

MANAGING A U.S. SHOOTING TEAM

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I was surprised when I was asked to give a class on managing a U.S. team. It took a lot of thought to decide what I should say. I guess the best way is to tell you the process I go through and add a little philosophy on the top of it. A team manager or captain - you can use either term - has two things he must remember. The first is that the reason the captain is there is because there is a team. His job is to facilitate these people's ability to shoot and perform. I've seen in the past and have heard stories of team captains who become the focal point of a team and the team runs around them. I personally feel this is the wrong approach to the situation. The first job of the manager is to convince those who are in the position to select a manager to do it early enough so that the manager can plan. In the past there have been times when the team manager wasn't selected until after the team was chosen. This really puts the manager behind the eight-ball. You need time beforehand to think what you will need to do to serve these people.

Usually the team manager is selected first. Now, there are two ways you can form the rest of the administrative staff of the team. One way is to let the team manager select his own staff of assistants and gunsmiths, or the national governing body can select these people and place them with the team manager. I feel if the team manager is to be responsible for the performance of the team, he should have a voice in the selection of the people who will work with him. The key is the ability of these people to get along with each other. Also they should have proven ability to work with shooters. The whole thing is compatibility. You need people who are willing to put in a twenty-eight hour day in a twenty-four hour day.

So, the team manager first of all performs a series of administrative functions. If he has a hand in the preparation of a budget, he should be capable of knowing what he needs in terms of travel, training costs, billeting, meals, equipment, clothing, etc. On U.S. shooting teams, usually the team manager is presented with an amount of money that he must work within.

From the host country comes a number of forms that must be filled out by the participating country's team manager. Information on such forms includes biographical data, insurance, country clearance, firearm serial numbers, passports, pictures, inoculations, etc., that must be done ahead of time.

Then it's good to work out a training plan and a match plan. Settle basic ideas on how much training prior to departure you want to do, how long it will be, where it will be conducted. Then once at the match site, determine how much training time you have, what sequence the training will follow.

Also, you need to formulate a movement plan. Type of transportation must be selected. The team manager must work with transportation people on the handling of excess baggage and the special requirements of taking firearms and ammunition. With the laws we have in this country, ammunition can become a monstrous problem because the regulations limit transport to fifty pounds of smallarms ammunition per cargo load in a plane. It is necessary to go to the airline and the FAA people

and convince them to count only the weight of actual explosive material in the ammunition. This way you can take a fifty-five man team with enough ammunition for two weeks firing without exceeding the fifty pound limit. Shotgun ammo, of course, has the most amount of powder.

Next comes clothing. When team selection is so close to the event, as in the situation we are now facing with the Olympics, this becomes a problem. People come in different sizes and when you deal with clothing people, they invariably don't have the correct sizes and need lead-time to get them. I'm doing a great deal of calling right now trying to get the clothing and equipment we need. Also many of these manufacturers, knowing they are supplying a U.S. team, take special pride in that fact. Therefore, they want to tailor-make clothing or equipment, which is a nice benefit to the shooter.

Another thing I always try to do is have a published plan. This would be in the form of three to six typewritten pages that tells all aspects of the match and what is expected of people. It includes the names and addresses of team officials, where they can be reached by phone, the dates of departure, ramifications of transportation from home to match site and return, expected weather conditions, clothing information. Shooting is considered a warm weather sport. However, the last few years, we've needed handwarmers everytime. List equipment and make the shooter responsible for his equipment meeting the ISU legal specifications. If there is any question, the shooter is to contact the team manager, so it can be checked prior to departure. A shooter should not assume something will pass. He must be sure. He should raise any question he might have. Inform the team members how much ammunition should be taken and include a billeting plan - who he will or will not sleep with. In rooms, that is! Most shooters don't smoke, so they should not be asked to room with a smoker.

Once we get a site, be it the match site or an assembly or training site, I use the philosophy that the fewer meetings the better. A shooter, being human, likes to plan his day. You don't need someone on short notice telling you of a meeting that day at three o'clock. Give plenty of notice on meetings and keep them to a minimum. I like to use a bulletin board that shooters are required to check each morning, putting down information needed for each day. As long as everyone uses it and gets the message, stay with it. Don't harass the troops.

At the match event, the team manager has a series of administrative meetings, such as drawing for squadding and local range procedures. All this information must be relayed to shooters. The team manager is also responsible for making challenges or protests. You have several disciplines going on at one time, such as rifle, pistol, shotgun, running boar. It is important to keep in contact with all these people and if you must leave, let them know where to get in contact with you. It's a matter of checking on everything. The manager's job is to solve all the problems for his team. However, you cannot solve a problem if the shooter does not relay it to you, either through his coach or directly to you. On a large team, with coaches for each discipline, it is best to go to the coach first and let him relay the information to the manager. Don't sit in the corner and moan to yourself. Bring the problem to the attention of your team administrators.

Now, I have a bit of philosophy to mention. I've seen and heard of team managers and staff, who once they get a team, envision themselves like team sport

coaches who begin changing everybody's life style and shifting people around on events. My feeling is that the team administrators should not play games with the shooters. If the shooter has earned his way onto the team, he should shoot that event unless he becomes incapable of shooting. The reverse of this is having shoot-offs for a four man team say, out of maybe six people. The shooters are asked to keep shooting, keep turning in scores and the manager tells the guy the night before that he's going to shoot. This is extremely damaging to the mental preparation of the shooters in my opinion. You get a better response from a person if he knows the job he has to do. Then he can take the time to prepare himself mentally. I don't hear any contradictions to this - so I guess you agree.

To sum it up, the job of the team administrators is to take every possible strain off the shooter. This leaves the shooter only one responsibility, to produce a score on the day he is supposed to. Don't harass the shooters. They shot their way onto a U.S. team, so they must have something going for them that got them there. Treat them as competent adults. This goes back to the original philosophy that the team manager is there because there is a team, not the team is there because there is a manager. You try to shield the shooters from well-wishers and parents who can sometimes be overwhelming. It's my opinion that these people divert the mental processes of the shooters. The shooter can't prepare properly with constant attention or distractions from the side.

On dress code, my policy is that the shooter should wear what is comfortable and familiar. Off the line, if necessary, the manager prescribes what is to be worn.

After the match, the team manager is responsible to prepare a final report for the national governing body. This includes everything that went on, especially problem areas, so that they can be anticipated the next time.

In essence, the team manager is called a go-fer. You go-fer this, you go-fer that at the wishes of the shooter. So you have go-fers and assistant go-fers. We've yet to have a go-fes, though someday we may see that too. I hope this has been interesting to you. I've never been asked to speak on managing a team before.

MA: I thought it would be interesting for our juniors to know that it really is not an easy task to manage a team. Certainly Joe, you did this well in Switzerland and if shooters understand what you do and what your responsibilities are, then they will understand better what their responsibilities are to make your job easier and make the whole team run better. It's good to know both sides.

LW: I'd like to make a comment. I've been on a lot of U.S. teams and I've seen a lot of different managers, some good, some bad, some worse. For you new shooters who haven't been on teams, you don't realize how well off we are now as compared to teams in the past. We've come a long way in the last few years. We finally have team managers and coaches who are really interested in the shooter's welfare. I've been on three teams with Joe as manager and without a doubt he's the best team captain I've ever been associated with. That may not be saying a whole lot, considering the caliber of the others we've been associated with! No, Joe has done an outstanding job. He feels the reason he is there is to help the shooter and I feel the same way. The shooter is the one who has the job to do and needs all the

cooperation he can get from everyone, including the team manager. It's an important job and the team administrators should be qualified to do it. It shouldn't be given to someone because he's a nice guy or because he's been in the NRA for thirty-five years and they want to do something for him. We've come a long way on this. We've had outstanding team managers and coaches these last few years, in the rifle at least, and I hope it can continue because it contributes to the overall effort of the U.S. team.

MA: Who makes the selection of U.S. shooting team officials?

JB: The NRA International Committee makes the selection now. Up to and including this year, the U.S. Olympic Shooting Committee, which includes the NRA International Committee members, has made the selection. Sometimes they have selected the full roster of team officials and sometimes they name only the manager and he has strong input into the Committee as to who he would like, after having time to think about it. It's important to have people who can work together with no personal conflicts. All the team officials must be approved by the U.S. Olympic Shooting Committee in the case of the Olympics and Pan American Games. This committee is now defunct so the NRA International Committee will have the responsibility in the future.

TW: What about the language barrier? Do you carry your own interpreter or rely on the host country?

JB: Sometimes we have people on the team who speak pigeon Spanish or pigeon Deutsch, but normally the host country provides interpreters. English is almost the international language now, so you can usually get your message across.

MA: Joe, we thank you for giving us real insight into the job of team administrators. Hopefully, it will help us do our part as shooters on future U.S. teams.