

High Power Rifle Team Matches

Senior Chief Petty Officer Dwight H. Becherer, USN, Ret.

The procedures and strategies I discuss about High Power Rifle Team Matches are fairly conventional in nature. Some of the things I have to say are my own ideas or things that I have seen other successful teams use. Most of my experience with High Power Team Matches was with the Navy teams at Fleet, All Navy and national level events. I have been coach and shooter during the same time and have gained greater insight with those experiences. I do not suggest that this is a definitive work about team matches. I feel it is only a place to start from.

Many of the teams I have seen often have a common failing - lack of organization. The team that is well prepared in advance stands a much greater chance of succeeding than a team of equal skill. The team that makes fewer mistakes fares better than the team with superior talent that saves 2 rounds in the rapids. Organization, coordination, knowledge, and communication within the team will greatly enhance the probability of success. In a nutshell, it's TEAMWORK.

For the purpose of this discussion, a 4-man team is assumed equipped with M1s, M14s (M1A), or M16s (AR15). Most of the information is general in nature and applies to bolt gun teams as well. I don't discuss wind doping or mirage. There are volumes by others on the subject. I mainly concentrate on team strategy.

The time to prepare for team matches is not when the members show up on the 200 yard line. You may have months or weeks to prepare but more likely the night before or even the morning before the match will be all you have. The selection of team members is often a matter of past performance or predetermined by the club or organization membership. Many times the coach is one of the shooters himself. Few are times when I was on a team that had a dedicated coach. The coach needs to know the abilities of the shooters he will be coaching. The team members also need to be ready to coach the coach when it is his turn to shoot. The coach also needs to know the abilities of the teams around him. If your team is an expert team and the teams next to yours are all High Masters, their performance and what they say about conditions can help. I do not suggest that you rely on another team's judgement but it helps sometimes to confirm your call. It also helps to keep your ear tuned to what is being discussed by other teams because they may see something you overlooked.

The first thing I like to do in organizing the team is go over the equipment that the team takes to the firing line. You can lighten the load of the team if you take only two scopes and one mat to the line. Unless someone has a thing for using their own gear, use the best you have, i.e., don't leave a 77MM Kowa in the car over a Tasco. Ideally, you should have a 100MM team scope and another for scoring duty. The rest of the equipment brought to the line are normal things each shooter needs. Make sure the team has enough ammo for each member to complete the match. Be certain you have all your equipment. Assign a team

member to be responsible for it. You do not want someone running off to get something you will need just as the three minute preparation period starts. Make a check list and go over it with the team before you head for the line.

Everyone on the team should be doing something all the time. You are either shooting, getting ready to shoot, scoring, or coaching. Even if you are a non-firing butt-puller you can contribute to the success of the team. The butt-puller can ensure that his team target is the best quality possible. He won't be able to pull his own team's target but he can keep an eye on it if he is pulling the one next to it. A poorly repaired target face during the rapid strings can be hard to read.

The shooter should be ready to go the line with all his equipment except his mat. He ensures that he has the proper elevation for his rifle for that yard line and windage set to zero. Generally, the shooter is responsible for elevation and the coach is responsible for the wind/windage particularly at the 600 yard line. Regardless, the coach must ask the shooter if he has the proper elevation on for each yard line, but the shooter must know his zeros. The next shooter should also be getting ready for his turn to shoot. He should have all of his equipment on and ready to assume the shooting position when he gets to the line.

When I coach the slow fire stages, I like to single-fire the shooters. When the coach and one shooter are working together I feel there is less confusion and the shooter can relax into his own rhythm. When pair-firing, you may strain the non-firing shooters performing other tasks. If two shooters and a coach are on the line that leaves the fourth shooter scoring another team. When your team is finished, the coach and scorer are relieved by the shooters coming off the line, but the scorer is probably not finished scoring the other team and not mentally or physically prepared to shoot. The coach has the same problem: he has to prepare to shoot and bring the coach that has just come off the line up to speed on the conditions. The scorer gives his scorecard to one of his shooters coming off the line, and mistakes are more likely to appear on the scorecard. Everyone is scurrying around swapping functions as the clock is ticking. When you single-fire the team, a coach and first shooter are on the line shooting. The second shooter is scoring another team. The fourth shooter is getting ready to shoot. When the first shooter finishes he scores for the remainder of the match. The second goes to the firing line. The second shooter is now getting ready to shoot. When the second shooter comes off the line he becomes the coach. The third shooter goes to the firing line and the first coach gets ready to shoot. The same rotation of shooters works all the way across the course.

If you do have more people to score and coach, pair-firing can be done effectively. But you still put more pressure on the coach to keep the two shooter's calls, data book and sight corrections straight. The shooter also has to wait for the other shooter to fire: that breaks rhythm and can be mentally and physically tiring particularly at the 600 yard line on a hot afternoon.

When the coach gives sight correction to shooters that are pair-firing, it's for both guns. If he feels a windage correction is needed it's much easier to keep

both guns synchronized. He will announce, "Both guns, one right..." Shooter and non-shooter will make the correction. If one shooter needs an individual correction, he will say "Left or right gun one left..." and that shooter alone will make the correction. The coach watches the shooter or shooters make the corrections. The procedure is the same for 200 and 600 slow fire stages. The shooter must give accurate shot calls to the coach. "I don't know where it went" is useless. In the standing position an accurate call can refine a zero that you will need for the rapids to follow. That's important for some team matches that don't allow sighters.

For the slow fire sighters the coach and and shooter should communicate between each other, feeding the other information for a common goal. During the rapid stages, communication between the shooter and coach is greatly reduced. Until the shooting starts, the coach and shooter exchange information. But when the targets come out of the pits it's mostly one-way, coach to shooter. That brings up a question that I have rarely heard discussed: Who is in charge? Which can bring up another question: Who has the most information? I feel the person in the driver's seat for the rapids is the shooter because he has almost all the information. The only thing he cannot see that the coach can is a change of conditions during the string.

Consider that the rapid strings are only 60 or 70 seconds. Precise communication is essential. Once while I coached a shooter during a 300 rapid an interesting thing happened. The shooter was fairly competent but not until later did I know that he had not done any team shooting (know your shooter!). During the string he would shoot a 10 and I would call out loudly "GOOD!" Three separate times he stopped and looked at me with a look on his face as if to say, "What do you want?" Toward the end of the string the entire team was yelling in unison "SHOOT!" He got all 10 rounds off with a not so bad score. During the post-shooter de-brief he asked me, "Why did you keep calling out my name?" The shooter's last name was Gustaffson, and he thought I was calling out "GUS! GUS!" when I was really calling his tens as "GOOD! GOOD!"

During the prep time, the coach is busy getting set up. He needs to have a stop watch set for either 60 or 70 seconds. The coach should also have a score data book and duplicate score card. He positions the team scope after the shooter is in position. The coach should position the scope not to interfere with the position of the shooter or when he stands. The coach also needs to clear a path from behind the scope to the shooter's side. You do not want to trip over anything or be blocked by a score keeper. The scope should be as low as practical and aligned with the axis of the shooter's barrel (directly above and behind). The 100 MM team scope comes with three eyepieces (32X, 24X, and 16X). I recommed the 32X for the rapid stages. The object is to see the impact of the bullets on the target. At 600 yards and beyond, choose the eyepiece that reads mirage the best. Center the image of the target in the center of the scope. The center has the clearest image; avoid the edge of the scope. During the prep time the coach examines the target carefully. Look for bullet holes that have not been repaired. Wrinkles produce shadows that can hide bullet holes. Turned up corners of pasters can look like bullet holes. Corners of black pasters that over-

lap a white line can look like a bullet hole. If the coach sees something on the target that needs attention, he calls for target repair or a reface.

The coach briefs the shooter with the following information:

- Ask him if he has the correct elevation on.
- Ask him if the magazines are loaded 2 and 8.
- Tell him what his target number and color are.
- Go over with him the calls that he will hear.
- Tell him to call the first two shots during the magazine change
- Ask him if his sights are half, full, or quarter minutes.
- Tell him the sight corrections given him will be in clicks except elevation may be in half minute corrections.
- Tell him not expect any calls on the first two shots.
- Tell him to make the sight corrections only after he has loaded the second magazine and the bolt is closed (on M1s and M14s, this makes it easier to turn the windage knob).
- Tell him "If you don't hear a call from me after the magazine change, I did not see the shot hole. Keep shooting."
- Ask the shooter if he has established his natural point of aim.

For M1 and M14 shooters, cycle their op-rod several times to settle his position.

During the prep time, the coach gives the shooter a windage correction if required and watches him put it on. When the prep time is over, the coach should be standing with the shooter. When the command to rise has been given, the coach tells the shooter to:

- "Take some deep breaths." (This slows down the heart rate and clears the vision)

When the command "LOAD" is given, watch the shooter load with two rounds. The coach re-checks the wind and may give a last windage correction, and watches the shooter make the sight correction.

When the "READY" commands have been given and the targets start to come up the coach tells the shooter:

- "Your target number and color is..."

When the shooter is getting into position, the coach tells the shooter:

- “Op-rod forward” or “Close the bolt” (Watch that the first round chambers).
- “Safety off” (Check that the safety is off).
- “Check your natural point of aim.”
- “Breathe between shots” (This helps with timing and keeps vision clear).

The coach moves quickly to the scope and watches the first two shots. During the magazine change the coach moves quickly to the shooter’s side and:

- Watches him reload and chamber the third round.
- Have him call the first two shots.
- Give him a sight correction if needed after the bolt is closed and watch him make the sight correction.
- Tell him to recheck his natural point of aim.
- Remind him to breathe between shots.

The coach returns to the scope again and calls each shot seen a loud and clear voice that the shooter can hear.

The calls below are the conventional calls used during the rapid fire strings:

| <u>CALL</u> | <u>MEANING</u> |
|----------------------------|---|
| Center | X |
| Good | 10 |
| Out (at a clock position) | 9 |
| Wide (at a clock position) | 8,7,6,5 |
| Hold Closer | Push front sight into black slightly. |
| Hold High | Hold half the diameter of the target higher. |
| Line of White | Move the front sight down away from the black slightly. |

| <u>CALL</u> | <u>MEANING</u> |
|---------------------|---|
| Hold Low | Hold half the diameter of the target lower. |
| Favor RIGHT or LEFT | Move the front sight slightly left or right. |
| Hold RIGHT or LEFT | Move the front sight half the diameter of the target width right or left. |
| Time | 10 seconds remain in the string. |
| Roll-um | 5 seconds remain in the string. |

The calls are used in combination if needed. For example, if the coach calls the shot "wide at 3" he also may give a "favor left" call.

When the shooter fires he must form a call in his head and then listen for the coach to call out the actual placement of the hit on the target. If the shooter and coach make the same call the shooter will know what to do. If the shooter calls a shot a nine at three and the coach calls the shout "out a 3, favor left" the shooter should conclude not to favor left but to break the next shot in the center. If the shooter calls the shot an X and the coach calls it "out at 9, favor right" the logical thing for the shooter to do is to favor right. The point is for the shooter to take the information received from the coach, compare it with his own and take logical action to make the next shot hit center. This mental process only takes a split second.

When the rapid string is complete and the line is made safe, the shooter clears the line quickly. The off-going shooter counts down his elevation and de-briefs the coach. The de-brief can clear up any mysteries about performance. For example, the reason your group was strung out at 6 o'clock is that your elevation ran down during the string. The shooter must be honest with the coach because he will partially base the sight correction for the next shooter from the shooter's first group. If the shooter's elbow was slipping out during a rapid he should say so, if he screwed up he should say so. The coach should look at the other targets. You may notice the other teams' groups were out the same as yours. The object is to learn what you did right and correct what you did wrong. Plot the group in a data book for each shooter; it can be helpful when you move to the next yard line when you make sight corrections. Write the score on a duplicate score card and compare it with the official card for discrepancies. Move the next shooter to the line and do it again.

At the 600 yard line, single firing is preferred to pair-firing for the reasons already discussed. The last thing I would like to touch on is the methods the shooter can use for the Slow Fire Prone stage.

Watch a smallbore shooter shoot prone. Most will not take the rifle out of their shoulder to reload. The reason they don't take the rifle out of the shoulder is to maintain natural point of aim. They don't have to rebuild it every time they reload. High Power shooters usually take the rifle out of their shoulder to reload and rebuild their natural point of aim each time. Natural point of aim is important to the smallbore shooter that competes at 50 or 100 yards. How much more important is it to the High Power shooter that shoots at 600 yards and beyond? It also saves time if you reload the rifle in your shoulder: you do not have to find your natural point of aim again. You might say maybe you can reload a service rifle without taking it out of your shoulder, but I can't. I say it's just a matter of practice. I take the next round, snap it into the magazine and slide it to the rear all by feel. I'm ready for the next shot as soon as the target comes up out of the pits. My natural point of aim is still good, I chamber the round, align the sights and focus on the front sight and start to squeeze the trigger. The shooter breaks the shot as soon as possible and gives the coach an honest call. They all should be good but if you break the shot one way or another, call it that way. Unless the coach tells the shooter to "holdup," the shooter should get all his shots downrange quickly.

When the shooter finishes his string, he clears the line quickly. He counts down his elevation and notes the amount of windage he has on his own rifle and does a quick de-brief with the coach while the next shooter is getting into position.

As I mentioned at the beginning, this is only a place to start from and should not be considered a complete work on High Power Team Matches. Each time I shoot a team match, I learn something new or have an opportunity to apply what I have learned somewhere else. I also believe that it pays to keep your head on a swivel and your ears open. A lot of information is discussed and exchanged by the participants in a team match. Some is useless, but sometimes you can pick up a bit of information that you can use. It only takes an X to win.

D. H. Becherer