

SHOTGUN LEAGUE FORMAT

Dear Technoid:

I have been shooting trap for about a year and a half with very good results. I have recently taken over a dying trap range at our local club, trying to revive it.

What i need to know is where can i get some information or better yet some software to run a summer trap league at our local club. I've never shot in any leagues, but i have been getting a lot of input from fellow shooters. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Thanx Bob

Dear Bob:

I have been running shotgun leagues since the late '70s. It is really only a matter of minutes to write a little spreadsheet that will do it. You don't really need a commercial program. What you have to think about is what type of league you want to run.

Winchester used to sponsor shotgun leagues made up of teams. The problem with any team situation is that team members are always dropping in and out of the league. That makes holding a team together very difficult. My experience with team leagues has not been good.

Most of the leagues that I ran were for International Skeet and seldom had more than 40 participants. I found a latter-type league to be the best. I think that the concept was originally used by a bowler or tennis player and I adapted the details to suit shotgun.

All shooters are ranked high to low based on their averages. On any give week, who ever is in position one competes against whoever is in position two, three against four and so on. Our weekly league was two rounds of 25. You shot for points. As between the two opponents, the person who had the highest score for the first round got one point, same for the second round and also one point for the highest total of the 50. Ties split, loser gets 0. Thus the most you could win was three points per week. You might prefer other numbers, but this worked for us.

After each week's shooting, the averages were retabulated and all the shooters moved up or down the list to reflect their new average and select their new individual opponent for the next week. At the end of the league, the guy with the most points wins.

This ladder system has several advantages: An individual is always competing against the person closest to him in average and thus in ability. There are no handicaps. The beginner has just as good a chance (perhaps better) of winning as the pro does. All you have to do is to keep beating your equal (but often changing) opponent. The good guys tend to be pretty equal and split a lot of points. As you get better and start to beat people, your average gets better too and you start to shoot against better competition. It is self leveling.

Another advantage of this league is that people can drop in and out without affecting the others. If someone drops out, his name just disappears from the next week's list and every one moves up one place. Nothing really changes. If a late comer is added, a new shooter just appears somewhere on the list and he starts with zero points. It is his choice. Drop outs and add ons are a big league problem and this solves it neatly.

The devil is always in the details and here are a few that I have worked out. Since no one can attend each and every league meeting, I worked out a score bank account system called "Escrow". On league day, before the shooter shoots his round, he must declare to the scorer whether he is shooting score, escrow or practice. Our rule was that the first two rounds you shot HAD to be score and if you showed up at the club on league day, you HAD to shoot. After your score rounds, if you wished you could shoot either Escrow or Practice.

Escrow scores were recorded just like score rounds, but they were sort of a bank account. If you failed to come one league day, your bank account Escrow scores were put in place of the scores you would have shot. The order of Escrow usage was first in, first out. This meant that we virtually eliminated the problem of "no shows" and people who could not come to the league for a few weeks in a row did not get discouraged and drop out.

If you anticipate a problem, you can always put in a limit on how many places down the ladder you can drop based on any one poor performance. In order to drop down in average to pair up with soft opponents, the sandbagger has to earn zero points for several league meetings. This will probably put him out of the running.

While we encourage the pairs to shoot together, we never did require it. What we did do, though, was never to post the results of the night's shooting until the league was over for the day. That way no one could arrive a little late, check out his opponent's score for that evening and shave points. If you don't know what your opponent has shot, you have to do your best every time to have a chance of beating him.

Starting averages, at the beginning of the league, were initially hard to come by. We would use "known ability" for the first ladder ranking. This worked pretty well, but later I shifted a bit. I had two or three sessions of league warmup before the league actually started. During this league warmup period you were required to shoot two rounds of Escrow each session. This did several things for us. First, it gave the shooter a starting average that we could use when setting up the first ladder. No shooter would willingly do poorly in his initial Escrow rounds because he could be relatively certain that some of them would be used later in the league when he missed a night. Bad early Escrow comes back to haunt you. Secondly, it put some Escrow in the bank for each shooter so that he could still be competing if he missed a few nights and could not come.

I used spreadsheets made on VisiCalc, Lotus 123 and now Excel. Anything that can sort numerically will do fine. It is not very hard to set up. If you need some help, have further questions or want me to send you some of the old spreadsheets, let me know. Good luck with the league. Nothing can transform a stagnant club the way a league can. The bowling people know this better than anyone.

Best regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid