

## **Starting a Collegiate Clays Shooting Team – My Experience at the University of Arizona**

### **The First Question is “Why”**

Why start a collegiate clay sports team or club? It's an important question to get right because you will be explaining it to a great many people. This endeavor will be successful primarily because you have developed a coalition of supporters & decision makers that understand the motivations, processes, strategies, benefits and plans, and have hopefully chosen to either support your ambition, or at least decide not to actively resist. The first team that must be built is a team of decision makers and leaders in the community and within school administration

There are a lot of answers to this question of “Why”, and the good ones are focused on the ability for this sport, like many others, to provide the environment to build better people. You know, of course, that all but the rare few of the athletes will make it to the National team. So while that's extraordinary and wonderful, it's just too narrow of a reason to reach out to the university administration. Most people you will meet just don't care about shooting like you and I do and will be surprised that there is an international shotgun discipline.

Having spent 13 years in universities as a student, or working for a university, I learned something that I wished just wasn't true; that a university, public or private, are revenue driven enterprises who respond to the business opportunities, non-profit status or otherwise. The common misperception is that universities are benevolent places that exist to educate the masses. Education is the “how” and revenue is the “why”. With revenue, existing programs are maintained or expanded, research is preformed and resources are grown. A university is a business. This is not a criticism but recognition that business results matter.

So from my experience at the U of A (about 40,000 students and a payroll of \$780M per year) the administration asks the business questions first just like a public corporation would; how much revenue will this bring through new recruitment, what are the fees, are grants available and who will pay for tickets to watch this sport? What are the investment costs in people, facilities and what are the risks and liabilities? <sup>1</sup>

The few schools that have put shotgun on the curriculum usually have special situation such as an endowment, a benefactor or other special situation. For the rest of us it's left to the schools' perception about business outcomes, liability, public perception and popularity that keep us as club sports. From the perspective of the U of A athletes, it doesn't really matter other than they don't get academic credit for doing something they love.

My personal motivation as an alum for starting a shotgun team was knowing that Arizona, having been established in 1885, never had a shotgun team. Why didn't I do something sooner? When I was a

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<sup>1</sup> NCAA recognition at the U of A is not sufficient to be put on the curriculum. Ice Hockey was removed from the curriculum and made a club sport.

student there I remember all of the anti-gun reactions, and I suspected it was still the case. The rifle range under the gym was shut down and removed. I expected to encounter stiff resistance from the administration. But if the school mission is to build better people, the university needs to be more than about just learning. It also must include development of social skills and include experiences that can be carried throughout life. Skills such as overcoming adversity, managing stress, keeping commitment to others, and developing interpersonal relations are all but few of the challenges that we all face each day. These are skills that serve to make a successful life regardless of the education one possesses and which, I believe, sports teach better than any lecture. This “why” drove who we are as a team, how we coach, how the team operates, what we value and what we expect from the team, coaches and our home range. It focuses who we raise funds from, and how we do it. It’s our mission and our athletes know it.<sup>2</sup>

### Doing Your Homework

What part of the elephant needs to be eaten first? Is it the approval process, the building of a coalition, getting a sponsor or home range, finding coaches, getting the word out, recruitment? I won’t insult you by suggesting that what my approach is the right way, or the only way. I’m just documenting my experiences and how I approached the problem of how to begin. You will likely pick another place to start and be very successful as well.



First I needed help; A single person that I could bounce ideas off of and who is equally passionate about the sport. I looked for someone that knew the school and some of the departments. I shanghaied my son, Matthew, a sophomore at Arizona and an officer in another school club. I walked into my oldest son’s room and told him that you are starting a U of A shotgun team and you are going to be a club officer. Ultimately he was invaluable, especially when engaging with the administration.

The club is about the students. The administration viewed coaches as an important part and key to execution and safety, but selling the idea of a shotgun club needed to be done by the university’s “customers,” not by an outside coach. While the coach was an important resource to the students who were starting the club, first, last and always it’s about the student athletes. Being a type A personality it was difficult for me to not just jump in and try to do it myself. But I noticed that, I did not get the same reaction, as did my son when talking to the administration. I didn’t always agree with my son but getting input from him about what I was thinking was so important. Some things were minor, like the team name, and some were not, like some of the content of the by-laws.

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<sup>2</sup> Each athlete knows the team priorities; 1) Family, 2) Academics, 3) Shooting & 4) Everything else (girls/boys, cars, fashion, whatever)

The U of A also requires an Advisor that is an employee of the school. They want someone's chain to pull if things go sour. The person you pick as your advisor should be a shotgun advocate, able to speak candidly to you and you need to be able to listen to that person when it's counter to your intuition or experience. It's really great if the advisor is also a shotgun shooter. Our advisor is all of the above. He's a courageous person that tests the boundaries of school tradition in a positive way, and is a strong practitioner of critical thinking.

**Seek input from others;** especially from those who don't know anything about shooting or have any interest in what you are trying to do. This helps train your thinking and gets you out of your framework that "I have considered all of the angles and know all of the problems that need to be answered". What I'm saying is to **continuously educate yourself**.

At a university the size of the U of A, process is king, queen and the court jester. The administration has a process or department for everything that can be done, or not done. At Arizona there is a student organization called Associated Students of the University of Arizona (ASUA)<sup>3</sup>. It is a student government and activities organization. Of course, did I start by talking with them? No, I was going to get the team on the curriculum. I went straight to the Athletics Department. Each of the many conversations with many different people went something like this.

***ME;** Hi, I'm an alum and a certified USA Shooting shotgun coach that wants to start a shotgun team at the school.*

***THEM;** What?*

***ME;** I'm a shotgun coach that wants to establish a successful shotgun team at the school. It's going to increase the recruiting at Arizona and we have a great home range at Tucson Trap & Skeet that has all of the facilities for 7 different shotgun disciplines and guns to loan if needed. They even are going to have a World Cup out there. We don't need any equipment from the university. We want to be on the curriculum and be recognized as part of the university.*

***THEM;** We don't allow guns on campus. Have you talked to anyone else about this?*

***ME;** I know that guns cannot be on campus. Tucson Trap and the NRA provided a gun safe at the range for the students. Who do I need to talk with about getting a team started?*

***THEM;** We don't have a shooting team. The rifle range in the basement of Bear Down Gym was disassembled in the 1970s.*

***ME;** Ah This is not rifle... its shotgun.*

***THEM;** Oh, Like those clay targets things (making a circle gesture with their hands) or something, right? They shoot those off the back of cruise ships.*

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<sup>3</sup> I'm fairly certain that most universities have a similar student organization.

**ME;** *There are several shotgun disciplines like trap and skeet and sporting....*

**THEM;** *You need to go talk to (INSERT NAME OF SOMEONE NOT NEAR WHERE EVER WE WERE AT) in the (INSERT ILREVELANT DEPARTEMENT NAME OR CAMPUS POLICE HERE) department about what it is you are trying to do. They can help you.*

On and on. Small sport, no spectators, no revenue, no understanding, no passion, no interest. At this point I needed to decide to either solve WORLD HUNGER or get a shotgun team started. What I eventually found is that we could get support of the university, use the logo and have access to some

funds without getting on the curriculum. I abandoned the “on the curriculum” approach for now. My son and I went to talk to ASUA but not before a couple of weeks of reading about their charter, their processes and their organization. Of course you are never told all that you need to do up front. Accept small successes; I met the ASUA director and wasn’t thrown out of her office, or I know more about their concerns and objectives than I did before. I know what the next step is for now. It’s all good.

We needed to do the upfront work of understanding rules, requirements and regulations, and we didn’t try to get special rules made for us. We needed to address what we guessed would be the deal breakers up front, such as safety, liability, guns on campus and a home range that could provide coaching resources and had safety processes in place already. ASUA is rule driven and regulated by the Board of Regents and the University administration. Meet the rules, get them

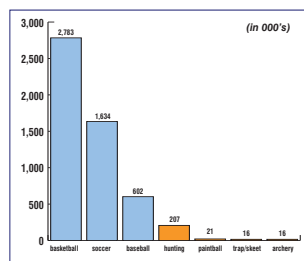
to understand what it is you are doing and WHY you are doing it. Fit in to existing frameworks and you are good to go.

Easy, simple – not. Getting them to understand and have an appreciation of the student demand for something they have never heard about is not easy. At first, we were coming off to the university administration as an experimental club trying to do something that was never done before at any college or university, which is not true of course. My son and one of his other friends, who also was interested in shooting had at least two meetings with ASUA. ASUA was concerned that the risk was too high and the demand would too low to meet club requirements. The legitimacy of a clay sports was unproven in their minds. Matthew brought sport safety data to one of the meetings to discuss how we

SPORTS INJURY STUDY				
Total Injuries Ranked by Sport				
Numbers are in thousands (000)				
Sport Total	Total Sport Participants	Injured Participants	% of Total Injuries	Injuries Per 100 Participants
<b>TOTAL INJURIES</b>	<b>211,202</b>	<b>20,145</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>9.5</b>
Basketball	36,584	2,783	13.8	7.6
Running/Jogging	35,866	1,654	8.2	4.6
Soccer	17,641	1,634	8.1	9.3
Football (tackle)	5,783	1,084	5.4	18.8
Baseball	10,402	602	3.0	5.8
Bicycling (recreational)	53,524	445	2.2	0.8
Tennis	16,353	415	2.1	2.5
Ice Hockey	2,812	415	2.1	15.9
Skateboarding	12,997	399	2.0	3.1
Walking (recreational)	84,986	384	1.9	0.5
Golf	27,812	291	1.4	1.0
<b>Hunting</b>	<b>16,471</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Gymnastics	5,149	149	0.7	2.9
Ice Skating	14,530	105	0.5	0.7
Swimming (recreational)	92,667	73	0.4	0.1
Bowling	53,160	50	0.2	0.1
<b>Paintball</b>	<b>8,679</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Shooting (trap &amp; skeet)</b>	<b>3,696</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Archery</b>	<b>6,650</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
Canoeing	10,933	11	0.1	0.1

Source: American Sports Data, Inc. - A Comprehensive Study of Sports Injuries in the U.S.

Compared to other popular forms of recreation, the shooting sports have some of the lowest occurrences of injury.



2006 Industry Reference Guide

know that this is a safe sport. ASUA made it clear if approved that one accident or even an incident would finish the club and it would not matter whose fault it was and why it happened.<sup>4</sup>

We talked about rules and safety training required by Tucson Trap & Skeet, and that they have been in business since 1947. Our intention was to knit together a message that we understand this sport and



have the right resources to assist with the execution of the team. We did not want to leave any reasons for them to end the discussions.

Now something happened that I did not think about at the time, which turned out to be pure luck. After the third meeting the ASUA Director, who was trying to understand what this club was all about, just happened to call the ACUI representatives that are located on campus.

The ACUI reps said they did not know any

specifics about this sport but one said she saw something about it on the ACUI web and would look into it and let her know. Matthew was called to another meeting a short time later where the whole deal came together after a little more education with the ACUI reps. It never occurred to me to contact ACUI at the outset.

If your school is an ACUI member, I strongly encourage you to let them know what it is you are doing up front. Do they need to be there at the first meeting? Not necessarily. I recommend that you “shoot the lightest load” at the initial discussions. What I mean is that don’t commit all of your resources up front. Plan to have a secondary set of resources or arguments should you be shut down right off the bat. Then use your second set of arguments and supporters. **Sometimes even the best arguments take time to be understood.** Expect to be told no upfront and have a plan B and C ready to use.

My plan B was to have a recruiting drive on Club day on the University Mall. If I needed to I could use this as evidence of the demand and remind ASUA that they need to fulfill their mission. We can work any liability issues if needed.

My Plan C was brilliant (or so it seemed to me). At my regular job I sat next to an Arizona State Senator<sup>5</sup> I noticed one day walking by his office that we was a retired Army Officer and an NRA Life Member (light bulb goes on here). One morning I stopped by his office and explained what we are trying to do at the U

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<sup>4</sup> Related to this we require that each team member sign a Hold Harmless that indemnifies the University, the Board of Regents, Arizona State and the Coaches. Also, for both liability reasons and due to State laws with respect to guns and minors, we agreed with ASUA that all team members will be at least 18 years old. No exceptions. This does not prevent the Team from participating with SCTP or 4-H which is done.

<sup>5</sup> State Senators are part-time in Arizona and need regular jobs like everyone else.

of A. “Gook luck starting a shooting club at the university”, he said. “You know how anti-gun the liberal university establishment is over there. I admire your initiative”. I responded “You seem to like a good fight over guns. When they escort us off campus can you do anything?” After thinking awhile he leaned back in his chair “I know the Board of Regents as well as anyone. I’ll write a letter if you need to.” BINGO! Of course this is Arizona not California. I’m not saying this is something you need to do, or should do. It was my doomsday plan of last resort by taking this issue into a political arena. There are too many unpredictable events, and the consequences of a loss are huge; it’s all or nothing state-wide.

### **Relationships, Solutions & Results**

Now that ASUA was a supporter, the workload shifted to me to get the deal officially done. I needed By-Laws that were acceptable to ASUA, Tucson Trap and the coaches. ASUA required certain language about hazing and discrimination and dismissal from the club. I wanted some language on adherence to the NRA Coaches Code of Ethics, team behavior, dress code and safety.

I didn’t really know at first what kind of club operation I wanted so I decided to **copy an existing charter** of another team. I looked on the Internet and talked to some coaches about how they organized their team. Because I wanted the team to learn leadership, I decided to adopt a model that was a best fit to my vision. I used the Yale By-Laws as a model and made some changes to fit my vision and need.<sup>6</sup> I appreciated that they, like Lindenwood, had team Captains where it’s more than just a title. The Captains have key leadership roles and are a great help to the coaches and the team. They are the executor for the Board and the Head Coach. The Yale charter stated specific responsibilities for the Capitan, other team members, attendance and club operation. It was a good starting place for the U of A. ASUA provided some feedback on our By-Laws and soon approved the charter.

### **Relationship Building Never Ends**

Because ASUA is run by students, the relationship building must be revitalized each year and during the year. When the team won 9 silver medals at the ACUI championship in 2012, we provided a news release to ACUI. They passed that on to the administration as evidence of success of ASUA clubs. ASUA is very supportive of the team and we must keep them informed and aware of the progress of the team.

Building good relationships and doing what you said you would do provides other unseen opportunities.<sup>7</sup> Two years ago our U of A advisor suggested that we take our team pictures with our guns on campus. I thought what a great idea but it was unlikely that the university would approve the request. Our advisor believed that the administration had demonstrated a fair-minded approach so far with the club and with our reputation he believed that he could get it approved.

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<sup>6</sup> I met Tom Migdalski at the first year of attending ACUI. This is a coach I would highly recommend meeting and getting his perspective on operational issues with your club.

<sup>7</sup> Using school logos without permission is in my opinion to quickest way to get shut down, next to having an accident. Always get written permission before you use copyrighted materials. Respect the institution.

After a few meetings and some phone calls, the Provost and the Chief of Campus Police approved the request with some provisos such as no ammo, police escort and control of the weapons on to campus and off. It was funny to watch students and professors who walked by and do a double-take of the team



UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA SHOTGUN TEAM 2012/2013

with their shotguns. Most saw the police that were with us and just shrugged and moved on. Only one Professor wanted an explanation, who later just moved down the road on his bike with a curious look on his face.

Success is not measured in medals alone but also in the strong relationship with the university. The students are learning leadership, scholarship as well as how to be a successful shooting athlete. Even with all of the work, time and a few disappointments, the team and the athletes have become my passion. Go get yours.

#### Pathway Towards Success

- 1) Define the Mission for your team and the “Why” its important
- 2) Educate yourself on school policies & procedures for sports teams
- 3) Accept that being a Club sport is acceptable and you can accomplish your Mission
- 4) Determine who the decision makers are and educate yourself about their goals & concerns
- 5) Especially talk with detractors and critics; maintain an open dialog
- 6) Build collations and seek help as needed inside and outside of the school (advisor, local ranges, USAS, NRA, NSSF, ACUI)
- 7) Accept small wins
- 8) Don’t accept NO as an answer – Have a plan B & C
- 9) Get student interest and involvement early
- 10) Celebrate your team and find a way for the shooting community to participate

Best regards,

Mark McClure  
Head Coach  
Shotgun Team at the University of Arizona