

# McNally's Luck

The United States' best hope for a medal in Men's Rapid Fire Pistol this July may be John McNally of Dallas, Texas.

John's dad, Jim McNally, is a two-time Olympic shooter and World Championships medal winner. The elder McNally had John shooting when he was twelve, and twenty-eight years later, at the age of forty, John McNally will participate in his fourth Olympics next month. His experience gives him a wide, long view of the Rapid Fire Pistol event, and he shared some of his perspectives about how the game has changed over the last two decades.

Both McNallys attended the 1996 World Cup at the Wolf Creek Shooting Complex in Atlanta. John had slipped to 16th place in the elimination round and barely made the qualifying round. There he suffered through back-to-back malfunction alibis in his last four-second string without dropping a point, making the finals. He eventually took a bronze behind Ralf Schumann of Germany and Krzysztof Kucharczyk of Poland.

John shoots a custom FAS that bears little resemblance to the out-of-the-box High Standard pistol Jim used when he competed. The gun and grips are designed so that the center of the bore is in line with the web of the hand. This causes the recoil to push straight back to dampen muzzle rise. The new-style grips have improved dramatically over the old 1911 design of Jim's day. They use a radical angle that forces the wrist to bend down and to lock in position. The full wraparound design is very tight on John's hand, and when locked into the grip you can actually see his hand bulging a little as the blood flow is restricted. John says he can only hold the gun so long without a break, and he will remove his hand between strings. The grip is so tight that he has developed a callous on his hand and wrist where the grip contacts. This all helps to stabilize the gun in his hand for the fast shooting needed in this event.

The FAS's barrel is ported just ahead of the chamber to dampen recoil. The ports are near the chamber so that the mild .22 shorts used in this sport will generate enough pressure to create a jet action that combat's muzzle rise. There is an obvious loss in leverage with this placement, but it's the only place the compensation ports will function. Recently, John has been experimenting with port diameter to find its effect on accuracy. This has become much more important because the size of the target has become smaller since Jim's day. Also, with the new targets that are scored to a tenth of a point, it becomes

important that the shots are centered in the 10 ring.

John's gun wears a custom 6-inch barrel. He says that the longer barrel of the FAS guns has a definite accuracy advantage over other guns with shorter barrels. His guns will shoot match-ammo groups of .38 inch at 25 meters, while other popular pistols may double or triple that group size.

He likes his guns light so that it is easier to overcome the inertia and stop the gun at each target. The frame is aluminum, as is everything else except the bolt, slide, barrel, and grips. The trade off is in muzzle flip, but McNally will sacrifice that for a lighter gun. The trigger pull on the FAS is 85 grams, or about 2.8 ounces.

John says that at any given match there are several shooters who have the skill to win. It all comes down to who can handle the pressure the best and, he adds, you cannot practice for that. You have to pay your dues, and that means that you need to crash and burn at some big matches to learn how to act under pressure. Practice and matches are so totally different that it can't be learned any other way.

"These World Cups are great," he says. "They give a U.S. shooter four or five opportunities a year to shoot against the big boys."

John is older than most shooters, and he says that his experience outweighs the physical loss that has come with age. "In the '92 Olympics, my first shot was off in .9 seconds. Now it's 1.4 seconds. However, I believe that my experience is compensating for that." He likes that first shot off fast and he constantly works to lower the time.

He believes that repetition is important to becoming competitive, and at one point he was shooting 500 rounds a day.

"You need to condition your brain," says his dad and coach. "By the time a basketball player makes the pros, he will have made more than 1,000,000 baskets. This is the same thing." Jim says reps create a clear path for the neurons in the brain to move to your hand. Repetition makes the path grow. As you practice, the pathway changes from a two-lane blacktop road to a four-lane highway, and then to an eight-lane expressway. "I have done so many repetitions in my life," says John, "that I can come back after a two-year layoff and all I need is a street sweeper to knock the debris off the 'road.'"

"The secret is to put a clear front sight on the middle of target and let the gun go off, then move to the next target and do it again. It's all in that front sight. Put that clear front sight in the middle of a blurry target and let it go. Of course, you need to learn how to do it real fast!"

—Bryce M. Towsley