

August 2004 - Olympic Shooting Team Post mortem

The Australian Olympic Shooting Team comprised 21 competitors, 14 men and 7 women. They contested 17 events in the four disciplines of Rifle, Pistol, Running Target and Shotgun. Lets take a closer look at how the nine days of competition unfolded for the Aussies at the Markopoulo Shooting Complex in Athens.

The highlight of the team's performances was undoubtedly Suzie Balogh's Gold Medal in the Women's Trap competition. To win an Olympic Gold Medal is one thing, but to win by four points is an amazing achievement. Balogh led the field from start to finish on a day that was probably the windiest of the entire shooting tournament. I would have to be honest and suggest that her Pre Games form in no way indicated this result, but she is a tough competitor, especially when she gets in front and can smell victory. Her beautiful smile won hearts across the country and we can seriously expect bigger and better things from the new Queen of Australian Shooting. Hopefully the shooting sports will capitalize on her success with an increase in female participation the obvious target. Suzie became our first female Shooting Gold Medallist in Olympic History.

Adam Vella stepped out from behind Michael Diamonds shadow to capture a Bronze Medal in the Men's Trap event. Nobody was going to beat Russian Alexander Alipovs score of 149, but Vella shot a strong final to hang on for third placing with a total of 145 from a possible 150. A former world number one, Vella's perseverance over the past decade has been justly rewarded. Our only other finalist was Lauryn Mark in the Women's Skeet where she finished in fourth place. She was not too disappointed as her age of twenty-four was nearly two decades shy of Hungarian Gold Medallist Diana Igaly. Mark was ranked fifth prior to the event and her result shows she is now entrenched in the top handful in the world.

Michael Diamond finished eighth, two points outside of the final. His score of 119 was far from a disgrace, but from a man who has raised the bar so high in recent years he would be disappointed with the result. Diamond had the weight of a nation on his shoulders as he had the opportunity to equal Dawn Fraser's record of three consecutive Gold Medals. It was not to be. The other performance of note was Susie Trindall's 7th place in the Women's Double Trap. Trindall finished just one point outside the Final with a great score of 106 points from a possible 120. Trindall is in the same boat as Mark as they have many Olympics waiting ahead of them.

Special mention must be made of Shotgun coach Greg Chan. Chan has had a difficult 12 months coping with the saga of Michael Diamonds court case, subsequent appeals, changes in the nominated selection policy and even debate with the Australian Olympic Committee over his teams technical equipment. In amongst all this he had to act as a mentor, ambassador and at times mediator within the team. All these things could easily have distracted his team's attention from the Games, but he managed to maintain their focus and achieve a very solid result in Athens. More importantly amongst all this he has still had time to look into the future and shape a very strong Clay Target Development Squad that could quite easily form a fair portion of our Beijing team in four years time.

What were the team's expectations? Before the Games we had only four shooters in the top ten in the world and only one in the top three. Statistically that means we had only one medal probability and three others should have been chances for the final. So should we be disappointed with our team's performance? Overall yes we should be. The High Performance Program is in its eleventh year and to have many of the results that our Rifle and Pistol Team returned is embarrassing to say the least. Its time to stop making excuses and start looking at performances. There is a HUGE gap between the achievements of shotgun compared to the other disciplines. You may be excused for thinking that the shot gunners get a greater share of the funding therefore their results are reflected because of this. I can assure everyone that this is not the case, but an argument can be certainly put forward to cut the Rifle and Pistol Programs proportion of the funding after a decade of defeat with the one exception of Anne Marie Forders Bronze in 2000. There are a group of younger shooters such as Daniel Repacholi, Matt Inabinet, Susan McCready and Tim Lowndes that need some greater exposure to intense international competition, but outside of these four we have no youth in the Olympic Squad. Lowndes effort in the 50 metre 3 – Position was excellent and he proved he is a genuine future medal chance who quite clearly is getting better, but the age factor for the rest of the squad is quite disturbing. Forget the success the Pistol and Rifle Teams enjoy at Commonwealth level, as this is no way a reflection on how they are placed on the world scene as their results in Athens proved. I can offer the criticism, but after ten years of watching their overall results I can offer no real answers. To me shooting is shooting and if the Shotgun Team can be so successful there is no reason why the others can't follow suit. The argument that the Rifle and Pistol Teams need more money spent on them has now worn thin. I believe future prospects for the Pistol and Rifle disciplines need to be identified, but the shot gunners have earned the right for the loins share of the funding.