

SHOOTING FOR GREATNESS

BY KURT SMITH



AT THE END of *Rocky III*, Apollo Creed challenges Rocky to a rubber match between the two of them to settle the score of who is the best, once and for all. As Apollo explains to Rocky, it's only to prove it to himself: "No TV, no newspapers, just you and me."

Because in the end that is all that matters to a true competitor at any level. Self-respect.

Rich Kang, a surgeon from Maryland, has had his picture added to the New Jersey Pistol website as the Winner of the 2015 State Outdoor Pistol Championship. His name is now engraved on the Madore Trophy.

And that's pretty much the extent of his recognition for this exceptionally difficult achievement. The top result of a Google search for "Rich Kang" is the LinkedIn profile of a California product developer with the same name.

Precision Pistol excellence isn't something one pursues for stardom, applause or finan-

cial gain. There wasn't much in the way of an audience or media other than a lanky, curious writer for a popular men's magazine present at the championship event. Shooter Frank Greco likens it to golf: it may not be the most exciting spectator sport, but among participants, there is an unwavering admiration for the best.

"It's the ultimate badass sport with pistols. In the shooting world, badass is snipers," he says. "In the pistol world it's precision shooters."

Greco is the Regional Vice President of New

Jersey Rifle & Pistol Clubs, based in Highland Lakes, NJ. A portion of this event took place at the Central Jersey Rifle & Pistol Club in Jackson. Greco didn't participate in the competition, but he was there to explain the mystique of it, right down to the effect of donut consumption on shooters. True.

"The sugar raises the blood pressure and affects the steady hand," Greco says, while offering a donut to this observer. "Sugar and caffeine in excess can be Kryptonite to a shooter."

It's that demanding?

To say the least.

Picture how far 50 yards is. One hundred fifty feet. Half of a football field. Now fathom being able to steadily aim and fire a pistol from that distance and consistently hit a target eight inches wide.

That's just for an eight-point shot. For a 10-pointer, that target is just three inches wide; for a bull's eye, which is used as a tiebreaker if two shooters have the same score, it is just an inch and a half.



Frank Greco and Ed Glidden

“Great shooters have an almost Zen-like approach to shooting and how they approach their daily lives, jobs, etc.”

one witnessing the action. But needless to say, it's an essential one.

Part of Glidden's occupation is training shooters in gun safety, including teaching youngsters in the club's highly touted junior program. "Individual training," he says, "is keeping the gun pointed in a safe direction



Can that even be done with normal human vision? Yes, and the shooters on the firing line this day are proving it. With multiple types of firearms and various types of shooting: moving targets, rapid fire, timed firing.

It's a three-gun match, with .22, centerfire and .45 caliber pistols. With each type of pistol, a shooter takes 90 shots. Those 90 shots are broken down into four matches: Slow Fire is two strings of ten shots each over ten minutes; National Match Course is ten Slow Fire shots, followed by two strings of five shots each at 25 yards; Rapid Fire is two strings of five shots each over ten seconds; and the Timed Fire Match is four strings of five rounds each, with 20 seconds per string.

All day long, the barrage goes on. Casings litter the ground. Wisps of dust float from the dune behind the targets. The unmistakable odor of gunpowder fills the air. Wrists snap back in recoil with larger pistols. The noise is

thunderous and deafening at times, but that's the only aural distraction allowed. No talking or other sounds behind the line. During one match a ringing smartphone is immediately shut off; only in church could that be more embarrassing.

It's grueling, this full day of shooting. Comfortable footwear is a must.

Between rounds, a horn sounds and a red light begins flashing. When the light is flashing, guns must be down, and must remain untouched until the flashing stops.

Ed Glidden, the director of the match, calls out instructions to the shooters, obviously with safety as the top priority. Cease fire, magazines out, make the firing line safe. Empty chamber indicators installed. Check your gun; check your neighbor's gun. And so on, dozens of times. Glidden's role looks boring to some-

at ALL times and treating every gun as if it were loaded. Constant awareness of the range officers and other shooters to prevent and/or correct the slightest infraction until safety becomes a habit. Any unsafe practice will result in expulsion from the match and the range."

The Central Jersey Rifle & Pistol Club people have a reputation for their focus on safe handling of lethal weapons. They are frequently praised for it in online reviews. It is particularly impressive to see younger people on the firing line, some barely in their teens, completely comfortable handling firearms. Partly because of Glidden's repetitious direction, safety is second nature in this competition.

Besides, with the concentration required at tournaments like this, competitors have more than enough to occupy their minds.

Watching the shooters, it appears as though they are cool as ice, with the focus, the concentration, the steady hand. But as one of the



The firing line

better shooters on the line can tell you, it takes years to develop this composure. And even, he still grimaces at the occasional subpar shot.

Lateif Dickerson is the master instructor at the New Jersey Firearms Academy. His résumé of other titles is very impressive: Certified Pistol Instructor, Range Safety Officer, Combat Handgunner at the School of Defensive Firearms, the list is long. He's been training civilians, police and military for 19 years in various weapons usage and self-defense.

Dickerson can tell you a bit about becoming adept enough for this competition. There

are three stages, he says: know how, physical conditioning and mental conditioning.

Know how is mastering the fundamentals, like stance, breath control and recoil management. Stance "should be as comfortable but as stable as possible. Think like a crane; your legs are the outriggers, your arm is the boom." Breath control is "basically holding long enough so you aren't moving." Recoil management is the ability to "consistently recover to the same place when shooting."

Then there's the physical conditioning.

"A match can go from 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM,

Get Started with Precision Pistol Shooting

If you'd like to try Precision Pistol Shooting, there is a website dedicated to helping you get started, with several insightful pieces from top shooters. The site is called "The Encyclopedia of Bullseye Pistol."

Among the articles is a piece by site owner John Dreyer about essential equipment. There's a lot to know when laying out the considerable funds for pistols, like whether they are mass-produced or hand built, or the differences between high performance and convertible pistols. Not to mention other necessary equipment, like eye and ear protection, scopes and cleaning supplies. Pistol shooting is not a cheap sport, so spend wisely.

Another piece by Dreyer quotes several Zen philosophies and describes the achievements in pistol shooting in how they relate to such quotes. One example: "A man who has attained mastery of an art reveals it in his every action." Dreyer compares this to pistol shooting in the sense that once a shooter can sustain an "empty mind," he can see "underlying principles in everyday life and life in all things."

Another piece from top shooter Jake Shevlin reveals the "secret" to shooting high scores. It's the same secret one learns about how to get to Carnegie Hall: practice, practice, practice. The shooter must sacrifice: sacrifice time, money, convenience and priorities in life to excel at just one thing. Top marksmanship requires a level of commitment unmatched by few endeavors. That, says Shevlin, is the "secret."

The Encyclopedia of Bullseye Pistol website also features a discussion group, e-mail updates, and links and maps to shooting clubs and ranges. It can be found at www.bullseyepistol.com.

ProtectWhatYouHave.com

DEL DUKE
INSURANCE GROUP

Insuring South Jersey for 80 years

**INSURANCE PRODUCTS
& EXPERTISE**

Property | Auto | Home | Life

Commercial | Marine | Flood

Excess & Hard-To-Place Risks

856-424-7960



You need an
independent insurance agent.™





A shooter checks his scores between rounds

oped also.”

But the mental preparation is by far the toughest part.

“The **ONLY** thing that should exist in your mind is that your sight is where it’s supposed to be as the trigger moves rearward; this is very hard. We all have a lot of noise and distractions, so conditioning your mind to focus is a process. That process is largely the challenge in shooting.”

Frank Greco emphatically agrees, sharing a story of his own self-defeat in the mental aspect of the game.

“When you’re in it, on the line, loading, in the zone, improving your score, it’s incredibly intense and extremely difficult mentally.

“One of my first times I experienced the ‘mental game’ was in the New York State Championship. The match director came over to me and asked me if I knew I was shooting better than most of the Experts and Masters. I said no, and got accidentally sidetracked, thinking I was going to win the match. The lost focus immediately showed; my shots were random and my scores went down.

“It’s vital to maintain a positive outlook and to speak to yourself in positive statements. It’s

important to train your subconscious mind and create a positive self-image.”

He pulls out his smartphone and shows this observer a picture of a target, the high-value section of it riddled with bullet holes. Sometimes, he says, he needs to look at it during a match, to remind himself what he’s capable of.

It’s all undeniably worth the effort.

The true reward of Precision Pistol, as Greco relates from his own personal experience, is self-respect: the realization of one’s hidden abilities and the ability to meet the most difficult of challenges. Once a person can hit that one-and-a-half inch bull’s eye from half of a football field away, it’s hard to imagine how monthly bills could faze them.

“Great shooters have an almost Zen-like approach to shooting and how they approach their daily lives, jobs, etc. Since I started, my ability to focus has sharpened dramatically, and it’s positively benefited other areas of my life. The ability to focus on what matters and disregard unimportant matters literally frees your mind.

“The benefits are real, and to that extent, shooting has made me a better person.” ■

Don’t Just Landscape... **GRANDSCAPE**

Experience our inspired designs. We offer meticulous craftsmanship in every project. Our services include: *Landscape Design and Installation, Irrigation, Landscape Maintenance, and Tree Shrub and Turf Fertilization Programs.* With Elite on the job, your property will be ready for healthy growth, as well as for your enjoyment, all summer long!

**Schedule a design consultation now....
So you can be ahead of the spring rush**

SATISFYING CUSTOMER FOR OVER 25 YEARS

“A Company You Know & Trust”

- Complete Landscape Projects
- Outdoor Kitchens & Paver Projects
- Ponds & Waterfalls
- Irrigation Systems
- Nightscaping
- Cleaning & Sealing Pavers
- Seasonal Color

*If you are thinking about rain harvesting or water management,
e-mail our affiliate www.americanwatermanagement.com*

NJ Lic.#13V04183200



P: 856.753.1944
800.582.6598
www.elitelandscaping.com

