

2008 Olympic Team Preview

It took nearly two months of legal arguing, but finally by early May the 2008 Australian Olympic Shooting Team was settled. It seems that Barristers and Solicitors play an unfortunate, but necessary role in determining the composition of any team these days no matter what selection policy is adopted by Australian International Shooting Limited (AISL). There were three appeals lodged against the nominated athletes put forward to the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) by AISL. The appeals were first heard by an independent tribunal appointed on behalf of AISL to determine whether there were any grounds for appeal based on the non compliance of the policy. If an appeal was upheld at this level the matter is referred back to the AISL Selection Panel for review. If the appealing athlete found the decision unacceptable after the Panel has referred the matter back to the Tribunal for its final decision then they had the option to take the matter further to the Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) which is the last avenue of appeal. Under the terms of the AOC's Selection Policy it is every athlete's right to appeal a nomination by the individual sport's National Federation to the AOC and final nominations cannot be accepted until the appeals procedure has been exhausted. It can become a lengthy, expensive and emotionally draining process, but one which I feel is here to stay for future team selections.

The team was nominated after four designated competitions between October 2007 and March 2008. There are seven Shotgun shooters and five competitors in each of the Pistol and Rifle disciplines. The following athletes and officials will represent Australia at the Olympic Games in August.

SHOTGUN

Final

Men's Trap:	Michael Diamond	NSW	August 10th
	Craig Henwood	VIC	August 10th
Men's Double Trap:	Russell Mark	VIC	August 12th
Men's Skeet:	George Barton	NSW	August 16th
	Paul Rahman	VIC	August 16th
Women's Trap:	Stacy Roiall	VIC	August 11th
Women's Skeet:	Natalia Rahman	VIC	August 14 th
<i>Shotgun Coach:</i>	<i>Valeriy Timokhin</i>	<i>VIC</i>	

PISTOL

Men's Free:	David Moore	NSW	August 12 th
	Daniel Repacholi	VIC	August 12 th
Men's Air:	Daniel Repacholi	VIC	August 9 th
	David Moore	NSW	August 9 th
Men's Rapid Fire:	Bruce Quick	VIC	August 16 th
Women's Air:	Dina Aspandiyarova	VIC	August 10 th
	Lalita Yauhleuskaya	VIC	August 10 th
Women's Sport:	Lalita Yauhleuskaya	VIC	August 14 th
	Dina Aspandiyarova	VIC	August 14 th
<i>Pistol Coach:</i>	<i>Anatoly Babushkin</i>	<i>VIC</i>	

RIFLE

Men's Prone:	Warren Potent	NSW	August 15 th
	Benjamin Burge	VIC	August 15 th
Men's Air:	Matthew Inabinet	VIC	August 11 th
	Benjamin Burge	VIC	August 11 th
Men's 3 Position:	Benjamin Burge	VIC	August 17 th
	Matthew Inabinet	VIC	August 17 th
Women's Air:	Susan McCready	VIC	August 9 th
	Robyn Van Nus	WA	August 9 th
Women's 3 Position:	Susan McCready	VIC	August 14 th
	Robyn Van Nus	WA	August 14 th
<i>Rifle Coach:</i>	<i>Miroslav Sipek</i>	<i>VIC</i>	

Team Manager: ***Nick Sullivan*** ***SA***

For the uninitiated there are five events on offer in each of the three shooting disciplines. Australia has qualified to have a representative in all fifteen events. This was determined by an international quota system that took place at the 2007 Oceania Games and all World Cup and World Championship events in 2005, 2006 and 2007. If a competitor is using one of their countries quota positions they are then eligible to be nominated to compete at the Olympics only if they have achieved a Minimum Qualifying Score (MQS) as specified by the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). This score must be obtained once at any of the pre determined world class events that are conducted under the strict rules of the ISSF. After the completion of the Oceania Games in October 2007 only athletes who had an ISSF MQS were eligible to shoot off for the Olympic nominations. A maximum of two shooters can be entered in each event provided they have the required MQS. In Beijing you will see several shooters “doubling” over into other events that they have an MQS in. This is very common in Rifle and Pistol, but rarely seen these days in the Shotgun events as the competitors here seem to be more specialized. In Olympic Rifle and Pistol events there are competitions for both Air and .22 calibre firearms, but unlike the Commonwealth Games and World Championships there are no Centrefire matches. Clay Target events are limited to 24 grams of maximum shot size number 7 and shotguns no larger than 12 gauge. Side by Side, Semi Automatic and Under and Over Shotguns are all allowed, but 100% of the field will use the latter configuration. Release trigger guns are prohibited. All Olympic events are conducted for individual awards only. There are no team competitions.

Unfortunately due to pressure from the IOC, Shooting has lost two events from the last Olympic Games in 2004. Women’s Double Trap in Shotgun and Running Target in Rifle have both been eliminated from the program. This is largely due to the fact that the IOC wants more “beds” available in the Olympic Village for other athletes as it introduces and expands the more popular sports whilst not wanting to increase the overall number of participants. One of the biggest tasks that the ISSF face in the future in regards to Olympic participation is keeping the shooting sports media friendly. By this I am suggesting that unless the event can be covered favourably by television then it faces an uphill battle to keep its Olympic status. Fortunately over the past twenty years the ISSF have made great inroads into making all of the ‘Finals’ great spectator events due to such innovations as electronic targets for Pistol and Rifle and easy to see “flash” targets that explode into a paintball of smoke when hit in the Shotgun competitions.

Of the seventeen Australian competitors, five are making their debut, which is a significant number. Whilst experience is always a great benefit, constant turnover in team members is just as important as often it will take more than one Olympics to gain the most out of an athlete. The reality is the Olympics are different than a Commonwealth Games or World Championship. I concede they are different in ‘theory’ only as the events themselves are shot in exactly the same format as other major tournaments, but the Olympics can be a very daunting event for the first time competitor due to the scrutiny the event is placed under by the general public, media and even family and friends of the athletes. The great benefit I see

for our five first time Olympians is that they already have a great deal of international experience under their belts and shooting competitive scores has not been a problem.

The team has some outstanding medal prospects. The most improved shooter in Australia and possibly the world since the last Olympic Games in Athens has been Prone Rifle shooter Warren Potent. Warren at 46 years of age is still getting better. He is ranked world number one by a sizeable margin after he again medalled (Bronze) at the first World Cup of the year in Brazil. To top this effort at the Olympic Test event in Beijing the following month he won another Gold Medal and along the way equalled the 'Finals' World Record with a staggering 704.8 points. This follows his two World Cup Gold Medals in 2007. The turnaround in form by Warren has been nothing less than amazing although we should not forget that way back in 1986, in what was then East Germany, he was part of the World Championship Gold Medalling winning and World Record breaking Australian Prone Team. Hardly an overnight sensation I would dare to say. For this reason he will be starting as favourite on August 15th. Michael Diamond will also start as the number one contender in the Men's Trap competition. The reigning World Champion and World Record holder will only have himself to beat as he makes his way towards a history making third Gold Medal. Michael's partner will be the twenty nine year old debutant Craig Henwood from the Melbourne Gun Club in Victoria. Craig finished a solitary point ahead of 2004 Bronze Medallist Adam Vella after the six months of trials. He then had a nervous wait as Vella unsuccessfully appealed against his non selection by AISL to the Olympic Team.

Probably the next two medal prospects are Pistol Shooters Lalita Yauhleuskaya and Dina Aspandiyarova in the Sport and Air events. Both ladies are constant finalists at nearly every World Cup they attend and with a touch of luck a podium finish is a distinct possibility. Lalita was the 2000 Olympic Bronze Medallist in Sport Pistol when she was competing for her native country of Belarus. In the Women's Trap competition Stacy Roiall from Victoria makes her first Olympic appearance at the expense of reigning Gold Medallist Suzy Balogh. Her world ranking of eleven (May 2008) sells her short of her real chances in Beijing. A World Cup Gold and Bronze Medallist in 2004 and 2005, Stacy has had a roller coaster career already. Surprisingly she missed selection for the 2006 Commonwealth Games, but then fronted at the Opening Ceremony in Melbourne as the head coach of the Falkland Islands Team. She is diversified in her shooting talents and is a big chance on August 11th.

Two interesting family pairings in this year's team include Victorian Skeet shooting brother and sister Paul and Natalia Rahman as well as recently married husband and wife Pistol and Rifle competitors, Daniel Repacholi and Susan McCready. I would think this is a first in the Olympic Shooting Team on both accounts and certainly would be quite unusual in most other sports as well. At this stage sadly for Daniel and Susan the village is separated into male and female rooms only, but they are hoping some unisex accommodation can be found for their stay in Beijing although their coaches may disagree.

Benjamin Burge will be the busiest shooter on the team competing in three Rifle events accompanying Warren Potent in Prone and Matthew Inabinet, who will be competing at his second Olympics, in Air and Three Position. Robyn Van Nus, the sole non Victorian or New

South Welshmen in the team, will also make her Olympic debut and compete in both Women's Rifle events. Robyn was the last competitor named officially for China, nearly two months after the first athletes, as she had to endure a long and drawn out appeals process against her original nomination from AISL. Unfortunately the appeals process cost Robyn the chance to compete at the test event, but this hopefully won't have a detrimental effect on her performance at the Games. It is worth noting that two of our Pistol Shooters with unique occupations in 48 year old Bruce Quick and 54 year old David Moore are making their second and third Olympic appearances respectively in China with no signs of retirement in sight. Bruce is a Radiologist specializing in Nuclear Medicine and David is an instructor of Boeing 747 pilots. If you are ever on a Jumbo Jet where the pilots get sick then these are the guys you want on board with you.

The Shooting Range in Beijing has been purpose built to host the Olympics, but will no doubt be utilized to host major Asian and World events for many years to come. Most athletes gave the range a confident thumbs up after competing there in April. The weather at this event played a major part in the overall scores with very cold and wet conditions at times making high scoring difficult as Tamworth Skeet shooter George Barton would testify after his great 5th place in the constant driving rain. The cold certainly won't be an issue in August with temperatures in the mid thirties predicted with extreme humidity. Curiously the Chinese Olympic Committee has been experimenting with the weather science of "Cloud Seeding" with such great success they are guaranteeing a "dry" Opening Ceremony. Dry meaning "no rain", not "no beer". Stay tuned on this one, but from all reports they have mastered the art of making the rain clouds precipitate over the surrounding hills and mountains around Beijing thus leaving the urban areas where the Olympic Stadium is situated with fine stable weather. The much spoken about smog certainly will be a factor in many sports, but won't really play a role in the outcome of the medals at the shooting range.

The Chinese team as a whole will provide the biggest competition. The home ground advantage will be significant coupled with the fact that this is now the home of their National Shooting Team. They also will have had exclusive use of the range for the four months prior to the Games commencing. The Russian, Italian, United States and German teams all performed very well at the test event and will again be countries to watch.

As always success at the Olympic Games will carry some weight towards future funding of the shooting sports. Although not entirely dependent on results in Beijing, it will always be far easier to negotiate new initiatives and increased funding from the Australian Sports Commission if the sport has Olympic Medallist's. At the 1900 Paris Games, when live pigeons were used instead of clay targets, Donald Macintosh won a Gold and Bronze Medal. We waited eighty four years for our next medal then another twelve before the medal drought was again broken in 1996 with three Olympic podium finishes. This was repeated in 2000. 2004 produced two more medals and I think that two or three medals would be a realistic expectation once again in 2008. Channel 7 are the Australian television broadcast rights holder for the Beijing Games and will generally only televise live coverage of any finals which Australians have a realistic chance of winning a medal. Let us all hope we get plenty of "live" action during the second and third weeks of August.

