

ISSF "Rifle and Pistol" Rule changes for 2017

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Rationale by David Goodfellow, ESSU Chairman and Member of the ISSF Rifle Committee.

The ISSF always review their Rules following an Olympics year, and 2017 is no exception. You may be aware of the publication on the ISSF website and some hostile and uninformed comments on social media surrounding the proposed changes to the shooting events for the 2020 Olympics, particularly the 50m prone Rifle and Pistol events, and changes to the General Technical Rules, but are possibly unaware of the circumstances that have made those proposals necessary. The intent of this article is to explain some background and reasons behind those proposals. Please note that I am not authorised to make official statements on behalf of the ISSF, and therefore the following is a personal interpretation. I will not attempt to explain the decisions concerning the shotgun events because that would be of little or no interest to most of the ESSU membership.

The statement on the ISSF website mentions what the proposals are, but does not explain the reasons that have forced the Ad-Hoc Rules Committee to make those proposals. Realising the huge impact that the removal of the Prone Rifle and 50m Pistol events would have on the target shooting community, the ISSF were open to retaining those events as mixed-gender, but were under pressure from the IOC to make changes for the reasons that I have attempted to explain below.

In late 2015, the International Olympic Committee, (IOC), produced a document entitled "Tokyo 2020", (T2020), the provisions of which all International Sporting Federations, (IF's), are obliged to comply with if they wish to remain or to be included in the Games. This document contains several fundamental principles, one of which is gender-equality in the total number of athletes and medal-winning opportunities, requiring a 50% participation by women in all sports. There is no other option but to accept these principles, the requirements of which must be implemented by IF's in good time before mid-2018 when awarding of quota places for the 2020 Olympics will commence. The current ISSF programme of Olympic events does not comply with several aspects of that document, an obvious one being that we are amongst eight Olympic sports that does not have gender equality. The ISSF supports the principle that there should be an equal number of events for men and women, but unpopular and seemingly illogical proposals have been required to change our existing events to comply with that requirement. Thomas Bach, the IOC President, has publicly stated that he wants to see five new Olympic events included in the 2020 programme. Such diverse and visually impressive events as speed climbing and wake-boarding will be included. However, to avoid the Olympics getting too big and unaffordable for future host Countries, there cannot be an increase in the overall number of events nor total number of competitors. The extra medals for those new events are going to come from somewhere, and we don't want it to be from Shooting! Everyone must recognise that the IOC 'own' all the Olympic events for all sports. The IOC therefore ultimately decides which sports are to be included and the overall number of medals awarded in each of them. The IOC desire is to change from 'Sport-based' to 'Event-based', which means that instead of a Sport being included with all its current programme of events,

the IOC and the Olympic Organising Committee can decide which events are included and those which are not.

All revenue from the Games becomes the property of the IOC, derived primarily from selling broadcasting rights to the giant American and international Media, ticket sales and from sponsorship from multi-national companies, hence the obsessive and somewhat draconian control on manufacturers' branding from non-Olympic sponsors. All sports are subjected to intensive post-Olympic review, considering all aspects such as audience appeal (tickets sold), sale of broadcasting rights, universality, sustainability, environmental impact, etc. Sports are then 'banded' into various categories, which determines the sum of money given by the IOC to each of the relevant IF's in the form of a grant. London was a tremendous success for all sports and particularly for Shooting, after which we were upgraded from a category D to a category C sport. Consequently, the ISSF received a grant of many millions of US\$ and therefore the IOC has a very large influence on ISSF decisions.

There are currently 15 shooting events in the Olympics, 5 Rifle, 5 Pistol and 5 Shotgun, with a maximum number of 390 athletes. We desperately need to retain all of them because if shooting is dropped from the Olympics in favour of other sports then there will be all kinds of repercussions on things such as funding, facilities, support from UK Sport and Government, etc. We would die as an international sport, particularly in the UK, with the likelihood of Shooting being dropped from the Commonwealth Games and the consequent loss of justification for the limited s5 Pistol authorisations that we have now. Following the IOC review, the full report of which is expected to be published in late February 2017, the ISSF have been pressurised to make changes to three of our current events to comply with the T2020 requirements or face losing three Olympic medals to other sports. Objective appraisal of the five Rifle events, when attempting to satisfy the points that I have mentioned below, placed 50m prone Rifle as the sacrificial lamb! For Pistols, the airgun and 25m Womens events were 'safe', which left the choice between 50m and Rapid Fire. As Rapid-fire is more exciting to watch, then the 'loser' seems to be the 50m event. The final decision on which three events will be replaced with new mixed-gender events, which will in turn be communicated to the IOC, will be taken by the ISSF Administrative Council at their meeting during the World Cup in Delhi on 22nd February 2017.

The obvious solution, which the Rifle Committee proposed at its Meeting in November 2015, was to have a 50m prone rifle mixed-gender team event to replace the existing 'men-only' 50m prone rifle event. However, realising that continuing the existing formats and merely adding the scores of the man and women together would not have satisfied the T2020 Sports Presentation requirements, we suggested a number of different formats for the event, as did the Pistol and Shotgun Committees for their current male-only events.

We all appreciate that Prone Rifle is the most popular and widely-competed of all events when one considers the number of athletes of all ages, abilities and both gender who participate in the UK, USA, and many other Countries, but a realisation and understanding of the following should help to explain the problems with the Prone Rifle and 50m Pistol event from the perspective of the IOC, and why the ISSF has proposed alternative mixed-gender 10m airgun events in order to retain our 15 shooting medals:

- **Sports presentation:** Prone rifle is not considered as an 'athletic' event complying with the Olympic ideals of "Faster, Higher, Stronger". "Dead men shooting" is often mentioned. It does not look good on the media presentation. We need to show the faces of the athletes, not hidden behind side blinders, caps or visors. Prohibiting weights taped on to rifles, the clean uncluttered 'look' of Finals, music during qualification and Finals, are all intended to project an image of a world-class sport on close-up, high-definition television, and to show an entertained, enthusiastic audience watching an exciting sport rather than an one sitting in silence concentrating on their iPhones and just occasionally looking up at the scoreboards.
- **Too reliant on technology:** Within the sport, we know that the person who will win is obviously highly skilful, but has a huge advantage if he/she has the best ammunition and rifle combination and unlimited financial support from their NGB, or individual sponsorship. The Olympic Champion tried five barrels to find the one that performed the best, together with an unlimited supply of factory-matched ammunition.

Consider that with the best ammunition/rifle combination, at best you might achieve a 5-6mm grouping capacity. With decimal scoring that equates to anything between a 10.4 and a 10.9. There is no way of changing that when the trigger is pulled because the shot-value is determined by the grouping capacity of the ammunition. Many athletes at the highest level are capable of winning on the day and therefore, in reality, Olympic medals decided by a couple of decimal points are determined by as much a matter of luck as by athlete performance. That is not what the IOC want! Unfortunately, that was one of the unintended consequences of moving to decimal scoring in the rifle events to break ties.

- **Cost:** The cost of airgun pellets as against the cost of rimfire ammunition, added to the cost of a top-of-the-range rifle to be competitive at the highest level, makes .22 shooting far more expensive in comparison with airgun shooting. Furthermore, the cost of building ranges to host an Olympic event, and possible maintenance afterwards, is detrimental to our cause. London defined the future with that issue, and established a format that will be copied in Tokyo by constructing multi-discipline ranges that will be dismantled afterwards.
- **Universality:** The IOC want to get more people involved in sport at all levels. Newcomers to the sport, particularly juniors, are dissuaded by the complicated legal issues of joining a shooting club, licencing and possession of .22 firearms as opposed to airguns.
- **Grass Roots Development:** The difficulties of constructing a 50m range, particularly with electronic targets, is huge compared with the comparative ease of setting up a 10m airgun range virtually anywhere, as is the case at InterShoot, RIAC and the Welsh Airgun Championships, etc. More juniors are taking up airgun shooting in countries including the USA, China and India, all of whom invest heavily in airgun shooting as an entry-level activity. These are our major competitors on the International scene. Apart from ISSF events, there are those such as Target Sprint, Three-Position and Sporter Air Rifle, all of which can be easily arranged in comparison with .22 shooting which needs expensive, purpose-built ranges with all the associated safety concerns.
- **Environmental issues:** The use of lead has generated real concerns regarding environmentally-friendly disposal and safety. The IOC had recently signed up to the UN charter on environmental standards and this included the safe use of lead in

sport. Shooting obviously uses lead ammunition in .22 and shotgun, but in comparison the use of lead pellets in airgun shooting has little or no environmental impact.

- **Youth involvement:** The average age of most Olympians, (with the rare exception of the likes of Nick Skelton, etc.), is below 30 in most shooting events other than prone rifle. This is not what the IOC wants as it does not fit the ideals of an attractive, youthful and energetic sport.

You can no-doubt see that Airgun events are the preferred option of the IOC. It is relatively cheap, has few of the 'lethal weapon' perceptions, is youthful-looking and in most cases, is easier to transport guns internationally without the need of special permits or licenses. From many points of view, particularly in the USA, there is very little prospect in pursuing .22 prone rifle shooting as a stand-alone Olympic event because the disadvantages heavily outweigh the advantages.

As I hope is clear from the above, the harsh reality is that if Shooting is to be retained as an Olympic sport without losing any medals, then the ISSF were faced with changing at least three events to comply with the demands of the IOC, or lose those medals to other sports.

Before getting too despondent, however, remember that Prone Rifle and 50m Pistol will remain as ISSF events in the same way as Running Target, 300m Rifle and Standard Pistol, and will be competed at World and Continental Championships and our own National Championships. The ISSF decisions are not binding on National Governing Bodies, who can continue to include those events in their domestic programs for as long as they wish. The World Cups during 2017 will include all the current events plus trials of the newly proposed 10m mixed-gender team events before their final format is decided. Additionally, the Commonwealth Games shooting events, which already includes a 50m rifle event for women, will remain unchanged even though they do not take place until April 2018.

There have been a few changes to the General Technical Rules and those concerning the Rifle discipline. There have not been any significant changes to the Pistol Rules except for a new procedure for 25m Sport Pistol Finals, which have changed from a duelling system where the winner was the first to attain 7 points, to an elimination system like the Rapid-Fire Pistol Final. The main changes are as follows:

6.7.8.1 – Side Blinders: Are not now permitted. *Anything that is acting as a side-blinder, e.g. hair, side of cap, wrap-around sunglasses, etc. is not within the 'spirit and intent' of this Rule and can be disallowed. However, it is a Jury decision to allow a blinder on the grounds of safety if there is bright sunlight that might dazzle an athlete when shooting.*

6.17.2.a Finals Format: 10m AR and AP, 50m Pistol and Prone Rifle Finals. The first stages will now consist of 2 series of five (5) match shots fires in a time of 250 seconds, (150 seconds for prone rifle). *Changed from 2 series of three (3) shots in 150 seconds.*

6.17.2.d: Warm-up period: A combined Preparation and Sighting time reduced from 8 to 5 minutes, to be consistent with all other rifle and pistol events

7.4.1.6 c Sights: A single corrective lens may be attached to the rear sight. Corrective or tinted glasses maybe worn as an alternative. Filters may still be incorporated in the rearsights, as now.

7.4.2 Standards for 300m and 10m Air Rifles

7.4.2.1: The 200mm restriction on the lowest point of butt-plate is removed. The outside edge of butt-plate may be offset 30mm to left or right from butt-stock centre. *Changed from 15mm offset.*

New Rule 7.4.2.4: The lowest point of the butt-stock may not be lower than 140mm below the centre-line of the bore. ***This does not apply to wooden-stocked rifles.***

7.4.2.5: The lowest point of the fore-end increased to 120mm below the centre-line of the bore. *(Changed from 90mm below centre-line).*

7.4.2.7 Weights

7.4.2.7.b Weights cannot project downwards or outwards from the butt-stock, or

7.4.2.7.d Weights may be attached to any part of the rifle but must be within the fundamental shape of the stock. *Cannot protrude out from the stock.*

7.4.2.7.e. Weights must not be taped to the rifle. *This does not apply to tyre-balance type weights that use double-sided sticky-tape.*

7.4.4.1: New diagram to clearly show air rifle dimensions.

7.4.5 e: Weights attached to the butt-stock must be rigidly attached and may not merely taped on.

7.4.5 Standards for 50m rifles

7.4.5.g. The lowest point of the butt-stock may not be lower than 140mm below the centre-line of the bore. ***This does not apply to wooden-stocked rifles.***

7.4.5.2 Palm Rests: Definition clarified so that it can be used in positions other than standing. *Former wording suggested that a fore-end extension device could be interpreted as a Palm Rest and therefore not allowed in the kneeling or prone positions.*

No changes to Clothing Regulations

7.6.1 Shooting Positions

7.6.1.1 Kneeling: No Changes

7.6.1.2 Prone: No Changes

7.6.1.3 Standing:

7.6.1.3.j: The right hand may not touch the left hand, left arm or the left **SIDE** of the shooting jacket. *The former Rule said "left **SLEEVE** of the jacket".*

On balance, some sensible rules that have been proposed by the Athletes Committee and will help taller shooters in the standing position. There is nothing too restrictive in these new Rules, which I think have been an improvement and in most cases of benefit to the athletes.

Several different formats have been suggested for the proposed new air rifle and pistol Qualification and Final events. All will be evaluated and a final decision will be made and printed for the start of the 2018 season.