

Coaching Ideas for Youth Programs

By HQ Moody, NRA National Coach Trainer

Over the years we have heard many good ideas for adding interest to club and team shooting activities that involve young shooters. We would like to pass a few of them along to you.

- “Be prepared,” as the Boy Scouts say. A good shooting program has plenty of well-organized activity. If you take the time to schedule your shooting sessions, and include some fun things to do, you will find that your program has direction. Look at some of the NRA Youth Periodicals or at the publications of other shooting sports organizations like the CMP for ideas.
- Shoot a “Guts Match.” The “Guts Match” is an elimination match where everyone on the firing line fires one shot (shoot any position, but everyone shoots the same position) within a specific time limit. After everyone fires their shots, the Range Officer will call for scores, starting from the left end of the line. The individual with the lowest value shot is eliminated. In case of a tie, both tied shooters shoot until one is eliminated. The match goes on until there is only one shooter left.
- Want a positive program that the juniors in your organization will enjoy? Get them involved in running the program. Have them elect a Team Captain and have the Team Captain attend club planning sessions. The Team Captain should have a vote and a voice in the planning process.
- What if your younger shooters are too small to handle smallbore rifles? Offer them an instructional program that uses BB guns or air rifles. Both of these disciplines provide the coach with a great vehicle to get younger and smaller shooters started while using equipment they can afford and use. Do not put down the BB Gun and air rifle. Juniors can learn shooting fundamentals just as well with these rifles and they can take part in a shooting program that leads up to national championships and the awarding of college scholarships. For more information contact NRA Youth Programs, the NRA Competitive Shooting Division or CMP Affiliate Relations.
- Sometimes, one of the hardest things for an adult leader to do is to admit that they don’t know something. Don’t be afraid to admit that you as a coach don’t know the answer to a question. Be honest and tell the shooter that you will try to find the answer. Your respect meter will go up several notches when you get back to the shooter with an honest answer.
- Do you have doubts on how to treat shooters? Contact the NRA Coach Department and request a copy of the *Coaching Ethics Code*. The code deals with ethical problems that youth sports leaders face and will help you make wise decisions as a coach.
- Do you want to grow your ability to help your junior shooters. Take an NRA-USA Shooting-CMP Coach Certification School. This school will give you more tools to help your shooters grow in the shooting sports. It is specifically designed

for adult leaders who work with beginning and intermediate shooters. To check the current listing of scheduled Coach Certification Schools, check the web site http://www.nrahq.org/safety/education/instructor_clinics.asp#CoachSchool

Editor's Note: The CMP strongly recommends that every CMP affiliate with a junior shooting program have at least one adult leader who has attended the NRA-USAS-CMP Coach Certification School.

- Get your kids into uniform. One of the best things a coach can do to promote a feeling of self-worth and belonging among club members is to have a sweatshirt or T-shirt with a logo of your junior club on it and to give that tangible form of recognition to the kids who earn it. The kids may be on a team or just represent your club.
- Are you looking for incentives to get your kids to practice or go to competitions? Try one or more of the excellent qualification and incentive award programs that are available for junior shooters. The NRA has the NRA Qualification Program and Excellent Performance Awards. The CMP has the Junior Distinguished Badge and EIC Program for position air rifle shooters. USA Shooting has its Passport Program. These are great tools to promote growth and give shooters a feeling of satisfaction when a specific award level is completed. These programs give coaches a methodology for the logical learning and performance progression of a shooter. Contact the respective organizations for more information.
- Have competitions! You don't have to be a competitive shooting club to have fun with competitions. You can create many types of fun shoots. A great idea is to make your own special awards that cannot be won anywhere else. Be sure to have an awards ceremony for your winners.
- Make your awards ceremonies a big deal! Make three boxes for the kids to stand on when they receive their awards. Paint the boxes some flashy color and put a large number on each box representing the place won (i.e., 1, 2, and 3). You will be surprised how much the kids want to be on the "stand."
- When you have team matches, remember to give the team coaches awards, too. This is a great idea to give more recognition to the people who put so much effort and dedication into developing shooters.
- Join the NRA, CMP and USA Shooting as a Junior Club. Affiliation with each of these national organizations is inexpensive and each organization offers important affiliation benefits that will help you serve the youth in your program better. Contact the respective organizations for more information.
- Send or better yet, take your youth to a shooting camp. Shooting camps offer one of the best opportunities anywhere for juniors to learn new skills, participate in a real training program and meet lots of new friends. The NRA sponsors the National Junior Smallbore Camp in late July during the National Matches at Camp Perry. The CMP offers a series of Junior Position Air Rifle Camps during June and July. Both organizations sponsor other equally important camps.

- Do something other than shooting once in a while. Remember the saying, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy?” The point is that you need to get together with your club and do something else every so often. Go swimming; go on a picnic or maybe skating. The more you get your club together for all types of activity the stronger the club will bond.
- Invite an expert to come to your club and give a talk or clinic. You will always be the coach and if you are positive and honest with your shooters you will always have their respect. Bringing in a guest to talk to your young shooters will only add to their knowledge and reinforce what you are teaching. Besides, it’s a break in training.
- Have special club activities at least semi-annually or quarterly. A potluck dinner or club picnic is a must for good clubs. This is the time when you can present awards that the kids have won during the past quarter or half year. And don’t forget to give special awards to your parents who volunteer their time.
- Conduct a Parent Orientation Program (POP) at the beginning of the year. Set-up your program to introduce your assistants, discuss the schedule and review your instructional curriculum. Make sure you describe your coaching philosophy. Get some of the youth who have been part of your program in the past to demonstrate the type of shooting you will be doing so the parents know what their kids are going to do. This is also a great way to recruit parents for your staff!
- Train parents to help you with the club. Sometimes parents are our most neglected resource. Parents can score, keep records for the kids, run the firing line, help with transportation, etc. Using parents for these tasks allows the coach to have more time for coaching.
- Do not be a “one-man” show. It is true in all youth sports, when the coach (or Scout leader, adult sponsor, etc.) does everything himself, he burns out. That also means that when the day comes for the leader to leave (burnout, transfer, etc.), the program will collapse. This is all the more reason to involve parents and to train them as assistants so they can take over when that day comes.
- Get involved with other clubs. Traveling across town or to another city provides activity that kids love. Remember the club uniform? What a great way to show your colors. This is quality time where the club can bond and have fun while doing shooting activities at other locations.
- After your finish competitions go to the Match Director or Range Officer with your club members and thank the sponsoring club for conducting the tournament. No matter how good or bad the match was, this provides your shooters with a learning experience in sportsmanship and citizenship.
- Having problems with your shooters focusing on scores instead of how to perform? One good idea is to black out the scoring rings on the target and have shooters concentrate on shooting shot groups where scoring is not done. The idea is to try to shoot a tight group in the center of each bull. You also can order targets without lines from most target manufacturing companies.