

## **August 2001 - Self-promotion**

In one of my earlier articles I commented on the fact that I did not believe shooting would ever get any 'everyday' media coverage in the mainstream media until a full-time publicity officer is employed under the Australian Shooting Association (ASA). This person would need to be employed to promote all forms of shooting, not just the Olympic disciplines, and they would need to be funded through contributions from all affiliates under the ASA's umbrella.

I can hear the arguments already forming. Who can afford to pay a publicist \$40,000 per annum? The real question is can we afford not to pay someone to promote the sport through the mainstream media?

As many of you know, I host a radio sports show on 3AW, one of Australia's biggest radio stations. For the most part, the stories that we cover on our six-hour program originate from other forms of the media, such as television and the daily newspapers, or from stories that appear on the wire service from media sources such as the Australian Associated Press.

In the four years I have been on radio, I have never once seen a shooting result or story appear on the wire service and only once a year do we see a story in a metropolitan newspaper or television station. Hence, the shooting content of my radio show is nil because there is no public interest.

I am tired of the argument that is put forward by a number of shooting organisations in Australia that say the media are simply anti-gun. Sure, there have certainly been journalists that have had some very radical anti-shooting opinions, but I would suggest, for the most part, that the media is simply ignorant because no-one from the shooting sports is promoting the sport from within.

If there is something newsworthy, all any executive of any of the affiliated bodies of the ASA needs to do is get in touch by phone, fax or e-mail with the Australian Associated Press office in their capital city. Then, dictate a simple story in layman's terms with results and a return contact phone number for further information. Within minutes this story will appear on every wire service in the country and across the world.

The more current the story, the better chance it has of being broadcast. By current, I mean if an Australian shooter in some world cup in Italy wins a medal, then it needs to be reported within the hour. All news services like to think they are running only the latest news.

Now you may say it is impracticable for a committee or executive member to be able to keep up with and then report on an overseas competition within Australia. I agree. A promotions officer would make this a part of their job and can report it in such a way that all the local radio newsreader would have to do is read the story straight off the wire

service without fear he is getting the technical aspect of the sport wrong. Most people outside the sport still think a rifle is used to break clay targets.

The Australian women's hockey team employs a full-time media liaison officer to promote the group. Even when they compete in a 'tinpot' tournament in Far East Asia against pitiful opposition, it is reported as though they have just beaten the world's best once again. If it sounds like I am jealous and envious of how hockey runs their sport, well I am. They do a great job. For the \$40,000 it costs them for their promotions officer, they get sponsorship tenfold and publicity of untold proportions. Why can't shooting do the same and reap the same rewards? There are a hell of a lot more shooters in Australia than female hockey players.

Earlier in the year I held a shooting day at the Werribee-Victorian Clay Target Club in Melbourne where I invited about 25 people who I have become friends with in the sporting world. None of them had ever shot a gun. The group included basketballer Andrew Gaze, 'Oarsome Foursome' member James Tomkins, athlete Tamsyn Lewis, swimmer Nicole Stevenson and many of the country's leading AFL footballers and netballers. Channel 7 got wind of the idea and wanted to film the day for a segment on the 'Sportsworld' show. The day was an outstanding success. Not only did the 25 participants go away with a completely different concept of the sport, but the media got to film a couple of dozen of the highest profile Australian sportspeople actually enjoying using firearms for recreation. That is the sort of publicity you cannot buy.

Every gun club in the country should at least try one open day per year where they invite their local councillors, media or any 'mover and shaker' with any influence within the community to participate in our sport. What we need to make sure of is that the next time our ability to use firearms for recreational purposes is threatened, we have some influential people from outside our sport prepared to fight for our cause as well. The days of preaching to the converted are over.

If our sport is going to cash in on the Olympic success we have enjoyed in recent times, then we need to act now. I am certainly not suggesting that shooting will ever feature regularly on the back page of our metropolitan newspapers, but state and national shooting championships can become newsworthy if they are promoted and reported properly.

We cannot afford to let another 'Port Arthur' type tragedy erase all the great inroads that we have made during the past five years. I urge all affiliates of the ASA to move into the new millennium and start promoting the sport with the professional personnel that it needs, deserves and must get.