

Other World-Class Technology and Techniques

National Rifle Coach Robert Mitchell oversees the development of shooters in several rifle disciplines, but he has noticed trends common to all of them. Here are some of his insights about how gear and guns and good scores are changing how Olympic shooters train:

“Shooting has always been technology driven,” Mitchell said. “The invention of the electronic scoring is only the latest development. Despite technological innovations, however, the guns and the ammo aren’t any more accurate than they were 30 or 40 years ago. Clothing is where you’ve seen a lot of high-tech stuff, a lot of development.”

“Another area of improvement has been in athlete performance. Scores are much higher than they were 10 years ago, and we’re shooting a smaller target. Much of this advancement, I believe, has been due to the availability of more information about correct shooting techniques. Also, shooters just keep pushing the envelope as far as scores go. When [Rajmond] Debevec shoots 1170s and 1180s consis-

tently, other shooters begin to believe they can shoot those scores, too. It moves everyone forward a notch.”

“The finals have injected another area of training that can either ruin you or elevate you. We view the finals as a separate aspect of shooting. It’s not prone, standing, or kneeling. It’s the finals. There’s a different time frame, and because of the excitement, most shooters can’t hold the rifle nearly as well. They need to train for that. But how do you create the pressure and excitement of the finals? One way we do it is to say, ‘Here’s \$20. We’re shooting for lunch.’ Anything we can do to raise the stakes helps us deal with pressure and anxiety the finals produce.”

“If anything, we will have a home-field disadvantage in Atlanta. When you take shooters overseas, it’s not hard to separate them from parents and friends and keep them focused on what they have to do. The advantage, of course, is to be able to shoot on this range, even if it’s only for a few more days than the rest of the world.”