

## **The Best or the Fairest - April 2004**

There is not one perfect system for selecting all of Australia's Olympic Team's in the twenty-seven different sports that will represent us in Athens this August. The 'no extenuating circumstances' clause that worked its way into the Australian Shooting Association's selection policy for the first time this Olympiad has proven to be far from perfect. The Olympic Shooting Trials have turned into a soap opera in which Michael Diamond and Nathan Cassells have played the starring roles. It does raise an interesting point though, do we want to select our 'best' team or do we want to select our 'fairest' team? The two are often very different.

Nathan Cassells is probably the most popular competitor in Clay Target Shooting in this country. Extremely modest, supremely talented, quick witted and a typical 'she'll be right mate' Aussie attitude. He is a former Junior World Champion and in 2001 he teamed up with Michael Diamond, to win the World Team's Championship. Diamond is Australia's best shooter and in my opinion he holds the same title on the world stage. I have seen his mere presence on the range scare his opponents. The 2001 World Championships were held in Cairo, coincidentally the scene of Diamond's next great challenge at the World Cup event there next Tuesday. The night prior to that Championship in 2001 Diamond had missed his flight to Egypt from Greece and had to sleep on the airport floor as the next flight was eighteen hours later. After a restless night he finally made his connection, but not in time for the official training day prior to competition. I made it however and distinctly remember how happy all of his competitors were to hear he wouldn't be a serious contender with no practice, jet lag and probably a bad back courtesy of the airport floor in Athens. Wrong! He took home both team and individual gold medals in an awesome performance. Diamond is at his best when faced with enormous adversity. He is the world's greatest marksmen.

Cassells went through the ASA's published ( June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003 ) selection policy and made the second of the two Olympic places on offer under the original format. Diamond didn't attend because at that time his shooters licence was suspended whilst he fought his innocence of assault and firearm charges in the Queanbeyan Magistrates Court. On the morning of the first Olympic Trial on January 9<sup>th</sup> the ASA published a press statement stating that the original selection policy was to stand, they wished Diamond all the best in his future endeavours and say the sport must move on. On January 28<sup>th</sup> Diamond is found not guilty and is given back his right to use a firearm, a privilege he had not had since early October last year. The second Olympic trial starts on February 12<sup>th</sup>, but Diamond is impossibly behind due to his non-attendance at the first event. The embarrassed ASA, whom you would have to assume were thinking Diamond was going to be found guilty anyway, buckle under the pressure of public opinion and amend their policy on February 9<sup>th</sup> three days before the second trial is due to start. The new selection policy has the two shooters jetting all over the world at three head to head battles. The first in Sydney four weeks ago ended in a deadlock. This coming week they compete in Cairo, the following week Athens.

We again get back to the argument what is best and what is fairest? Diamond is the best and if Nathan Cassells does not make the team he will no doubt put forward a case, maybe during an official appeal, that he has not been treated fairly. Cassells argues that nothing he did in his life made him have to justify his actions before a magistrate so why is he being penalised now? This is an argument that a few of Diamonds competitors obviously agreed with as many signed a petition before the second trial pleading for the original policy to be reinstated.

By April 23<sup>rd</sup> we will know which of these two marksmen will be nominated by the Australian Shooting Association to represent them at the Athens Olympics. Unfortunately someone has to lose, that's sport, but on this occasion I am concerned that the loser could be lost to shooting forever and their reasons for doing so will be very extenuating.