

Wigger Is A Doper—Wind Doper, That Is

As all serious rifle shooters know, doping the wind is a subtle skill, one of the small things that can make a big difference in precision shooting. The lessons of wind doping have never been lost of American shooting legend Lones Wigger. Wigger, who is one of only 13 shooters in history to have won two Olympic gold medals (1964, 1972), as well as a silver medal while competing in three Olympic games (1964, 1968, and 1972) in the rifle shooting events. Wigger was recently named one of the top 100 Olympic athletes of all time, the only shooter so honored in that elite group.

In an interview with *PERFORMANCE SHOOTER* at the recent UIT World Cup shooting competition at Atlanta's Wolf Creek Shooting Complex, Wigger pointed out that even the world's best shooters still have trouble in doping the wind.

"I tell everyone who wants to compete at the world level that it takes years of elbow grease to become skilled enough to compete at the highest levels," said Wigger, "then it takes about five more years to learn how to win. Those extra five years of experience, once a shooter's skills are honed, give him or her time to learn about the many little things that can make a big difference at the elite levels of competition."

One of those subtle skills is wind doping. "Doping the wind is one of the most overlooked subtleties in rifle shooting," Wigger said. "When you're talking about the kind of scores the best shooters post day in and day out, losing just a point or two because you did not adjust for the wind can mean the difference between finishing at the top and in the middle of the pack.

"The best example I can give you from my own experience is from the day I set a world record," Wigger said. "We were shooting overseas in an open venue that was built a little differently from most of the others we shot at in those days. It had one fairly open side, and a prevailing wind that would blow in from one direction. However, it would bounce off a hillside and come back across the field the other way, but only show this movement at the flags nearest the targets. It was so hard to pick that up, I was the only shooter who did. I watched the flags and tried to time my shots to coincide with the wind. My first shot was a 9, but every other one was a 10. No one else scored well at all that day, but because I could figure out the wind, I won easily."

Wigger said that in longer-distance centerfire shooting, the wind combined with mirage can affect shooters even more. "The wind can actually shift the mirage, fooling the shooter into thinking he's seeing something he really is



Above: At the Wolf Creek 50-meter range, Lones Wigger says that wind may fool shooters in the semi-closed venue. Though competitors are protected from the rear and the sides by walls, downrange screens and walls set up to protect television cameramen can cause swirls and wind rebounds that are difficult to read.

not," Wigger said. "I've seen it so bad on hot-weather days that a shot would be off as much as from the 10 ring to the 8 ring at 300 meters simply because the heat mirage shifted in the wind."

In Olympic smallbore competition, the wind is also a factor, Wigger said. At this July's Olympics, where temperatures are expected to reach or exceed 100 degrees and the humidity will be high as well, the top shooters will have to take great care in studying the wind. "I don't think mirage will be a factor at the Olympics, as it rarely is in the short 50-meter games," Wigger said. "But the prevailing winds certainly will be."

Wigger said that the rule of thumb is to pay closest attention to the flag nearest the shooter because this wind has more time to act on a bullet in flight than breezes blowing farther downrange. At the Wolf Creek 50-meter range, however, Wigger said that shooters should pay close attention to the most distant set of flags. "In this semi-closed venue, the shooters are protected from the rear and the sides by walls," Wigger said. "Also, there are screens set part of the way down range, as well as walls set up to protect television cameramen. In this case the winds are usually slowest near the shooter, but can pick up enough to affect the shots downrange. Also, there is the chance that the winds will bounce back off the walls and across the field in a reverse wind."

—Bob Robb