



Clay Target Sports

Shotgun target sports date back to England in the late 1700's when "box shooting" used live pigeons released from box traps with a pull cord, thus we have today's popular call of "Pull!" requesting the release of the target. The first formal trap shoot took place in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1831, using live birds. With the advent of glass ball targets, and eventually clay disc targets, the sport began to take on the popular form of the game known today as Trap. American Trap uses a single target launcher, or trap, that oscillates left to right, launching a single clay target, or bird. The shooters position themselves on one of five shooting positions, or stations. Each shooter shoots five shots from his current station, then the squad rotates to the next station. Each shooter shoots five shots from five stations.

The game of Skeet came along later. It was invented in Massachusetts in 1920, by a man hoping to improve his wingshooting abilities. There have been many refinements to the game of Skeet since that time. Typically, American Skeet is the variety played in the United States. In Skeet, only one shooter holds the shooting position at a time. Each shooter shoots a sequence of birds from 8 stations from a "high house" and a "low house." These "houses" are simply structures that hold the traps, or target launchers.

While Sporting Clays has its roots in Trap and Skeet, it is a completely different game with its own set of rules. The game is played over a course which may feature varying terrain with several different target presentations from different locations with varying flight paths. While Sporting Clays was originally designed to simulate live game scenarios, it has evolved into a sport all its own. The game is played on a course, made up of stations. Each station features a shooting stand for the participant to shoot from. Upon the shooter's call, targets are released. Targets can be thrown as single targets, simultaneous pairs, or report pairs where the second target is launched upon the report of the shot at the first target. Unlike Trap and Skeet, there are a variety of specialty targets in Sporting Clays. In addition to the 108mm Standard targets. These include 90mm MIDI targets, 60mm MINI targets, rabbits that roll and bounce on edge, battues that arc, and rockets which are heavy and maintain speed. In addition, the presentation of the targets varies, which is to say they may be thrown crossing from one side to the other, quartering away, quartering in, inbound, outbound, overhead, underfoot, or straight up in the air. It is the variety of targets, target presentations, course layouts and terrain that many find so enjoyable about Sporting Clays. While Trap in Denver is the same as Trap in Boston, and Skeet in Tallahassee is the same as Skeet in Sioux Falls; Sporting Clays is never the same game twice.

Golf with a Shotgun

Sporting Clays has been referred to a Golf with a Shotgun. While this may sound odd, it is very true, as there are several parallels between the games. Golf is played on a course, as is Sporting Clays. A golf course changes from time-to-time, as does a Sporting Clays course. Golf is a game of thought, rhythm, smooth movement, and timing as is Sporting Clays. A golf course consists of a series of holes, while a Sporting Clays course consists of a series of stations. Each hole in golf has a Tee, while each station in Sporting Clays has a stand from which the shooter fires. A golfer will study the hole and select the proper club for the shot at hand. A Sporting Clays shooter will study the target presentation and select the proper choke and shot combination for the upcoming shot or shots. The standard golf course is 9 or 18 holes, while the standard Sporting Clays course is 50 or 100 targets. In a large golf tournament, there may be several rounds over several days with the overall scores determining the results. The same holds true for Sporting Clays, as a large shoot may span several rounds over several days, with the overall scores determining the results. Sporting Clays shooters, much like golfers, are passionate about their game.

Helpful Hints for New Shooters

It can be intimidating to walk out on to a Sporting Clays course with no real experience. Nearly everyone who has shot has experienced the same feelings. If you are unsure of something, do not hesitate to ask. A great way to get started is

to ask someone at the club about the course. If you still have concerns, ask an employee of the club to see if they know of someone you could “squad up” with for your first time out. More than likely, you will get an offer to join a group of shooters. Be sure to let them know it is your first time out and you would like for them to show you the ropes. In all likelihood, you’ll be schooled on how to use the club’s equipment, keep score, and basic Sporting Clays etiquette. Another likelihood is that you’ll make some new acquaintances that could turn out to be good friends. You can be certain that you’ll have a unique experience. In exchange for their help, all you have to do is be safe, be courteous and have fun!