

2023 Riflemen's Weekend Report

The month of August slips by quickly every year. The summer fairs wrap up, kids get back to their studies and school sports, daylight fades sooner, and dawn begins to come with a little bite in the air. These signs are all reminders that it is time for Pennsylvania's Riflemen's Weekend! On Labor Day weekend high power shooters from all around the northeast, Maine to Virginia, rolled into Reade Range for our three-day state championship match.

Late summer brings incredible weather for shooting. We were blessed with cool mornings and evenings and sunny, warm days all weekend long. Friday morning brought 52 long range shooters to the 1000 yard line to kick off the match. The wind wasn't blowing too hard, but was already a little switchy. Roy Musselwhite led off the day with the first of only two cleans put on the board by the sling shooters, a 200-12x, but there were five others right on his heels with 199s. Amanda Elsenboss came back from a bit of a rough start to lead the second match with a 199-11x. Going into the final match of the day Joe Sopko was down just 2 points, Fritz Hempelmann was down 3, and several others, including Amanda and Dave Shellhammer were down 6. But as they say, "It ain't over 'til it's over!" Amanda dug in and shot the second clean, a 200-13x, to give her a 594-29x for the day, along with the PA Long Range Prone Championship! Joe Sopko came in second place with a 592-23x, and Dave Shellhammer was just a point behind at 591-20 for third. Ashley Castle was the Junior Woman Champion with a 545-7x, and Zach Fritz used his AR-10 to become the Long Range Junior Champion with a 509-5x.

Meanwhile at the far end of the range the F-Class shooters were having a similar experience. Mike Drass kicked the day off with a great 200-9x, giving him a 2 point lead over John Hose and George VanWhy. VanWhy led both the second and final matches, with a pair of 196s and claimed the Long Range F-Class jacket with his 590-28x. Henry Ferris ended the day with a 586-25 for the second place spot, and beat third place winner John Hose by just 7 Xs!

We met at the 600 yard line on Saturday morning for the Mid Range Championship. It was bright and sunny, no chance of rain, and calm wind. You could tell right away it was going to be a close match! The F-Class shooters opened up with three cleans-Henry Ferris with 16 Xs, George VanWhy and Anthony Witheridge both with 13 Xs! Joe Spina, Eric Updike, and Mike Drass were just a point back. VanWhy and Anthony held onto the lead with cleans in the second match. Joe Spina also shot a clean to remain 1 point down. VanWhy dropped a point in the third match, but 599-41x gave him the Mid Range F-Class title to go with his Long Range win! Joe also dropped a point, taking second with his 598-39x, and Anthony was just 10 Xs behind for third place. It was quite the fight for the F-Class Championship!

The sling shooters were in top form as they vied for the lead. Five cleans were fired in the first match; Allen Castle, Jon Daher, Fritz Hempelmann, Amanda Elsenboss, and Dave Shellhammer all getting a good start off the line! Amanda backed up her 200-12x with another 200-12x while Dave and Fritz each dropped 1 point. All three of them dropped another point in the final match of day. Matt Zagorski's 200-12x was the high score of the third match. Amanda's 599-36x let her double up her Long Range win with the Mid Range Prone Championship. Dave was down just 1 point and 1 X with a 598-35x, and Fritz was just a hair behind at 598-34x! It was a good day to shoot good scores. The wind was pretty light and though there were some changes that could push you around a little bit, they were readable. It made for a very fun day to shoot.

Pennsylvania's junior shooters were out in force as well. We had eleven on Mid Range day. They made up almost an entire relay! Wyatt Wilcox started the day strong with a 193-5x, and Katherine Raines was just a few Xs behind. Gianni Formica got into the zone in the second match with a solid 198-5x, and he followed it up with a 197-7x. His 582-18x total earned him the Mid Range Junior Championship. Gianni shoots air rifle regularly and it shows, as this was only his second high power match ever! Ashley Castle fired a 572-15x to win the Mid Range Junior Woman title.

Our good weather continued on Sunday as we got ready for the Across-the-Course match. It was *not* a good day for high offhand scores, however. A slight, gusty wind was pushing the shooters around, making it tough to break good shots. It didn't bother Charlie Trickett, though. Charlie just pushed back with a beautiful 197-5x! Terry Paul had the high score sitting. His 200-11x beat out several other cleans. Fritz Hempelmann and Jack Jones tied at the 300 yard line with 200-13x. Somewhat surprisingly, there were no cleans fired at the 600 yard line. The wind decided to be more sneaky and the changes seemed harder to see. They were easy to see on your target, though! Charlie's 199-11x was high for the prone slow fire stage. When all the shooting and all the adding was finally done, Jon Daher had earned his first Across-the-Course Championship, shooting a 790-28x with his service rifle! Jon has worked hard for this match for several years, and since he became a PA resident a few months ago, he is our PA State Champion. The next three shooters all scored 789s. Fritz took second place with **40 Xs!** Tied for third place with 29 Xs were Charlie and Robby Greene. What a close match!

Our junior relay was back with an even dozen young men and women shooting across-the-course. Zach Fritz pulled ahead in the offhand with a strong 194-1x. Wyatt Wilcox overtook him in the rapid fire stages, shooting a pair of 199s. Zach tried to make a comeback at the 600 yard line with a 190-7x, but he came up a little short. Wyatt Wilcox won the Across-the-Course Junior Championship with his 774-24x! This is Wyatt's fourth junior championship! Ashley Castle continued her weekend-long streak, winning the Across-the-Course Junior Woman title with a 747-9x!

A unique feature of Riflemen's Weekend is our Ultimate Rifleman award. This honor is presented to the shooter with the highest aggregate score across all three days of competition. After consistent, excellent shooting all weekend, Fritz Hempelmann added "2023" to the Ultimate Rifleman jacket he first won last year! Fritz beat his score from last year by 4 points, firing a 1978-91x out of a possible 2000.

I would like to add a special thank you here to our match sponsors. Hart Barrels provided us with a certificate for a barrel to award during the Long Range match. And Shooter's World provided us with some powder and primers that we used for prizes. Thank you so much! Your donations are really appreciated!

I look forward to this match all year. I love getting to shoot all the different disciplines in one weekend. Tom Ferraro came up with that format many years ago, and it was a brilliant idea. We get to enjoy a meal together after shooting each day. I look forward to seeing Matt Zagorski's fireworks. They were really spectacular this year! Most of all I look forward to seeing each of you, to meeting those I haven't shot with before, and to spending an entire long weekend with other shooters. You men and ladies make this match great! So thank you all for coming, congratulations to our State Champions, match winners, and Ultimate Rifleman, and I hope to see you all on the range soon!

God Bless,
Jeremy Castle