



MASTERS AT ARMS

Dreams that began with the Master at Arms Activity Badge have taken Scouts to the Commonwealth Games and international success. **Neil Hallam** visited the National Scout Rifle Championships to find out how



Main picture opposite:
Danielle gets ready in the
Precision Rifle Event GB
Far right: Junior Team in
South Africa
Right: With some local
South African Scouts



Air rifle shooting

The Bisley Championships caters for all ages and abilities, but at the upper end of the competition they act as a selection event for the National Scout Shooting Squad, a group that provides more than half of the air rifle shooters to the Great Britain juniors team.

Last year, the team travelled to Johannesburg to compete in the South African Schools Championships, and nine out of ten in the squad were Scouts. In South Africa, shooting is on the school curriculum, but despite their nerves about shooting against such practised competitors, the team did brilliantly, winning 51 medals between them.



required, which considerably reduces start-up costs.

Hannah, 14, competes in three position sporter. She must shoot well in standing, sitting and prone positions, and is currently the British under-21 record holder.

Like Danielle, Hannah started shooting aged ten with the Buxton Scout Group, who specialise in shooting and have their own range. Two years later, she competed at the Bisley Championships and was offered

a place on the Scout squad. Last year, she was selected for the GB squad, winning a gold medal in South Africa. She also attained the highest score in her event at Bisley this year, with ambitions to cross over to the precision category and hopefully shoot at the next Commonwealth Games.

Precision eye

Explorer Scouts Danielle, 16, and Michael, 17, compete in the precision category. Both took similar pathways onto the GB squad, starting shooting at the ages of 11 and 12, and working their way through the national Scout team and onto the GB squad.

The precision category is expensive, costing up to £5,000 in equipment, so the sporter category was developed to make the sport accessible to more young people. Ordinary air rifles are used and no special clothing is

High-level pressure

Jess Eden, 20, also used shooting as a springboard to success. She began air pistol shooting at 14 when she took her Master at Arms Activity Badge. Through the Bisley Championships she joined the Scout squad and at 16 she was spotted for the Olympic Development Squad.

She then spent two and a half years as a potential Olympian, before deciding to concentrate on her education. Now working on coaching

qualifications as part of a Sports Studies degree, she hopes 'to continue giving back to the sport, even if I'm not competing at the highest level'.

And if there is one man who understands the pressure on high-level competitors, it is national coach Chris Lacey, 22, who, like many other Scouts, started air rifle shooting, aged 12, for his Master at Arms Activity Badge.

In 2001, Chris was competing in a Scouts versus Cadets competition at Bisley, where he saw the British record holder Chris Hector practising. He told his dad, 'I'm going to beat him one day' and, in 2005, he was as good as his word, beating Hector's 10m air rifle record, which he holds to this day.

In 2006, Chris reached the pinnacle of his career by taking fourth place at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games. He remembers waiting behind a curtain to march out to the opening ceremony, and the cheering of the crowd as the team emerged. What Chris described as 'a surreal experience' continued with him being interviewed on the BBC.

Sadly, a motorcycle accident in 2009 ended Chris' Olympic dreams, but he now coaches the national squad. When asked if he has any advice for Scouts wanting to follow him, Chris says: 'It took an unbelievable amount of passion and commitment. But by the time I was 19, I had travelled the world and met Olympic and World Champions.'

OLYMPIAN HERO?

Marksman Mick Gault is heading for the London 2012 Olympics, after winning 15 medals in the Commonwealth Games. 'Scouting started me off rifle shooting. We had an indoor range and we used to blow candles out at 25 yards.'

become a master

There are Master at Arms badges for Scouts and Explorers. Visit the Information and Resources area of www.scouts.org.uk for full requirements