik did earlier the previous decade, Pellielo won the Junior Gold Medal. This event seems to provide a great indicator as to who the future champions of the sport may be.

The following year at the World Cup in Los Angeles two young shooters made their debut final in a World Cup competition. Pellielo and Australian Michael Diamond were to be introduced to each other for the very first time. It was to be the start of one of the greatest and longest shotgun rivalries in ISSF history.

Only the great French Champion, Michel Carrega, has equaled Giovanni Pellielo's record at the ISSF's World Trap Championship. Both have won the title on four occasions. Giovanni's first title came in 1995 at Nicosia then again at Peru in 1997. He successfully defended his title in 1998 at Barcelona after winning a sudden death shoot-off against the American Champion Lance Bade who missed his second last target of the competition to tie Pellielo on 149/150. His most recent World Championship victory was once again at Lima, Peru in 2013.

Pellielo's dominance in World Cup competition has been no less impressive having made the top step of the podium more than any other trap shooter, an amazing ten times. Only his countryman, Skeet shooter Ennio Falco, has won as many. Giovanni's strength in finals is highlighted here as he has only one solitary World Cup Silver Medal and four Bronze Medals. The second placing was after he shot all 125 targets at Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates in 2013. The new ISSF "Dueling" Final system definitely worked against him in that event. If Pellielo makes a final then statistically he is a big chance to win it.

The World Cup Final at the end of each ISSF shooting season is the competition where Giovanni is the undisputed king having taken home the ISSF's impressive crystal globe trophy no less than seven times. His first way back in 1992 where he equaled the world record with his score of 224/225.

When the ISSF changed their rules in 1993 to 125 target competitions and 24 gram (7/8 ounce) maximum shot loads it was Pellielo who first reached the magical perfect score of 125/125. He did this on April 1st, 1994 in Nicosia, Cyprus. At the same range the following year I was part of the Australian Team with Michael Diamond and Filippo Petriella that set the new World Record in the Trap Teams event. This record lasted for approximately 15 minutes until Pellielo ran his last 25 straight to be part of the Italian team with Marco Venturini and Marcello Tittarelli that defeated us by one point. I can't say I was happy for them!

For those that are statistically minded here is a staggering fact about Giovanni Pellielo's consistency at the ISSF World Championship since the introduction of 24 gram shot shells in 1993. Since that time he has competed in 16 World Titles and has averaged a remarkable 121.25 / 125 or 24.25 per round over the last two decades. Nobody in the modern era can match that consistency in this event.

Pellielo is a six time Olympian for Italy. This is more than any other Italian trap shooter. The great Galliano Rossini went to five. Skeet shooter Andrea Benelli also participated in the Olympics six times. In a country with so much depth this is quite an outstanding achievement.

The Olympic Games is the only title that eludes Pellielo. Twice he has finished in second place (2004, 2008) and a Bronze Medallist at Sydney in 2000. He is the only male shotgun shooter to win medals at three consecutive Olympics.

To date Giovanni has 34 medals from the World's four major ISSF Trap events. Only Michael Diamond has more.

Giovanni Pellielo is not finished yet as he proved by hitting 124/125 at the 2014 Beijing World Cup. His concentration whilst he competes is legendary as is his unique trademark technique where he has both feet locked solidly together.

Pellielo did attend the Grand American ATA tournament once. He won the "High Foreign" Award in the Clay Target Championship. He shot a perfect 200/200.

A deeply religious and highly intelligent man, Giovanni is “employed” as a Police Officer and is an accomplished pianist.

Giovanni’s career has been remarkable. He is the ultimate professional.

Giovanni Pelliolo was born in 1970 at Vercelli, near Milan.

Wayne Mayes - USA - American Skeet

Wayne Mayes was so good at the discipline of American Skeet he was nearly typecast. Mayes was a class competitor at many other events as well, but his dominance in Skeet was amazing. He was regarded to Skeet Shooting as to what Jack Nicklaus was to Golf or Michael Jordan was to Basketball.

By far the single biggest problem I encountered on this Top 20 list was where should I put Wayne Mayes? I am certain there are many American Skeet shooters that think he should be Number One. I have many other shooting friends from around the world that have never seen or heard of American Skeet. Some of them would think because it is a "domestic" discipline like American Trap it should not be included on any list where there are truly international events that hold their World Championships on a rotational basis around the globe. There may be arguments for both, but in the total scheme of things this is a subjective list about the great competitive shotgun shooters. Mayes fulfilled the criteria. There is no doubt in my mind Wayne Mayes needed to be included. Never at any stage did I have him out of my top 10.

Mayes won his first American Skeet World Championship back in 1973 at Savannah, Georgia where he was the victor in the 28-gauge event. At the American Skeet World Championships four gauges are used. 12, 20, 28 and .410.

His list of World Championships is too many to mention here, as there were 42 Titles in total. Mayes was named in the All American Team on 42 occasions.

Wayne held many world records, but probably the most talked would have been his effort with a .410 gauge. It was with this tiny gauge that Wayne set himself ahead of the rest. He has the World Record Long Break in Skeet with a .410 of 777 consecutive hits. Incredibly in June 2012 at Dallas Gun Club in Texas he hit his two hundredth perfect 100 straight in competition with the smallest gauge. Truly remarkable for a total weight of 14 grams (1/2 ounce) of shot pellets.

Eleven times Mayes went to registered tournaments and shot the perfect 500/500. Four times at the World Championships he hit 550/550 and once 650/650 over the entire program. He won the High Overall Award at the World Titles on five occasions.

Wayne could shoot anything with a shotgun. He had accomplishments in flyer events and, to many trap shooters disgust, he is also listed as having a perfect score of 200/200 in Amateur Trapshooting Association (ATA) Singles, a 100/100 in ATA Doubles and 100/100 in Handicap shooting. He is officially listed as number 65 on the ATA's list of competitors that have achieved this Grand Slam trap-shooting milestone. I wonder how many great ATA shooters have registered a 100 straight at skeet with a .410 gauge shotgun just once?

None of his peers would disagree with the statement that Wayne Mayes was the greatest American Skeet Shooter in history. Many say he was the greatest shotgun pointer of all time as well. The only competitor that would be able to put an argument forward to match Mayes's ability and record would be the great Todd Bender, Wayne's long time friend. Bender has no problems publicly declaring that Mayes should be given this distinction. That says a lot to me about not only Todd's character, but of how high Wayne was regarded amongst his fellow shooters.

In the latter part of his career Mayes shot a Kolar shotgun, but one of his early shotguns that he set world records with was a Winchester 1400 semi automatic that he named "Blondie". This gun is on display along with much of Wayne's memorabilia at the National Skeet Shooters Association (NSSA) Hall of Fame Museum at San Antonio in Texas. He was inducted into the NSAA HOF in 1994.

Mayes was not only a renowned competitor, but also a highly regarded coach. One of his young pupils was a lady from California called Kimberly Rhode who made a remarkable transition from American to International Skeet.

Wayne Mayes was still winning when tragically his life was cut short. On Monday afternoon March 11th, 2013 he had an accident while disposing of some gunpowder and suffered severe burns to most of his body. I think everyone thought he would recover from his injuries, but unfortunately it was with great sadness that it was announced that Wayne died from complications of the injury three months later on June 10th. He was a fighter until the end. It was a terrible week for the Skeet Shooting community as just two days later Todd Bender's wife Cyndi also passed away.

Wayne Mayes was born on May 4th, 1943 in Alabama.

Michel Carrega - France - International Trap

Anyone that was fortunate enough to see France's Michel Carrega shoot International Trap will no doubt describe his technique as either "poetry in motion" or "smooth as silk". Carrega was one of the most technically correct trap shooters of all time.

Michel made a spectacular international debut in 1967 when he shot 197 out of 200 in his first major competition. The event was the European Championship at Brno, Czechoslovakia. It was a difficult shooting range and that score would normally win by three points, but this time it lost by the same margin. Incredibly Italian Edoardo Casciano established a new world record after he hit all 200. Carrega learnt quickly as the following year at the same competition at Namur in Belgium he shot 195 to beat Casciano by two points to take the European Title back to France.

The Olympic Games were held the following month in Mexico City and Carrega finished 12th. He broke a respectful score of 193 clays, but the low placing hurt him. 1969 wasn't a great year for Michel although he still managed a bronze medal at the European Championships held in his native France with a great score of 195.

1970 arrived and so did Carrega's new shotgun from the Belgium firearm manufacturer FN Browning. He was their number one sponsored shooter and over the next two decades he would be credited with giving the gun its worldwide fame and popularity. From this point on Carrega found another level. He lost a shoot off for the European Title to Alexander Alipov from the Soviet Union after shooting 195/200. Alipov's son Alexey would go on to be the Olympic Champion at Athens in 2004. Despite the loss it set Carrega up perfectly for the World Titles at Phoenix in the USA two months later. Michel broke 197 to enter a 3-way shoot-off with his teammate Jean Baud and local hero Ray Stafford. Carrega won the tiebreaker relegating his countryman to the silver medal and the American to third place.

The following year the World Title was in Bologna, Italy and he again won the Championship after a shoot-off, this time against East German Juergen Henke. It set the stage the following year for the greatest Olympic Games Trap competition of all time.

Carrega was the overwhelming favourite to win the Olympic Gold Medal at Munich in 1972. The Italians were desperate to overcome the disaster of four years earlier in Mexico where neither of their shooters finished in the top dozen. They sent the evergreen Silvano Basagni and a relative newcomer at the age of 41, Angelo Scalzone. It was his first Olympic appearance and surprisingly he had never won an individual international medal at World or European level prior. He was however part of the 1967 Italian Gold Medal winning team at the World Championships in Bologna. That was the last world-class event prior to these Olympics that Scalzone had participated in. His form in the months prior to Munich must have been extraordinary to gain selection considering he had not competed for his country at this level in over five years. The Italians overlooked competitors to the immense caliber of Ennio Matterelli, Galliano Rossini and Giorgio Rosatti to select Scalzone.

The two-day event quickly turned into a three-man race. Scalzone brilliantly ran the first day (100 targets) without missing. Basagni and Carrega made one error in both of their first two rounds, but shot the third and fourth rounds perfectly to finish on 98. On the second day Scalzone made his first mistake early in the opening round whilst Basagni and Carrega were faultless in their first 25. All three were straight in the second round. With 50 targets remaining Scalzone was on 149, Carrega and Basagni were tied on 148. In the seventh round of the competition Scalzone and Carrega both shot clean scores, but Basagni finally succumbed missing twice. The pressure must have been enormous in the final round on the Italian after Carrega shot all of his targets to momentarily hold the new Olympic Record of 198. Scalzone stood tall and shot the last 25 to take the Olympic Gold Medal back home to Italy. It was to be his only International Medal at Olympic or World level, but it was a great one. In a strange coincidence just like Alipov, who defeated Carrega two years prior at the European Titles, Angelo's son Roberto went on to be a world-class competitor winning two World Cup Trap Gold Medals and a Bronze Medal from the World Championship in 1997.

The loss in Munich inspired Carrega to shoot a brilliant 199/200 at the Berne, Switzerland World Championship in 1974 and to set the new ISSF World Record. This was the first competition on the recently introduced rule of 32 gram (1 1/8 ounce) maximum shotshells. He won his fourth World Title in 1979 at Montecatini, Italy just prior to his 45th birthday defeating his arch rival Alexander Asanov from the Soviet Union.

Carrega would never again win an Olympic Medal. He finished a disappointing 31st at Montreal in 1976 and then in 1980, just at the moment when Carrega was arguably at his best, France reluctantly sent a reduced sized team to

Moscow due to their political indifferences with the Soviet Union at the time. They did not even compete under their own National Flag; the French participated under the International Olympic Flag instead. Only 121 athletes competed representing just thirteen sports and unfortunately Shooting was not one of them. At his final Olympic appearance at Los Angeles in 1984 Michel Carrega, who was just months short of fifty years of age, finished a very credible 5th only two points behind the reigning Gold Medallist, Italy's Luciano Giovanetti.

Uniquely for me Carrega's last international ISSF competition was to be my first, the Pesta Sukan Games at Singapore in 1985. Michel ended his career on a high by winning the gold medal, I finished second, a point behind the great Frenchman. I watched him shoot every target that year. His style was effortless and his smoothness to the target was uncanny. It was a great lesson from the worlds most perfect trap shooter.

Carrega never competed in any ISSF World Cup; he retired the year before these events were first contested. I always wondered how dominant he may have been if he had lived in a later era where he would have been exposed to the amount of international competition that we have today.

The ISSF record books show Michel Carrega as the second highest ranked male athlete of all time in World Championship Trap competition. Only Italy's Giovanni Pellielo is rated ahead of Carrega. They are the only two competitors to win the title on four occasions, Pellielo taking the higher ranking due to his two silver and one bronze medals.

Michel Carrega still lives in France. He was born in 1934.

Ray Stafford - USA - American Trap / International Trap

There are few things Ray Stafford has not won at American Trap. He has some impressive records that include an amazing 39 consecutive years where he averaged above 99% annually on Single targets. You need to stop and contemplate just how good that statistic is.

Stafford won the Clay Target Championship on four occasions. Only Joe Hiestand has won it five times. Stafford won the High Overall Title at the Grand American on seven occasions. In 1989 his composite average for the entire year over all three events of Singles, Handicap (27 yards) and Doubles was an amazing 98.32 %. This was an all time record for many years. It was only broken when the angles were reduced slightly Five times he was had the highest yearly ATA Average in Singles and four times he was the countries highest average scorer on Handicap (27 yards). He has over thirty-recorded 100/100's in Doubles competitions.

Stafford is the most decorated All American Team shooter in the history of the Amateur Trapshooting Association (ATA) having made the list over 35 times. To date Stafford has won 14 major titles at the Grand American Tournament. He was inducted into the ATA Hall of Fame in 1988.

Ray Stafford started competitive shooting aged eighteen in 1965. He joined the Army through its Marksmanship Unit and was immediately identified as an exceptional talent. He quickly learnt the art of International Trap and incredibly just three years after starting he was good enough to make the US Olympic Team at Mexico in 1968. Not surprisingly Ray was the youngest shooter in the team and he shot a very credible 189/200. It was an historic Olympics for the American Trap Team as US Air Force shooter Tom Garrigus shot 196 and a further 50 straight in overtime to take the Silver Medal. This was the USA's highest placed Olympic individual Trap medal since Mark Arie won at Antwerp, Belgium in 1920. John Braithwaite from Great Britain missed two in his first round and then ran the next 175 to take the gold.

The following year Stafford was a member of the US Team that won the silver medal at the 1969 World Championships in San Sebastian, Spain.

The International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) World Championships were conducted by the United States in 1970 in Phoenix, Arizona. This provided Stafford with an excellent opportunity for a great result. Prior to the Worlds the USA team went to the European Grand Prix at Wiesbaden in West Germany where Ray shot an outstanding 196/200 on a difficult range to win the gold medal. Two months later at the World Title he went one better by hitting 197 and ended up in a three-way tie for the gold medal. He ended third behind two French shooters, Michel Carrega and his teammate Jean Baud.

This was to be his last major ISSF competition, but the start of one of the greatest ATA careers on record. He first attended the Grand American back in 1968, but once he finished competing in International Trap Stafford became a prolific winner in American Trap right across the United States for the next four decades.

Ray has been an innovator over the years. He has never used the same gun for huge periods of time. He continually looks for ways to improve and was probably one of the first competitors to successfully use a high rib shotgun and more recently a half high rib. He was well known for having his shotgun shoot well over 100% above its aiming point which went against many of the traditional theories at the time that trap guns should shoot no greater than 70 percent high.

There are many stories of Ray refusing to accept targets where other people have claimed he "chipped". He is certainly as famous for his acts of sportsmanship as he is for his shooting record.

There is one quote that I have read about Ray Stafford that sums up his gracious and humble attitude. A competitor walked up to Ray when he arrived at a tournament and said to him "how is America's greatest trap shooter going today?" and Ray replied " I am not sure I haven't seen Dan Bonillas in a couple of weeks"

Ray Stafford was born in 1947 and is a resident of Denver in Colorado.

Dan Bonillas - USA - American Trap / Flyers

There was a period of time that if you nominated in an American Trap competition that Dan Bonillas had entered then it was accepted that you were shooting for second place at best. That was the perceived dominance of the man.

Some of Bonillas's statistics are nearly to the point of unbelievable, but the one that impresses the most was his average score for Doubles in 1997. He won the Amateur Trap Association (ATA) annual Average Award for this event with a record percentage at the time. It is no secret that a few ATA shooters protect their yearly average by shooting at the absolute minimum of registered targets (1,000) and will not shoot in bad weather. In 1997 Dan shot at 10,300 targets and hit 10,220 of them or 99.22%. To even shoot at that many competition pairs is incredible, but to hit this amount in all weather conditions is even more staggering. Bonillas obviously does not worry about protecting his average. To the contrary Bonillas had a reputation as one of the greatest shooters of all time in the wind. To this day only Sean Hawley has a record close to Dan's on Doubles.

In 1992 Bonillas entered a 500-target Doubles competition and broke the lot. The first person in history to do so. He has won the yearly ATA Doubles Average Award more than any other competitor. Dan wasn't too bad on Singles either. At the 1980 Grand American he ran 994 targets in a row without missing. His personal best was 1600 straight in 1975. Remember that is single barrel shooting only. Up until 2005 Bonillas had 27 years where he averaged above 99% on Singles. He made 22 consecutive All American Teams.

He had seven major victories at the Grand American Tournament with one of his most notable being the 398/400 to win the All Around Title (Singles, Doubles and Handicap) in 1982. That total was a record at the time. In 1975 Dan was the first competitor to shoot 100 straight from 27 yards in any event at the Grand American Tournament.

In the shooting world you know you have made the big time when one of the world's biggest firearm companies names a gun after you. Perazzi did just this for Dan Bonillas in 1981. The model "DB 81" was twenty years ahead of its time. Dan helped design the shotgun that had a raised rib above the barrels. It was an insight into the many trap guns that we see today produced by virtually every major gun manufacturer. The shotgun was quite popular and many of his competitors used it including the late Frank Little who was one of the greatest Singles shooters in ATA history.

Dan Bonillas was also an accomplished shot on flyers although he was not as well known for it. He made a podium finish twice at the World Championships. You can count on your fingers the amount of competitors that were good enough to do that.

The famous Italian range at Montecatini was holding its last ever live pigeon competition in 1984, which was the World Championship. Dan finished a very credible 3rd. The following year the World Titles were held in Mexico at Guadalajara. The World Championship for Flyers is conducted over 25 birds or your third miss, whichever comes first. If there are perfect scores then the shoot-off is the best of ten birds. The 1985 event had just on 600 entries and by the end of the competition nine competitors had downed all 25 pigeons within the 16-yard boundary fence. One of the nine was Dan Bonillas. The ten-bird tiebreaker commenced and one by one each finalist missed. After nine birds Dan was the only one still perfect. He proved he was human and missed the tenth and then lost a sudden death miss and out for the World Title.

I was there in Mexico in 1985 to witness that shoot off in person. My father always told me if you were going to copy somebody's style of shooting then copy Bonillas. I watched him shoot for days on end. I loved his technique of closing the gun and having it just slightly off his shoulder and with one small movement the gun was mounted. The great shooters make it look easy and Dan Bonillas made shooting look effortless.

Dan was a champion high school football player. His school, near Oakdale in California, won the State Championship with Dan playing quarterback. Before his time as a professional shooter and a representative for Perazzi, Dan was a juvenile parole officer.

He remains a native of California and is still an active competitor and coach.

Dan Bonillas was born in 1947 and was inducted into the ATA Hall of Fame in 1994.

Ennio Falco - Italy - International Skeet

In early 1996 Ennio Falco thought his luck had ran out. He was driving in southern Italy when his BMW was ambushed and car jacked by thugs. He had no hesitation on giving up the vehicle because he knew that was replaceable, but his life wouldn't be. His biggest concern was the item lying in the car's trunk. It was his favourite Beretta skeet gun. The Olympics were only a few months away and he was never to see the shotgun again. History will show that Falco urgently had another shotgun made and he would go on to shoot 149/150 in Atlanta to take the Olympic Gold Medal with a record score.

Falco leads the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) World Cup medal tally with a total of twenty-three medals, ten of them gold. He is second on the World Cup Final Medal list with ten, five of them gold. He nearly owned the European Championship at the start of the century winning it on five out of six occasions from 2001.

The statistic that is astonishing regarding Ennio Falco is this; the ISSF rank their medallists in order from gold to silver to bronze. One gold medal will put you higher on their tally list than two silver medals. Falco has the second highest total of male ISSF World Championship Medals in history yet he is ranked eighty-ninth on the list. Eight medals in total, zero gold, 5 silver, 3 bronze. The World Championship is the only event that denies him a complete set of gold medals from all four of the ISSF's major titles. Falco's teammate for many years, Andrea Benelli, remains the sole Italian clay target shooter in their rich history to achieve this honour.

Falco has had some heart breaking losses at the World Championship. He lost a "sudden death" shoot-off in 2010 at Munich after he tied with the Russian champion Valeriy Shomin on a score of 149/150. In 2013 he battled his way into the last spot into the final in Peru. After the semi final he again won a sudden death tiebreaker to gain entry to the Gold Medal Duel. Unfortunately for Falco he then lost the final match to Denmark's Jesper Hansen who shot a perfect 16 from 16 to once more push Falco onto the lower level of the podium.

Purists of Skeet regard Ennio Falco as one of the most technically perfect shooters of all time. He has a very natural erect stance and he seems to require little effort to mount the shotgun from the starting position on his hip to his shoulder. His consistency from his first international competition as a seventeen year old in 1985 until today has been remarkable. Together with Benelli the pair have formed the backbone of the Italian Skeet team for nearly thirty years winning countless team medals, many of them gold.

Falco's first major open individual victory was the World Cup at Osijek, Yugoslavia in 1988. He was still eligible to shoot as a junior competitor at this time. His last title was the World Cup Final at Izmir, Turkey in 2010. Uniquely after this win he could claim to have won a major title in four consecutive decades. The '80's, '90's, '00's and the '10's. No other male ISSF shotgun competitor can claim this feat. Canada's Susan Nattrass won World Championships in the 70's, 80's and the '00's and two World Cups in the '90's.

Apart from the 1996 Olympics Falco's most famous international victory came at the 1997 World Cup in his native Italy at the Lonato range. He shot the perfect competition shooting 125/125 in the qualifying rounds followed by a clean 25 in the final to give him 150/150 and a world record score.

At 46 years of age it appears Ennio Falco, the most decorated male skeet shooter in history, is winding down his career as he has just recently taken a position as contract coach with the Indian Skeet Team.

Interestingly it was reported that The Sultan of Brunei offered Falco a considerable sum of money after the 1996 Olympics to change countries. He obviously declined the offer.

Ennio Falco was born in 1968. He lives at Capua in southern Italy with his wife and daughter.

Rudy Etchen - USA - American Trap / Flyers

There is an old saying that “nobody is as big as the sport itself”, but Rudy Etchen came close. Anyone that ever met him felt better for the experience. His close friends referred to him as “The Rude”. He was one of the world's great all round shotgun shooters. Whether it was in Vandalia at the Grand American Tournament, at the luxurious live pigeon clubs of Europe or in a field shooting quail Rudy Etchen was competitive.

Rudy was the son of 1924 Olympic Gold Medallist Fred Etchen who won his medal as part of the USA's Trap Team in Paris. In 1936 a young Rudy turned up for the Grand American and promptly won the Sub Juniors in the Clay Target Championship. He did it again in 1937 then twice more in the Junior category in the following years.

Rudy's pet Amateur Trap Association (ATA) event was Doubles. He will be remembered in history as forever being the first person to ever break 100 straight in Doubles at the Grand American Tournament. He did this in 1950 with a brand new Remington model 870 pump action shotgun. Uniquely 32 years later he did this again at the Louisiana State Shoot with the same pump gun. Rudy used this shotgun for the remainder of his trap career. He was known as “Mr Pumpgun”. Rudy single handedly was responsible for the popularity of this model Remington. It would turn out to be one of their biggest selling shotguns of all time with sales of the 870, as of 2014, approaching nearly ten and one half million units.

Etchen was the National Doubles Champion in 1942, 1943 and 1945. He was runner up in 1944. He was classed as an industry shooter for many years and his High Overall (HOA) Score at the Grand in 1950 of 980/100 won the Industry Section. This remained the highest ever HOA score in any category until the great Dan Orlich shot 982 in 1966.

Rudy contested the Grand American in 1952 as an amateur and won the Clay Target Championship, All Around and HOA titles. He went on to win the Veterans crown in the Clay Target Title in 1989 and Senior Veterans in the same event in 1993 thus clean sweeping every category he could over his entire career. His victories at State level were impressive, but most notably in 1952 and 1957 he won all four of the main championships at the Idaho State shoot.

As an amateur he was named in the All American Open Team on 6 occasions and twice led the yearly averages in Doubles and Singles. Rudy was inducted into the ATA Hall of Fame in 1980.

Rudy Etchen was more than an average American Skeet shooter as well. He won over 20 State and Regional Titles throughout his career.

North America was not big enough for Rudy and the lure of the live pigeon (flyer) circuit was too much for him to resist. From the mid 1950's to the late 1960's Rudy won some major silverware throughout Europe, Africa and Mexico. He won Grand Prix events on flyers in Monte Carlo, Madrid, Paris and Guadalajara. In 1955 Rudy was part of the American Team that won the World Flyer Teams Title (his teammate Bill Isetts won the individual crown). In 1966 in Mexico City Rudy was runner up for the World Championship. Etchen was an exceptional shot at the columbaire (hand thrown birds) event. He won titles in this discipline at Seville, Cairo and Madrid.

As good and as quick as Rudy was he didn't tempt fate by using his Remington pump gun on flyers. On the box birds he used a Purdey 30" barrel side by side which patterned 76% at 40 yards on the right barrel and 93% on the left. That's another way of saying a full choke and a “fuller” choke. For columbaire he used a 28" barrel Parker which was choked improved cylinder on the first barrel and full on the second.

Etchen was as famous for his personality as he was for his shooting ability. People gravitated towards him. It is no wonder some of his friends were ‘A’ list Hollywood celebrities that included Robert Stack, Roy Rogers. Ward Bond and even the Australian born star Errol Flynn.

Rudy's legacy lives on with his youngest son Joel, who is an excellent competitor himself and a gun shop owner in Pennsylvania. In 1993 Rudy and Joel won the Parent / Child event at the Grand American with a score of 399/400. Rudy was 70 years of age at the time.

Rudy's granddaughter Rebecca and grandson Alex both have won trophies at National and State level.

I was at the centennial Grand American in 1999 at Vandalia on behalf of Beretta, but only for a couple of days. My late father, Brian, met Rudy several times when they competed on the live bird circuit in Europe. Brian had many great

stories about him and asked me to say hello. Sadly time slipped away and I never had the chance to meet Rudy Etchen. I am sure if I had have had the pleasure of his company, like so many others before me, I would have been vastly better for the experience.

Rudy Etchen was a legend in every sense of the word.

The “Rude” passed away on August 28th, 2001. He was 78 years of age.

James Graves – USA – International Skeet / International Trap / Double Trap

Since the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) started their World Cup competitions back in 1986 quite a few competitors have tasted success in two of the three events on offer. Only one person has made it to the dais in all three disciplines of Trap, Skeet and Double Trap. James Graves, better known as Todd or “Fuzz” to his close friends, was based at the famous Fort Benning Marksmanship Unit in Georgia during his shooting career and could quite easily lay claim to being the ISSF’s greatest ever all round competitor.

When Graves started at Fort Benning he was in the company of Dan Carlisle for two years who at that time would be the worlds best multi discipline ISSF shooter at both International Trap and International Skeet having won an Olympic Trap Bronze Medal in Los Angeles in 1984 and a World International Skeet Title in Caracas, Venezuela in 1982. Carlisle no doubt would have been a great influence on Graves.

It would be fair to say Todd was best known for his Skeet shooting skills having won a medal in this discipline at all four of the ISSF’s major competitions being the Olympic Games, World Championship, World Cup Final and World Cup. In 2002 Graves twice shot 149/150 to win Skeet Gold Medals at the World Cup at Santa Domingo in the Dominican Republic and the World Cup Final in Lonato, Italy. At the Sydney Olympics in 2000 Graves took home the Bronze Medal with a score of 147.

To illustrate his all round ability Graves within the space of four years he held the World Record for Trap after he won the World Cup at Mexico City in 1989. He won his first Skeet World Cup Gold Medal at Germany in 1992 and when he captured the Bronze Medal in the Double Trap event at the Los Angeles World Cup in 1993 he completed the trifecta as the ISSF’s only World Cup Medallist in all three events. He remains the sole person to do this to this day.

It is unforeseeable that we will see another shooter win a medal at this level in all three ISSF disciplines. There are very few competitors shooting more than one event these days and the only current competitor still competitive in two of the three events would be Kuwait’s champion shooter Fehaid Al Deehani who has won an Olympic Medal in both Double Trap (Sydney 2000) and Trap (London 2012). In London he shot off for the Bronze Medal in both the Trap and Double Trap events.

Todd and his teammate, Bret Erickson, continued the Marksmanship Unit tradition of providing thousands of shooting supporters with a fabulous “trick” shooting exhibition. Anyone that was lucky enough to witness their show would be left with no doubt as to why Todd is named in my top 20 list. Fortunately another tremendous American Army shooter in World Champion Josh Richmond has now taken on the trick shooting responsibilities within the Unit.

Todd was renowned for his exceptional gun pointing ability and smooth technique. His calm demeanor under pressure was nearly intimidating to his opponents. He was one of the most popular competitors amongst his peers during his career. These attributes no doubt made his appointment as the main coach in the United States Shotgun Team very logical.

The continued success that his team achieves under his guidance lays testament to his ability not only as a competitor, but also now also as a coach and mentor to many of the up and coming talented young competitors that the USA enjoys.

Todd Graves was born in 1963 at Ruston, Louisiana

Jury Tsuranov – USSR – International Skeet

Many people would not know this, but the Soviet Union's Jury Tsuranov is the most prolific male World Championship Medallist of any shotgun discipline in the history of the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF). He was also involved in an era where the Russians led technological changes to shotguns that raised a lot of eyebrows in the shooting world.

From 1959 to 1975 Jury competed in twelve consecutive ISSF World Skeet Championship events. Incredibly he medalled in nine of them. Jury stood on top of the dais on three occasions, was runner up five times and finished third once. Three male competitors have won 7 World Championship ISSF Medals, but as yet nobody has overtaken Tsuranov.

Tsuranov is a case study in consistency and perseverance as it took him a decade of competitions from when he won his first silver medal in 1959 at Cairo until he finally was crowned World Champion with his win in 1969 at San Sebastian. In 1971 at Bologna in Italy, Jury won his second World Championship with a perfect 200 out of 200.

Jury Tsuranov must have been a strong man as he used 36-gram (1 ¼ oz.) shot loads to achieve most of his success. The ISSF did not introduce a maximum load of 32 grams (1 1/8 oz.) until 1974. 32 grams remained until the end of 1988 when a 28-gram (1oz) maximum was introduced and four years later on January 1st 1993 the maximum load was reduced to 24 grams (7/8 oz.). I cannot imagine shooting 36 gram shot shells at 200 targets, but this is exactly what Jury used in competition and trained with for the majority of his career.

When it was announced in the early 1960's that International Skeet event was to be included at the Olympics for the first time in 1968 there was much more research and development of skeet shooting equipment. An interesting story happened at a competition in Scandinavia in the mid 1960's where the Americans and Russians were both attending. At the end of the event the Russian coach at the time was very keen to buy one of the Americans shotguns. Enough money was exchanged and an hour or so later the Russians returned the American shooters gun minus the last few inches of his barrel. They were obviously very keen to see how western shotguns were choked. A couple of years later the Russians unveiled their new Skeet Shotgun the Baikal MU-8. It had a cylinder bore that went into an expansion chamber and then some constriction. These days it was referred to as "Tula" (trombone) choke tube. They allegedly worked particularly well with the wads that were used in the 36-gram loads at the time. Never the less everyone thought that the Russians were using something different than everybody else that gave them an advantage. (Some people still think this today!) The Russians had tremendous success with this shotgun and later the same with the trap version. Whether it was through a technological advantage or plain hard work is a matter of opinion, but it is common knowledge that some manufacturers are now making similar changes to their barrel tubes some fifty years later. All it did comprehensively prove is that the "cold war" was not just restricted to politics in the 1960's.

In 1968 the Soviets turned up at the Mexico Olympic Games with their new shotguns where Tsuranov hit 196 / 200 to finish fourth. His teammate, Yevgeny Petrov, won a three-way shoot off to take the gold medal after finishing on 198. Tsuranov shot scores of 192 at the 1972 Munich Olympics and 193 at the Montreal Games in 1976, but sadly never added an Olympic Medal to his collection of World Medals. There are quite a few ISSF competitors that were dominant at World Championship level, but never managed to stand on any level of the dais at the Olympic Games and unfortunately Tsuranov was one of them.

As a side note, between 1968 and 1973, the Soviets won every individual International Skeet event on offer except the 1972 Olympics where Konrad Wirnhier from West Germany edged out Petrov for the gold. If it wasn't Tsuranov or Petrov winning it was their third shooter, Vladimir Andreyev. All with the Baikal MU-8.

Jury Tsuranov also won a gold, silver and bronze medal from the European Championships.

Tsuranov's son, Konstantin, is following in his father's footsteps and won a World Cup Silver Skeet Medal in Beijing in 2008 and then participated in his first Olympics a few months later.

I am unsure of the exact date Jury Tsuranov passed away, but one of his former teammates recently told me he believed it was around 2007

Homer Clark Jnr - USA – Flyers / American Trap / International Trap

Several distinguished American shooters competed successfully in Europe on the circuit in the "golden era" of live bird shooting after the Second World War winning many Grand Prix events. Some of these included Rudy Etchen, Billy Perdue and Joe Devers. The latter two won the Cup of Europe back in the early 1950's. Quite a few United States competitors have won the World Flyer event once. Charlie Miller being the last coming up to four decades ago in 1976, but Homer Clark Jnr was the only American to win the world event for a second time. Interestingly American women have been far more successful in the World Championship over the years with Lorali Delalany notably being a four-time winner.

Homer Clark Jnr was actually the second competitor to win the World Live Pigeon Shooting (Flyer) Championship twice. Italian Guilio Calestani (1940 & 1948) was the first to achieve multiple wins. After Clark two more Italians, Carlo Giorgetti (1960 & 1962) and the legendary pigeon shooter Bruno Pardini (1974 & 1978) and more recently Spaniard Julio Lopez Breton (2002 & 2005) achieved dual success. Clark's first victory came in 1949 at Madrid and again two years later in Monte Carlo. Nobody to this day has ever won the World Flyer Championship for a third time.

Clark was part of several winning USA Teams at the World Flyer Championship, but also one famous losing team. The Americans had won the World Teams event in 1958 and 1959 and had fully intended on making it a trifecta in 1960 at Milan, Italy. Homer Clark, Billy Purdue and John Downes from Texas shot 53/60 to go down to the Italians by two birds. The win did a lot to restore some Italian pride on home soil, as they had not won the event for several years. It was to be the start of a remarkable period in Italian Flyer Shooting as they were to win 18 of the next 26 team titles. With shooters like Giorgetti, Pardini and the Bodini brothers they were a hard team to beat in Europe as the Americans found out. The USA team would only taste victory once again in the next 34 years.

Clark travelled extensively through Europe for decades competing on the Flyer circuit and achieved success, besides the World Titles, in major Grand Prix events in Spain, France, Portugal, Belgium and Italy.

When he was in Europe as part of his training in the 1960's he often was invited to shoot a new event called "ZZ" birds (Helices), which was said to provide a competitor great preparation and speed for pigeons. He was never a big supporter of this event, but agreed that the later model ZZ bird machines were getting better to practice on. Homer Clark Jnr had a reputation of being a very fast shot, maybe the fastest. In Europe the pigeon boxes just "fall apart" when the bird is released as opposed to the "Barnabee" system used in the USA, which launches the pigeon in the air several feet. The release system used on the Continent suited him and Homer could often shoot the bird fast enough to leave it stone dead inside the box.

In the latter part of his career Clark used a beautifully finished Beretta SO3 EELL under and over that had three sets of barrels. His favourite was a 30" barrel choked half in the bottom barrel and full in the top. However the shotgun that Homer made his name with by winning his first world title in Spain was a far more modest Ithaca 28" barrel side by side. (Homer is holding that shotgun in the main photo). This gun was on display for many years in the ATA Hall of Fame Museum.

To make this Top 20 Shotgunners list Homer needed to be more than just a great flyer shooter even with two World Titles to his credit. He had an impressive record on clay targets also.

At the Grand American Tournament in 1948 he won the National Doubles Title and twenty-two years later he tied for the Clay Target Championship with a perfect 200/200. Despite often being overseas during the North American Trapshooting season Clark was named in the All American Trap Team on two occasions.

Homer Clark Jnr proved his all round shotgun versatility in 1958 when he tried out for the USA International Trap Team that was to compete at the World ISSF Championships at Moscow in the Soviet Union. Unbelievably the Americans had never won an ISSF World Team Medal of any colour and Homer was keen to change this. He not only made the team, Clark was declared the team captain and helped the USA create history by winning a Bronze Medal.

On a side note Homer Clark Jnr is widely attributed as the individual who introducing reloading for competition trap shooters in the United States. His company "Alcan" imported all the componentry and made the products available along with all the ballistic data so that countless thousands could participate in the sport because the cost of new shot shells post World War II was prohibitive.

Clark was inducted into the ATA Hall of Fame in 1991 uniquely joining his father, also named Homer, who was one of the original Hall of Fame inductees.

Homer Clark Jnr passed away in 1998 aged 78.

Miroslav Bednarik - Czechoslovakia - International Trap

You hear of people having the “X” factor. Miroslav Bednarik was the first competitor I ever met that had it. He initially attracted international attention in 1981 when he competed as a sixteen year old junior (under 21 years of age) in the European Championships at Antibes, France where he won the silver medal. Three years later he won gold and the following year in 1985 at the Europeans, again in France, he repeated the effort and created a new Junior World Record with a score of 195. The World Championships were the following month in Italy and the Czechoslovakians knew they had somebody special in their midst so they nominated Miroslav to compete in the open category. This was unheard of at the time as it denied him a chance to add the junior world prize to his European Title because it was not possible to enter both divisions. In 1985 the Montecatini club in Italy was in its prime and was renowned as the “mecca” of international clay target shooting, but it had a reputation of being one of the most difficult ranges on the planet. It had a tricky background and yellow coloured clay targets were used which drew plenty of criticism. It didn't bother Bednarik who broke 197 out of 200 to win the title of World “Senior” Champion denying Italy's champion Danielle Cioni the crown. It remains the only time in the history of the ISSF a junior shooter has won the open world trap title.

The following year at Suhl in East Germany Bednarik did it again by shooting 199/200 in the qualifying rounds and a perfect 25 in the final (this was the first year of ISSF 'Finals'). His score remained a world record as it was never broken. Interestingly he chose to shoot a standard “out of the box” Beretta 682. With all the high grade prestigious shotguns Beretta offered him the lowest base model was his choice. His success with it was largely responsible for the guns worldwide popularity in years to come.

In Suhl it was nearly impossible to get close enough to the range to watch Bednarik shoot such was the respect spectators and his rivals had for him when he competed. Everyone was captivated by his unique technique of starting the gun virtually parallel to the ground and simply cutting all the clay targets off before they travelled too far or rose too high. Although it is not officially recorded, but it was widely spoken about at the time, Bednarik reportedly hit 223 out of his 224 kills on the first barrel. Not surprisingly after his win in 1986 many of his opponents tried to emulate his shooting style.

At the Seoul Olympics in 1988 Bednarik lost a “sudden death” shoot off for the Gold Medal to Dmitri Monakov of the Soviet Union after the pair tied on 197/200 and a perfect 25 in the Final. The following month at the World Cup Final in Munich Bednarik shot one better by hitting 223 to win gold. Nobody knew it at the time, but that was to be his last ever competition.

On Friday morning June 16th, 1989 the shooting world was rocked to its foundations when it learned that Miroslav Bednarik, the sports brightest young talent, was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident not far from his home near Brno. He was only 24 years old.

Miroslav was well on his way to becoming the greatest trap shooter in ISSF history. His legacy no doubt paved the way for two other Czech Trap Olympic Gold Medallists with Petr Hrdlicka winning in 1992 and David Kostelecky in 2008.

The “Bednarik Memorial” competition remains one of the most prestigious trap events in Europe.

Through my association with Beretta I got to know Miroslav and his father quite well. I enjoyed two days with them at the Beretta factory in Italy in 1988 before the Olympics getting a new stock made for my gun. I spent more time playing with his shotgun looking for any clues than I did my own. Miroslav was quite shy, but he would always be happy and very friendly. He had big bright red cheeks and a baby face. I always had the feeling he had no real idea how talented he was and how everyone was in total awe of him when he competed. We were the same age and he was everything in the sport that I wanted to be. I think of Miroslav quite often to this day and his story and its heart breaking ending still brings a tear to my eye.

A truly amazing competitor and a very humble champion taken from us many years before his prime.

Miroslav Bednarik - Czechoslovakia - International Trap

You hear of people having the “X” factor. Miroslav Bednarik was the first competitor I ever met that had it. He initially attracted international attention in 1981 when he competed as a sixteen year old junior (under 21 years of age) in the European Championships at Antibes, France where he won the silver medal. Three years later he won gold and the following year in 1985 at the Europeans, again in France, he repeated the effort and created a new Junior World Record with a score of 195. The World Championships were the following month in Italy and the Czechoslovakians knew they had somebody special in their midst so they nominated Miroslav to compete in the open category. This was unheard of at the time as it denied him a chance to add the junior world prize to his European Title because it was not possible to enter both divisions. In 1985 the Montecatini club in Italy was in its prime and was renowned as the “mecca” of international clay target shooting, but it had a reputation of being one of the most difficult ranges on the planet. It had a tricky background and yellow coloured clay targets were used which drew plenty of criticism. It didn't bother Bednarik who broke 197 out of 200 to win the title of World “Senior” Champion denying Italy's champion Danielle Cioni the crown. It remains the only time in the history of the ISSF a junior shooter has won the open world trap title.

The following year at Suhl in East Germany Bednarik did it again by shooting 199/200 in the qualifying rounds and a perfect 25 in the final (this was the first year of ISSF 'Finals'). His score remained a world record as it was never broken. Interestingly he chose to shoot a standard “out of the box” Beretta 682. With all the high grade prestigious shotguns Beretta offered him the lowest base model was his choice. His success with it was largely responsible for the guns worldwide popularity in years to come.

In Suhl it was nearly impossible to get close enough to the range to watch Bednarik shoot such was the respect spectators and his rivals had for him when he competed. Everyone was captivated by his unique technique of starting the gun virtually parallel to the ground and simply cutting all the clay targets off before they travelled too far or rose too high. Although it is not officially recorded, but it was widely spoken about at the time, Bednarik reportedly hit 223 out of his 224 kills on the first barrel. Not surprisingly after his win in 1986 many of his opponents tried to emulate his shooting style.

At the Seoul Olympics in 1988 Bednarik lost a “sudden death” shoot off for the Gold Medal to Dmitri Monakov of the Soviet Union after the pair tied on 197/200 and a perfect 25 in the Final. The following month at the World Cup Final in Munich Bednarik shot one better by hitting 223 to win gold. Nobody knew it at the time, but that was to be his last ever competition.

On Friday morning June 16th, 1989 the shooting world was rocked to its foundations when it learned that Miroslav Bednarik, the sports brightest young talent, was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident not far from his home near Brno. He was only 24 years old.

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#19

Anthony Jon Smith – England – Sporting

Anthony Jon Smith or “AJ” Smith or “Smoker” Smith, whichever name you knew him under you would have had total respect for his all round ability to use a shotgun. AJ Smith is widely credited as being one of the “fathers” of Sporting Clays. He had a tremendous following in both the United Kingdom and in the United States where he had a great influence in introducing this discipline of shooting.

A huge personality with the ability to match “AJ”, amongst many other major titles, won three European FITASC crowns and two World FITASC Sporting Championships in 1987 and 1989. He was affectionately known as “smoker” due to his ability to turn the clays he was shooting at to dust. There are several other competitors that may have better sporting records than AJ, especially at English Sporting where he strangely didn’t dominate, but the ease and speed that AJ could shoot the most difficult of targets put him in another league. Anyone who had the privilege of watching him at his prime would lay testament to this.

He was one of the first to try and teach the art of Sporting Clays through literature and his books were widely read worldwide. As a coach he was very straightforward in his approach. He was very critical of getting “over technical” preferring a very basic technique often based simply on gun speed.

He gave major competition shooting away for several years, but decided to make a “comeback” as a veteran and promptly won the World Veteran’s FITASC Title at Minnesota in the United States in 2006.

AJ Smith passed away in January 2010. He was 63 years of age.

#20

Shan Zhang - China - International Skeet

Zhang Shan (born March 23, 1968 in Sichuan) is a Chinese sports shooter and Olympic Champion. She won the gold medal in the Olympic Skeet Shooting event at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona.

This event was mixed, open to both men and women. Zhang Shan was the only woman to win a medal in this mixed event from 1972 to 1992. Zhang was not able to defend her title as the event was open to men only in 1996. In 2000 a women's Olympic skeet competition was added, and Zhang has remained a World-class competitor but failed to win any further Olympic medals. Shan is currently in Sports Management in China and is part of the Chinese Shooting Team management for the Beijing Olympics. She has remained active in shooting competitions around the world and will probably compete in the London Olympics. Zhang began her training in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan province.

The “Best of the Rest” 21st to 100th

80 more “most notable” great Shotgunners

The following is a list of eighty more shotgun competitors that I considered eligible of being considered for my Top 20. All of them have an outstanding record in the shotgun sports.

They are listed in alphabetical order;

Fehaid Al-Deehani KUW Double Trap / International Trap
Alexey Alipov RUS International Trap
Ahmed Al-Maktoum UAE Double Trap / International Trap
Abdullah Al-Rashidi KUW International Skeet
Mark Arie USA American Trap / International Trap
Christophe Auvret FRA Sporting
Lance Bade USA International Trap / Double Trap
Deserie Baynes (fem) AUS Int.l Trap / Double Trap / Australian DTL
Todd Bender USA American Skeet
Andrea Benelli ITA International Skeet
John Bidwell ENG Sporting
Giovanni Bodini ITA Flyers
Adam H Bogardus USA Flyers / American Trap
Kevin Borley ENG Universal Trap
Harlan Campbell Jnr USA American Trap
Dan Carlisle USA Int. Skeet / International Trap / Sporting
William Carver USA Flyers / Exhibition Shooting
Paul Chaplow ENG British DTL
Wendell Cherry USA Sporting Clays
Daniele Cioni ITA International Trap
Stuart Clarke ENG Sporting Clays
Adrian Cousins AUS American Skeet
Jorge Damme GER International Trap
Svetlana Demina (fem) URS/RUS International Skeet
Joe Devers USA American Trap / Flyers
Danielle Dispigno ITA Double Trap
Brad Dysinger USA American Trap
Glenn Eller USA Double Trap
Massimo Fabbri ITA International Trap
Debra Gelisio (fem) ITA Double Trap / International Trap
Kevin Gill ENG Int Trap / Double Trap / Universal Trap
Luciano Giovannetti ITA International Trap
Larisa Gurvich (fem) URS International Skeet
Cheryl Hall (fem) ENG Sporting
Vincent Hancock USA International Skeet
Joe Hiestand USA American Trap
Ben Huthwaite ENG Sporting
William Iles AUS Australian DTL / American Trap
Zachary Kienbaum USA Sporting
Jon Kruger USA Sporting
Josh Lakatos USA International Trap / Double Trap
Beatriz Laparra (fem) ESP Sporting
Duncan Lawton ENG Sporting
Frank Little USA American Trap
Julio Lopez Breton ESP Flyers
Sandor Lumniczer HUN International Trap
Donald Mackintosh AUS Flyers
Nora Martin Ross (fem) USA American Trap
Anthony Matarese USA Sporting / International Trap
Ennio Matterelli ITA International Trap

Gebben Miles USA Sporting
Fred Missildine USA American Skeet
Dmytro Monakov URS/UKR International Trap
Phoebe Ann Moses (fem) USA Exhibition Shooting
Wei Ning (female) CHN International Skeet
Kaye Ohye USA American Trap
Dan Orlich USA American Trap
Bruno Pardini ITA Flyers
Robert Paxton USA American Skeet
Albano Pera ITA International Trap/ Double Trap
William Perdue USA Flyers / American Skeet
Satu Pusila (fem) FIN International Trap / Double Trap
Arnold Reigger USA American Trap
Vic Reinders USA American Trap
Michel Riboulet FRA Sporting
Scott Robertson USA Sporting
Brit Robinson USA American Trap
Bruno Rossetti FRA/ITA International Skeet
Jessica Rossi (fem) ITA International Trap
Galliano Rossini ITA International Trap
Mickey Rouse ENG Sporting / Helice
Michael Schmidt Jnr USA American Skeet / International Skeet
John Shima USA American Skeet
Barry Simpson ENG Sporting
Roger Smith USA American Trap / Flyers
Jack Sutherland AUS Flyers
Daniel Texeira POR Flyers
Adam Vella AUS International Trap / Double Trap
Marco Venturini ITA International Trap
Christine Wenzel (fem) GER International Skeet

Epilogue

I hope everyone enjoyed the historical journey through some of the greatest names in the sport of competitive shotgun shooting.

The competitors I have selected for my Top 20 Greatest Competitive Shotgunners are solely based on my personal opinions. I know everyone will have their own thoughts and have their views on who should make this list and where they should be ranked. I think that is perfect. I would certainly like to inspire debate so at the very least our sport's history will be revisited. The ever-increasing access to the worldwide social media gives all of us a chance to add to the events, characters, winners and losers of our wonderful sport of shotgun shooting.

What I really set out to do is to physically record some of our greatest names and events of our sport in some small detail. There will be far better qualified people than myself to add to this list at some stage and give a much greater insight into the competitors I have selected and written about. I wanted to start the ball rolling. I also know there will be competitors I did not know about or worse still I have forgotten. To those people I do apologise.

It is extremely difficult to make comparisons across huge time spans such as those that this sport covers. What weight to give each discipline is also very hard to determine and what constitutes a better competitor from the same discipline, but of a different era becomes an entirely subjective decision. A Top 20 list for each specific discipline and gender would be far easier, but would be far less interesting to debate when the list is completed.

The disciplines of American Trap and Skeet caused me quite a lot of heartache. There have been some truly amazing competitors in both of these events, but the fact their major titles each year are not rotated annually outside of the United States makes them somewhat less international in flavour than other clay target codes. This makes comparisons

against truly world disciplines difficult. In saying that I placed both Leo Harrison III and Wayne Mayes in my top 8 of all time because they were so incredibly talented with outstanding records.

It certainly helped a competitors ranking on my list if they were multi skilled outside of just one discipline hence the reason why the final 20 is dominated by individuals that were successful "All Rounders" in more than one type of shotgun event.

After looking at thousands of shooters my original list had 243 names on it that I eventually cut back to 100 and of those 100 I came up with just 20. I wrote stories on 34 competitors such was my indecision on who should make the final cut. In the end I think I have arrived with a reasonably decent cross section of outstanding competitors. All 20 are legends of our sport.

Selecting on gender becomes a subjective issue also. Clearly there are some women that are just as competitive with a shotgun as their male counterparts. There are many circumstances in our shotgun history that females have been in some way discriminated against and that needs to be taken into consideration also.

We have some great young competitors in our sport at present that have already established amazing records that did not make my top 20. In time their continued success will no doubt force lists like mine to be updated and rewritten. I would envisage this same list in a decade's time would include names like Vincent Hancock, Glenn Eller and Jessica Rossi. I included the late Miroslav Bednarik in my list even though his career ended at just 24 years of age first of all because I believe he was simply brilliant and second of all out of respect. He could have gone on to be number one on my list if his life wasn't cut so tragically short.

The obvious criticism that my Top 20 list will receive is that shotgun competitors from the United States fill nearly half of it. This is largely due to the fact that the USA has by far the majority of shotgun shooters participating in the widest variety of organized competitive events. I could have easily added several more from the USA as there are the likes of Dan Carlisle, Todd Bender, Joe Hiestand at least four others that would have valid arguments to be added to my final twenty. Competitors from the USA are gradually making their presence felt in the traditionally British dominated Sporting disciplines. Future lists will no doubt reflect this. I have tried to be as diverse as possible in my selections without discriminating against gender, era, discipline or nationality.

Thanks for those of you that have contributed to the many stories when I was in the final stages of putting this list together. It is difficult at times to differentiate between "myths" and "legends" as distinct from actual facts. Some disciplines keep records far better than others so I hope I have done justice to the twenty competitors that I have selected through the stories I have written.

Once again "The Top 20 of the World's Greatest Competitive Shotgunners" is only my opinion. Feel free to add your stories and memories to the debate, but please don't take any of my writings personally.

Russell Mark

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