

# Start Your Own Juniors Team!

By: Frank Cornell

**D**o you want to get your kids or grandkids into a junior shooting program? Maybe you'd like to inspire a new generation of shooting sportsmen. Or perhaps you just want to do something in your community to promote sportsmanship and firearms awareness. When I informed Andy Fink and Ray Walters, that I was working with a junior shooting team, the first thing Andy asked of me was to write an article on starting a junior shooting team. After a moment of contemplation, I realized that I was fortunate in that I had fallen in with a group of juniors that were already organized and had adult and parental leadership and support. Unwittingly I had fulfilled one of the first requirements of establishing a junior shooting team: finding a core group of interested junior shooters. So what does it take to get into or start a junior shooting program? What steps are there? Where do you get qualified help and resources? Hopefully, I can answer a few of those questions for you in this article.

## **Interested Juniors:**

This is the first step to starting a junior shooting program, finding seriously interested juniors. Sadly, this can be a challenge in these times.

Young people have so many other things that attract them now: video games, television, motor sports, etc. Also, the modern news media vilifies firearms. The media probably does not detract juniors, but it most likely affects parental opinion. Despite this obstacle, there are still many juniors interested in shooting. A junior shooting program may be started with your child or grandchild and their friends. Local organizations may also have a group of interested junior shooters. For example, I am instructing a team for the Gem State Young Marines. I have also been approached by the Boy Scouts to help them with a summer camp shooting program. A well run junior shooting program can be contagious, once a core group of juniors is established word will spread fast! A good gun club or shooting range should have a junior program of some kind. Your local shooting facility may already have an established junior program so it may be as simple as signing your junior shooter or shooters up. Some clubs may be looking for junior shooters to sponsor.

## **Instructors/Coaches:**

Any kind of shooting team or program needs qualified instructors or coaches, especially programs for junior and beginning shooters. First let's look at what an instructor is and

what a coach is. An instructor teaches individuals or small groups marksmanship skills. A shooting coach is a team manager who also builds upon what an instructor has taught. A coach will be educated in the psychology and mental skills of good athleticism and shooting. All of the shooting coaches I know were instructors before becoming coaches which is an obvious progression. As well as providing basic safety and marksmanship instruction a good instructor will provide information on equipment, shooting programs, and publications. Furthermore, a coach or instructor will work to help acquire the necessary equipment for a successful shooting program. There are multiple sources to seek qualified firearms instructors. The National Rifle Association (NRA) maintains a list of current NRA instructors. NRA instructors are certified through NRA instructor training courses which emphasize firearms safety and basic marksmanship skills. A list of your local NRA Instructors can be acquired by contacting the NRA. Most local gun clubs or shooting ranges will have instructors associated with their organizations.

USA Shooting, the official governing body for US Olympic shooting, is another source for finding coaches. USA Shooting has some of the finest coaches that I know. USA Shooting coaches are well versed in organizing and equipping junior shooting programs.

State Fish and Game Departments are an excellent source for potential coaches/instructors. Most states require the completion of hunter safety training courses before hunters will be issued licenses. While hunter safety instructors teach firearms safety and safe hunting skills, many are also competitive shooters and can provide good marksmanship training.

4-H Clubs are also a source for finding firearms instructors and shooting programs. The National 4-H Council has a junior shooting program in which shooting instructors are required to go through a rigorous 3 day program that focuses on safety and the most basic marksmanship skills. For competitive shooting, more experienced instructors in advanced marksmanship techniques may have to be located to teach the skills necessary for organized competitive shooting.

Some communities have junior cadet programs associated with their local law enforcement agencies. Occasionally the cadet programs will have associated marksmanship teams.



Check out these websites!!

[www.nra.org](http://www.nra.org), [www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org), [www.usashooting.org](http://www.usashooting.org), [www.4husa.org](http://www.4husa.org),  
[www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org), [www.creedmoorsports.com](http://www.creedmoorsports.com), [www.champchoice.com](http://www.champchoice.com),  
[www.nealjguns.com](http://www.nealjguns.com), [www.odcmp.com](http://www.odcmp.com)



Check with your local law enforcement agencies for information on these programs.

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) also has an excellent shooting program. While your prospective junior shooters may not be interesting in scouting, the BSA may be able to refer you to qualified instructors/coaches.

The U.S. Army High School Reserve Officer Training Corps. has a nationwide junior air gun program. It is my understanding that this is a highly competitive program and many of the shooters go on to compete in the Junior Olympics. Check with your local Army High School ROTC program for information.

Last but not least, you can be the instructor/coach! If you have the desire, time, and commitment, then check with any of the above mentioned organizations for information on becoming a shooting instructor or coach.

Something to keep in mind when searching for coaches/instructors,

make sure that the potential instructor/coach is certified by a reputable firearms training institution or facility. Don't take someone's word that they are a "qualified firearms" trainer. Check their credentials!

#### **Determine the Type of Shooting Your Juniors Want to do**

The type of shooting that the juniors will be doing should be largely determined by the kids themselves. Initially, I would try to steer the juniors towards air gun or small bore shooting. Air gun and small bore shooting develops basic shooting skills laying the foundation for other shooting events. Also, air gun and small bore are relatively inexpensive shooting events. There are, of course, limitations to accommodating the shooting desires of the kids. The most likely limitation will be the availability of shooting resources, i.e. certain gun types, or range limitations. Limited skills and maturity of the kids may also impact the type of shooting program the juniors can handle. For example, smaller kids will not be able to handle heavier guns.

#### **Where to get Resources**

Just about any kind of shooting supplies that can be imagined can be acquired. Anyone with a computer and access to the internet can find these shooting supplies. The NRA has an online store. Another internet site to check is the Civilian Marksmanship Program site at [www.odcmp.com](http://www.odcmp.com). In your local area obvious places to look are gun shops, sporting goods stores, and gun clubs. Some of them may even donate or discount items when they are told what the items will be used for.

#### **What Support is Available Through Local Organizations?**

Check with local organizations for any support they may be able to provide. The American Legion and Optimist Clubs provide support for junior shooting programs. My gun club and shooting

range allows juniors to use club facilities free of charge. They also provide targets for any organized junior event.

#### **What Facilities are Available?**

Check your local area to see what shooting facilities are available. The types and availability of shooting facilities may impact the shooting events your juniors become involved in or when they can shoot. For example, outdoor ranges may not be useable during inclement weather. Maybe the range will only accommodate small caliber firearms.

#### **Determine the Goal of the Juniors**

I think this is a critical element for a junior shooting program, what do you or the shooters want to accomplish? What is the goal of the program? This is important in maintaining the interest of the juniors. It may be something as simple as basic firearms training. Perhaps the goal is to develop a competitive shooting team or league. Maybe the goal will be to just to provide a recreational shooting program.

#### **How Large a Program can be Supported?**

Consider the size of the shooting program that can be supported. The size of the shooting program will be determined by several things: how many instructor/coaches and adult helpers will there be? How much equipment is available? How much time is available? How many shooters will the facilities accommodate?

Liability should be considered when establishing a junior program. Does the facility you're using have insurance? Does the youth organization you're working with have insurance? Does the insurance cover your interest and liability?

#### **Basic Equipment Needs**

The basic equipment needs will be mostly determined by the type of shooting the juniors will be doing. All shooting requires eye and hearing protection, even air gun shooting! Firearms and ammunition are obvious equipment needs as are targets. Other equipment items to consider are: spotting scopes, shooting jackets and vests, shooting mats, shooting logs, scoring aids, and the list can go on. Equipment needs will vary and may change as the shooters progress.

In closing, sponsoring, promoting, or supporting a junior shooter or junior shooting program can be a very rewarding experience. Shooting is an athletic sport. It requires the same amount of discipline and focus as any other sport. As such, a good junior shooting program will emphasize athleticism and sportsmanship first! It is great time to see a junior improve and progress and attain self-confidence. And who knows, maybe your junior shooter will be an Olympic champion!

