

Tips on Being a Good Competitor

Prepared by the NRA Competitions Division

Tournament officials are not the only ones who have duties at a match. The success of any match depends as much on the competitors as it does on the proper functioning of tournament officials. Match personnel and competitors must work together during a tournament.

Here are some general rules which, if practiced consistently, will contribute to the smooth operation of any match as well as making you a welcome addition to the competition.

Know the Program

The only way to know both what to expect at a match, as well as what is expected of you, is to GET A COPY OF THE PROGRAM AND READ IT THOROUGHLY. Saying "I didn't know that" isn't going to make any difference to other competitors or to a jury. The conditions under which the match is going to be fired are listed in the program. Once you've paid your entry fee, you've accepted those conditions. Familiarizing yourself with the program in advance is the only way to be sure you'll be free to concentrate on your shooting.

Check Your Equipment

The night before you leave for a match, get ALL your equipment together in one place and make sure you have everything you'll need. Be sure that your ammo is right for the gun you'll be shooting, and that you have enough for the course of fire planned. Take along a screwdriver, pencil or pen (fiber tips are terrible in the rain) and your eye and ear protection. Even if you don't normally wear glasses, and you're sure that shooting .22 caliber won't bother you, you *need* eye and ear protection. Many ranges have a mandatory eye and ear protection requirement. Don't forget rain gear – you'd rather have it and not need it than the other way around. Be sure to take your data book, classification card or Silhouette book and your NRA membership card. There is a checklist at the end of this publication which you can use to help get organized before you leave home. Eventually, most of the above will become automatic, but it never hurts to use your checklist each time.

Guns and Ammo

Make absolutely certain the the gun or guns you are going to use are clean, in the best condition, zeroed and legal for the tournament. When appropriate, you'll want to take along extra magazines or clips. Again, be sure you have enough ammunition to complete the tournament, including extras for possible re-fires or shootoffs. You'd hate to forfeit a match because you ran out of ammo for the gun you will be shooting.

Know the Rules

How well you know the rules? All competitive shooters, novice or experienced, should have a copy of the current rule book for the competition they're shooting, and should be familiar with it. If a rule is unclear to you, you can ask a tournament official or Official Referee for help, or contact the NRA Competitions Division for clarification. There are two important things to remember about the rules:

1. The rules apply to everyone, from a High Master with several National Championships to his credit to a Marksman attending his second match; and
2. You may not agree with all the rules, but you must follow them, both the spirit and the intent.

Key Technicalities

There are a few details not generally covered by rule books or tournament programs, but which are important:

1. Be sure your entry card is filled out completely, correctly AND legibly. Include current classification and special category, when appropriate. Your NRA ID Number is required as it is the key to your records.
2. At any match where competitors score for each other, you must make neat, legible figures. There must be no question whether a figure is a "1" or a "7", and each box on the scorecard must be properly filled in with a figure. For example, in High Power Matches, a miss is an "M", it is not an empty space, a dash, or anything else. In a match, an "X" in the first box, followed by a line through the next nine boxes DOES NOT mean 10 X's, but 1 X and 9 misses. As the scorer, how would you like to inform the shooter that his first "clean" ever doesn't exist as far as the Stat Office is concerned?
3. To carry our example further, the shooter also has the responsibility to make sure the score fired has been marked on the card properly, and if not, to take the proper steps to change it through the Range Officer. Never sign your scorecard until you have fired the match and have verified the shot values and total score shown on the card. Once you and the scorer have signed the card, you've accepted the shot values indicated there and have no appeal.
4. Know the difference between a "challenge" and a "protest". You challenge the evaluation of a particular shot. You protest: a) any injustice you feel has been done to you (except the evaluation of the target); b) the conditions under which another shooter has been permitted to fire; or c) the equipment which another competitor has been permitted to use.

Some competitors feel that protesting is "causing trouble" and they "don't want to make waves". These same competitors will then complain "unofficially" about another competitor and everything "that person's allowed to get away with". Don't forget, if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. If you, as a competitor, see valid rule infractions which are not corrected after notifying a match official, protest and get an official ruling from a Referee or Jury.

5. Be Punctual. Better than being punctual, get there early. An hour is sometimes not too long to get squading, get your gear, and get ready to participate. If the program states the match begins at 8:00AM, you can be 99% sure that the first relay will be on the line at 8:00AM ready-to-shoot. Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the match, especially if the location of the range is unfamiliar to you. Arriving late and rushing about to get yourself and your equipment ready is almost guaranteed to ruin your shooting day, so give yourself plenty of time. If you arrive after the 3 minute preparation period, you might not be able to shoot at all.
6. Don't be afraid to go to your first match. Everyone has to start somewhere. Provided you follow the rules, other shooters are always happy and willing to answer questions and help you along.
7. Offer to help out. The vast majority of tournaments are conducted by just a handful of volunteers. Extra help is always welcome. Granted, you've paid your entry fee and are entitled to devote your attention to your shooting, but you can still offer to police the range after the match, put away equipment or any number of other tasks. Without the people who give up their shooting time in order to provide it for others, there wouldn't be a tournament. So do your part as a competitor.

8. Be sure clothing worn to a tournament reflects your concern for comfort and safety as well as recognition on your part that competitive shooting should be represented in as positive a manner as possible. Especially when TV or newspaper coverage will take place, attire should be in good taste in order to enhance the image of this sport being conveyed to the general public. Items containing controversial or offensive slogans or which, in any other way, could detract from the traditional sporting aspect of competition are unnecessary and strongly discouraged. In some cases, inappropriate clothing could be the basis for a match sponsor not allowing a competitor to participate.
9. Enjoy yourself. Sometimes it's hard to remember to do that, but try to keep in mind that while competitive shooting can be serious, demanding, and nerve-wracking, it is still great fun and is populated by the nicest people in the world – other shooters.

Match Equipment Checklist

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| _____ Firearms | _____ Shooting Stool / Equipment |
| _____ Data Book / Diary | _____ Stopwatch |
| _____ Ammunition | _____ Wind Indicator (if allowed) |
| _____ NRA Classification Card | _____ Sight Blacking |
| _____ NRA Membership Card | _____ Target Clips |
| _____ Eye Protection | _____ Ammo Block |
| _____ Ear Protection | _____ Tournament Program |
| _____ Spotting Scope, Stand and Extensions | _____ Directions to Range |
| _____ Sling | _____ Food / Drink |
| _____ Small Tool Set | _____ Apertures (optional) |
| _____ Glove | _____ Sights / Scopes |
| _____ Shooting Hat | _____ Sweatshirts |
| _____ Shooting Jacket / Vest | _____ Rain Gear |
| _____ Shooting Pants | _____ Mirage Strap (optional) |
| _____ Glasses Side Shields | _____ NRA Rule Book |
| _____ Boots | _____ Cleaning Gear |
| _____ Kneeling Roll (optional – check course of fire) | _____ Handstop (optional) |
| _____ Shooting Mat | _____ Rifle Accessories |
| _____ Clips / Magazines | _____ Pens / Pencils |
| _____ Gun Lubrication | |