VIOLENCE POLICY CENTER
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GOLD MEDAL GUNSLINGERS

Combat Shooting Targets the Olympic Games

Andrew Golden, the 11-year-old shooter in the Jonesboro school massacre, had begun to learn combat shooting

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The Violence Policy Center is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on firearms violence and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, grassroots advocates, and the general public. The VPC examines the role of firearms in America, analyzes trends and patterns in firearms violence, and works to develop policies to reduce firearm-related death and injury.

This study was authored by Philip Alpers and Josh Sugarmann and edited by Bill McGeveran and Aimée Stenzel. Research assistance was provided by Elizabeth Bell and Marty Langley.

The cover photo was downloaded from abcnews.com.

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, The Samuel Rubin Foundation, and The Trauma Foundation provided support for Alpers' research.

The VPC's work was funded with the support of The Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, The George Gund Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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Table of Contents

Section One: Targeting the Olympics.....1

Section Two: Targeting Gun Control.....7

Section Three: "GunGames Kids".....12

Section Four: A Combat Heritage.....17

Section Five: The Road to Olympic Recognition.....24

Appendix: Combat Shooting Web Sites.....28

Endnotes.....29

Section One: Targeting the Olympics

The Olympic Games are the world's premier sporting event. In the most recent Summer Olympics, held in 1996 in Atlanta, 197 countries competed for medals in 27 sporting events and participated in numerous additional exhibition sports.[1]

The Olympic Charter sets out the ideals and the aims of the Olympic Movement. Under the Charter, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) "participates in actions to promote peace" and "dedicates its efforts to ensuring that...violence is banned."[2] The IOC's goals include "the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles"[3] and "encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity."[4] As the Charter summarizes these noble aims: "The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world."[5]

Now, the peaceful intent of the Olympic Movement is being challenged. The gun lobby—eager to expand the perception of "sporting" activities involving firearms—has launched an international effort to make combat shooting an Olympic sport. Boosters of combat shooting hope that association with the Olympics, under the euphemistic name of "practical" shooting, will legitimize and popularize both their competitions and the increasingly lethal weapons they use.

By establishing combat shooting as an international sport, the gun lobby would also advance several of its most cherished goals. Olympic status for combat shooting would create new legal arguments in favor of non-sporting firearms, new opportunities to attract children into the gun culture, and new marketing opportunities for struggling gun makers.

Traditional target shooting has long been a part of the Olympics. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the French nobleman who launched the modern Olympics more than 100 years ago, was himself a former French pistol champion. One of the first nine sports he included in the new event was shooting.[6] At the 1996 Summer Olympics, more than 100 countries competed in 15 separate shooting events.[a] These athletes employ specialty weapons, take careful aim at bull's-eye targets, and usually fire from a set position.

So-called practical shooting is almost the complete opposite of traditional target shooting sports. Competitors conduct their activities over a "run-and-gun" obstacle course where they face a variety of "real-world" or "practical" shoot/don't shoot

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[a] The events were: air pistol, free pistol, rapid-fire pistol, sport pistol, rifle events, air rifle, free rifle prone, three-position rifle, running target, shotgun events, trap, skeet, and double trap.

situations, such as firing at the human silhouette of a "hostage-taker" while sparing the "hostage." Unlike traditional target sports, the weapons used are most often large-caliber pistols, assault rifles, and riot shotguns. And although participants use the more innocuous term "practical" when dealing with the general public, among themselves enthusiasts routinely refer to their pastime as "combat" or "tactical" shooting. Throughout this report such activity will be referred to by its original name, combat shooting.

In a typical "course of fire," contestants begin with a rapid draw from a holster, and are then timed as they run, crawl, and sometimes climb through a shoot-'em-up scenario, all while firing at human-scaled head-and-torso targets. Human targets intended to be shot are often referred to as "bad guys." "No-shoot" targets are often called "hostages." The highest scores are awarded to "head shots" and "heart shots" because of their heightened lethality, with points awarded for speed of shooting as much as for accuracy.

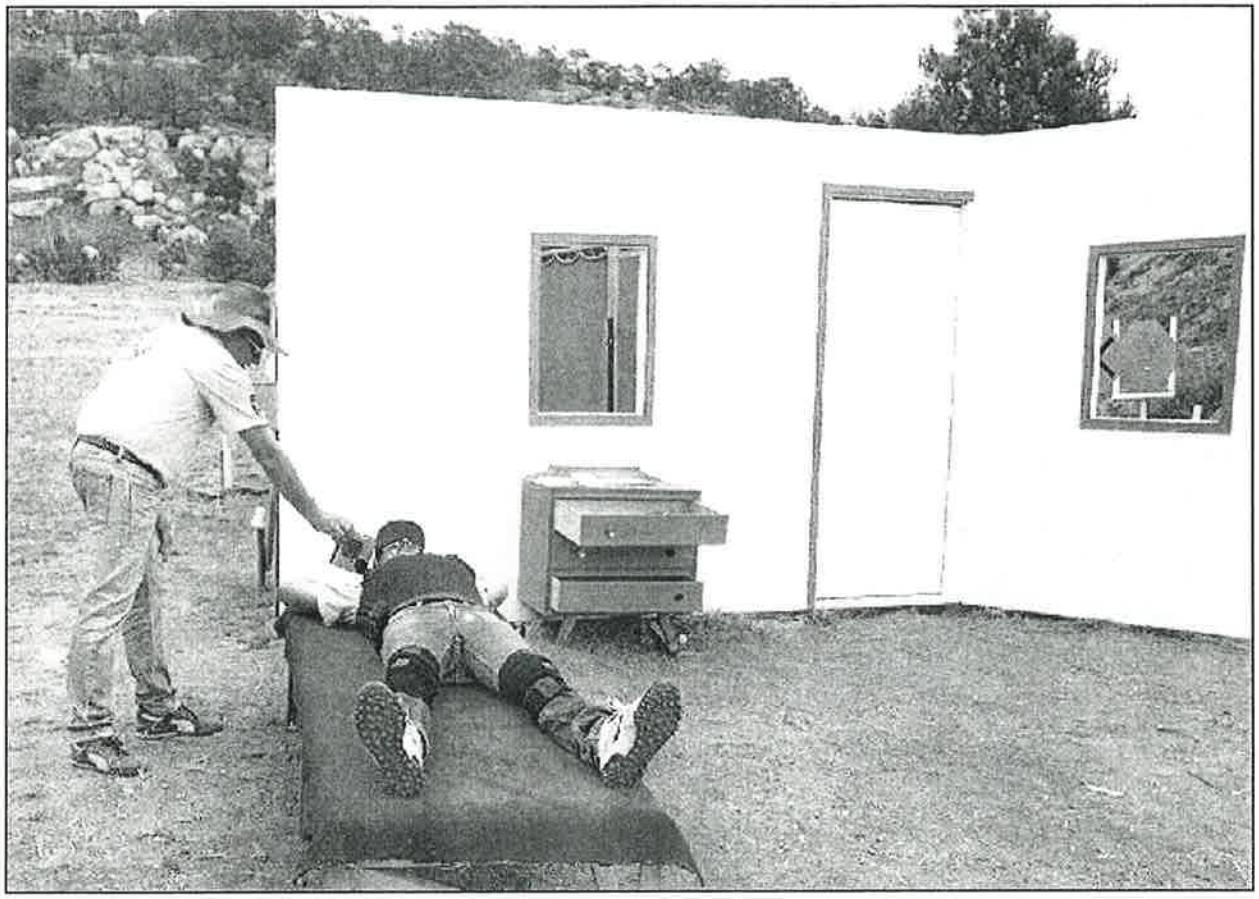
A landscape of wrecked cars, dangerous dark alleyways, ubiquitous home invasions, and crime-ridden businesses dominates the world of the combat shooter. With titles like "Save the Bank," "The Bodyguard," "Cartel House Raid," and "Carjacked by Gang Members," courses of fire often reflect the self-defense fantasies of the combat shooter, as demonstrated in the following examples:

- At the 1995 New Zealand Practical Pistol Nationals held in Rotorua, New Zealand, "stage" titles for the courses of fire included: "Helicopter Raid," "It Pays to Run Hard," "Pram Push" (pushing a baby carriage "while shooting one's way to a 'sniper shelter'"), "To Save a Friend," and "Bomb Alert" (where the shooter had to place a bomb between shots).[7]

- According to a 1998 account of an Australian competition at which New Zealanders competed, the instructions for "Wake Up" explained that the scenario "begins with the shooter lying on the bed, gun unloaded in the dresser drawer."[8]

- One course, "ATM Blues," held at the Australian Nationals in 1995, required shooters to begin by inserting a bank card into a mock automated teller machine, thereby activating moving targets in a "speed shoot."[9]

- A world championship held in 1993 in Bisley, UK, featured the "Bank of England stage, where you engage two IPSC [standard, humanoid] targets at 35 metres from the doorway of a helicopter...dismount and dash to the Bank doors which, after you kicked them open, left you crawling



1998 Australian Championships, Little River, Melbourne

under ropes to the engaging targets." Photographs accompanying this account showed combat pistol participants firing from a London double-decker bus.[10]

The campaign to bring combat shooting to the Olympics is led by the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC), the international organization representing combat shooters. The IPSC was founded at the International Combat Pistol Conference held in Columbia, Missouri, in May 1976.[11] Its initial membership of nine nations has today grown to 65 member regions representing 50,000 shooters worldwide.[b] The IPSC's U.S. chapter, the United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA), was founded in 1985. Headquartered in Sedro Woolley, Washington, the USPSA claims approximately 15,000 members nationwide.[12]

Combat shooting has also enjoyed robust support from the firearms industry—both in the United States and internationally. In its 1996 president's report, the IPSC thanked a long list of gun industry sponsors for their financial support of the World Shoot in Brazil, including Taurus, CZ, Springfield Armory, Tanfoglio, Glock, Walther, and Rossi. Sponsors outside the gun industry included Coca-Cola and Nestlé.[13]

Many of the same brand names are worn by industry-sponsored IPSC competitors. A wide range of companies sponsor shooters, from old-line companies like Colt's Manufacturing of West Hartford, Connecticut to smaller specialty firms such as Wilson Combat ("Home of the Winningest Competition Pistols in IPSC History"), based in Berryville, Arkansas. Wilson advertises its Model Special Ops "CQB" (Close Quarters Battle) pistol as a custom combat weapon for self defense or competition, with uses including:

> Self Defense, Offensive/Defensive Special Operations, Police and Military, USPSA [IPSC] Limited Class Competition, Informal Target Shooting, Plinking.[14]

The advent of combat shooting offers a marketing bonanza for all of these companies by associating guns designed principally to kill other human beings with traditional sporting activities. This is just one of the many advantages sought by the gun lobby and the firearms industry in the push for Olympic recognition of combat shooting. As this report and its accompanying video will document, increasing the acceptance of combat shooting worldwide will assist them in efforts to sell non-sporting firearms, recruit kids into the gun culture, and even fight against gun control laws.

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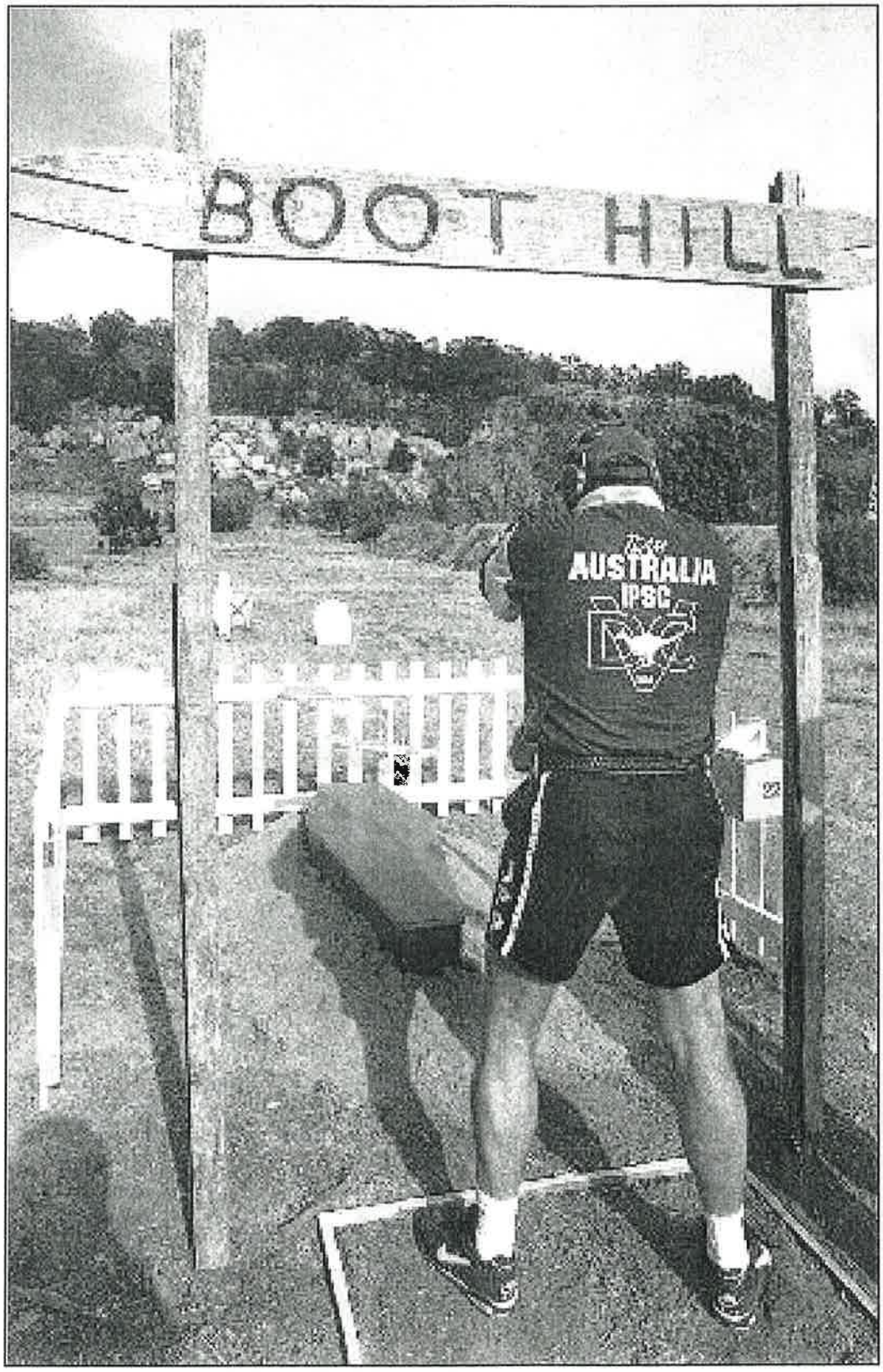
[b] A "region" is usually a country, but can include a geographical area or a political subdivision (e.g. Hong Kong).



1998 Australian Championships, Little River, Melbourne

1998 Australian Championships, Little River, Melbourne

Section Two: Targeting Gun Control

Combat shooting's principal boosters generally oppose gun control laws. The most prominent example is retired U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel John Dean (Jeff) Cooper, the IPSC's first president, who essentially created combat shooting.[c]

Whatever the formal political role of combat shooting enthusiasts, their hobby itself poses a threat to gun control laws throughout the world by further legitimizing guns that were designed for lethality rather than sport. Restrictions in the United States are particularly vulnerable, because they are predicated on exemptions for "sporting" firearms.[d]

In the U.S., attempts to wrap restricted weapons in a cloak of respectability by utilizing them in an alleged sport are nothing new. In 1986, the U.S. Congress banned the sale and production of new machine guns for civilian use and possession in the United States. Three months later, the National Rifle Association announced its intent to introduce legislation to repeal the ban. As a "prelude" to the bill's introduction, the organization announced a newly minted position on the "sporting" use of machine guns: "The NRA recognizes that sporting events involving automatic firearms are similar to those events such as silhouette target shooting and other target-related endeavors, and deserve the same respect and support."[15] While the bill was never introduced, comparable rhetoric has frequently been used in other instances.

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[c] Cooper, a living legend for many gun advocates, is known as the "gunner's guru." Cooper also serves on the board of directors of the National Rifle Association, is a columnist for *Guns & Ammo* magazine, and is author of the monthly newsletter "Jeff Cooper's Commentaries," available on the internet at www.cybersurf.co.uk/JeffCooper. Cooper's inflammatory writings on a wide range of issues—with the common denominators of racial antagonism, fear of federal authority, and hostility to international cooperation—offer an insight not only into his own views regarding the use of firearms, but perhaps into the paranoia and fear that frame the very context in which combat shooting occurs. Cooper regularly refers to Japanese as "Nips," and has suggested calling black South Africans from the Gauteng province "Orang-gautengs." Cooper's racist views are not limited to other nations. In 1994, he wrote: "Los Angeles and Ho Chi Min City have declared themselves sister cities. It makes sense—they are both Third World metropolises formerly occupied by Americans." And commenting on the murder rate in Los Angeles, Cooper noted in 1991 that "the consensus is that no more than five to ten people in a hundred who die by gunfire in Los Angeles are any loss to society. These people fight small wars amongst themselves. It would seem a valid social service to keep them well-supplied with ammunition."

[d] Section 925(d)(3) of the Gun Control Act of 1968 states, "The Secretary shall authorize a firearm or ammunition to be imported or brought into the United States or any possession thereof if the firearm or ammunition...is a type...[that]...is generally recognized as particularly suitable for or readily adaptable to sporting purposes, excluding surplus military firearms...."

The NRA and other opponents of the U.S. assault weapons ban used similar arguments and language in reference to the supposed "sporting" use of military-style combat weapons. Since enactment of the ban and similar import restrictions, the gun industry has repeatedly made slight modifications in the features of its weapons in order to pass the "sporting purposes" test and evade the law—a practice widely known as "sporterization."[e]

Today, the drive to promote combat shooting serves the same purpose for a wide variety of weapons, as illustrated with stark clarity by the words of former USPSA president Dave Stanford:

> All of our matches involve semi-automatic firearms, so we're really one of the strongest bulwarks towards legitimizing the continued use of semi-automatic firearms in America.[16]

Discussions surrounding the introduction of the "three-gun shoot" to combat shooting underscore this political agenda. The "three-gun shoot" allows combat shooters to use three types of weapons in the same event: riot shotguns, assault rifles, and high-caliber pistols (see page 9). In the words of one club official, the three-gun shoot creates "an opportunity to use politically incorrect weapons, often called *assault weapons*, for the fun of it."[17]

The recent passage of lax concealed weapons laws in a number of U.S. states further demonstrates the link between combat shooting and pro-gun politics. Lobbying efforts for these laws, which generally allow all non-felons to easily obtain licenses to carry handguns on their persons, concentrated primarily on flawed self-defense arguments and emotional appeals to fear of crime—using scenarios not unlike many courses of fire in combat shooting. In an e-mail distributed on the IPSC E-mail Digest, one U.S. club organizer wrote:

> Our largest potential group of new recruits are the hundreds of thousands of new CCW [concealed carry weapon permit] holders–the largest pool of new gun owners ever. If we could get even a relatively small percentage of CCW holders interested in the sport, we could hit all our membership goals easily.[18]

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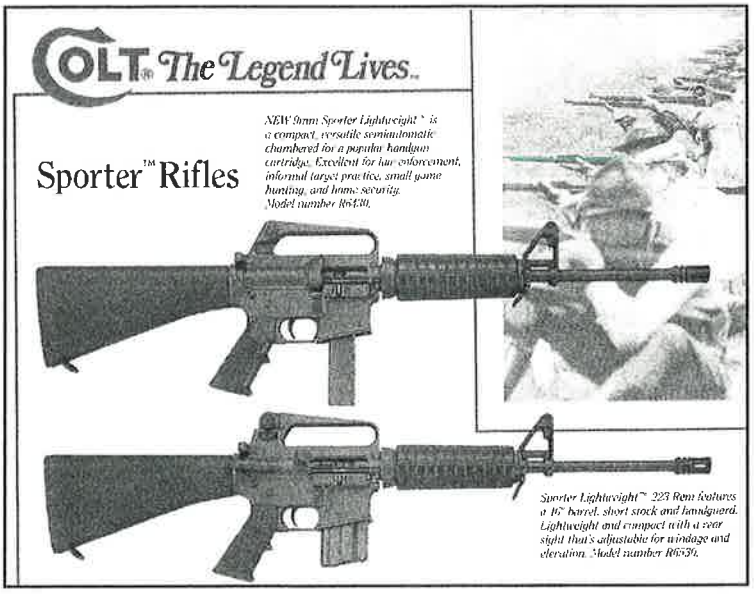
[e] "Sporterized" assault weapons incorporate minor cosmetic modifications in an effort to subvert restrictions on their manufacture and sale. For example, one common tactic for sporterizing assault rifles is to substitute a "thumbhole" stock for a pistol grip. This slight modification changes the appearance of the firearm while maintaining the function of the pistol grip—allowing the weapon to be easily fired from the hip. Other common sporterization modifications include the removal of threaded barrels, flash suppressors, or folding stocks.

Examples of Types of Weapons Used in the Three-Gun Shoot



Colt Sporter Assault Rifle

Clark Custom Guns Model 1911

Mossberg Ghost Ring Model 500

While IPSC members argue that the use of virtually any weapon—including high-caliber pistols, high-capacity assault rifles, and semiautomatic riot shotguns—in almost any context against human targets qualifies as a "sporting" use, the U.S. government has thus far ruled otherwise. In 1998 the U.S. Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms banned the importation of a wide range of "sporterized" foreign-made assault firearms and issued a study explaining its ruling. In the study, the department concluded:

> While some may consider practical shooting a sport, by its very nature it is closer to police/combat-style competition and is not comparable to the more traditional types of sports, such as hunting and organized competitive target shooting. Therefore, we are not convinced that practical shooting does, in fact, constitute a sporting purpose under section 925(d)(3).[19]

This adverse ruling certainly intensifies the interest of the gun lobby in gaining Olympic status for combat shooting. In the face of such an international imprimatur, it would become far more difficult for Treasury officials to sustain their interpretation that they "are not convinced" combat shooting is a sport.

Outside the United States, in countries that ban or severely restrict the availability of handguns, assault weapons, and other firearms to the general public, combat shooting offers a means by which pro-gun advocates—under the guise of combat shooting as sport—can begin chipping away at these laws.

New Zealand offers a case study. New Zealand has all but prohibited civilian possession of handguns since the 1930s. As a result, crime with handguns is rare, and only about one percent of police officers carry firearms on duty. In 1980, New Zealand Pistol Association official Bruce McMillan stated:

> At the moment there are no plans for combat shooting. One of our problems is that we are very shy of public image. We feel perhaps that running around with guns in holsters, having loaded guns in a running or moving situation in relation to targets or firing points, is a bit more than our public image can cope with right now. Things could change. People tell us that we are worrying about a public image that is already bad, so that we may as well live up to it.[20]

Today, 19 years after declaring "no plans for combat shooting," New Zealand's 3,000 handgun owners and 80 pistol clubs have persuaded authorities to allow regular combat shooting at humanoid targets using assault weapons, riot shotguns, and handguns. The same pattern has been followed in Australia, Canada, Europe, South America, and South Africa.

To pro-gun advocates, framing combat shooting as a wholesome sport is an effective method of normalizing assault weapons and powerful handguns, both in the law and in public opinion. Doing so supports the gun lobby's constant campaign to sell more guns to civilians.

Section Three: "GunGames Kids"

Many Americans first learned about combat shooting after the March 1998 massacre of children by children at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas. In that horrifying tragedy, 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden ambushed their classmates from a wooded hillside after setting off the school's fire alarm. As the students left the building, Johnson and Golden opened fire, killing four girls and a teacher, and wounding 11 other children.

In the investigation that followed, it was revealed that Golden's father, Dennis, was the founder and head of the Jonesboro Practical Shooters Association and had begun teaching Andrew combat shooting.[21] News reports focused not only on the young ages of the shooters, but also on how Golden had apparently played out the "shoot-to-kill" fantasy of combat shooting in chilling reality.

While many would be shocked by the idea of putting a real pistol into the hands of a pre-teen and setting him loose in a lurid fantasy scenario, the USPSA is actively recruiting children to join its ranks. The organization's web site (www.uspsa.org) contains an entire section (www.uspsa-juniors.org/main.html) headlined "USPSA's Junior Program: Dedicated to America's Finest Youth."

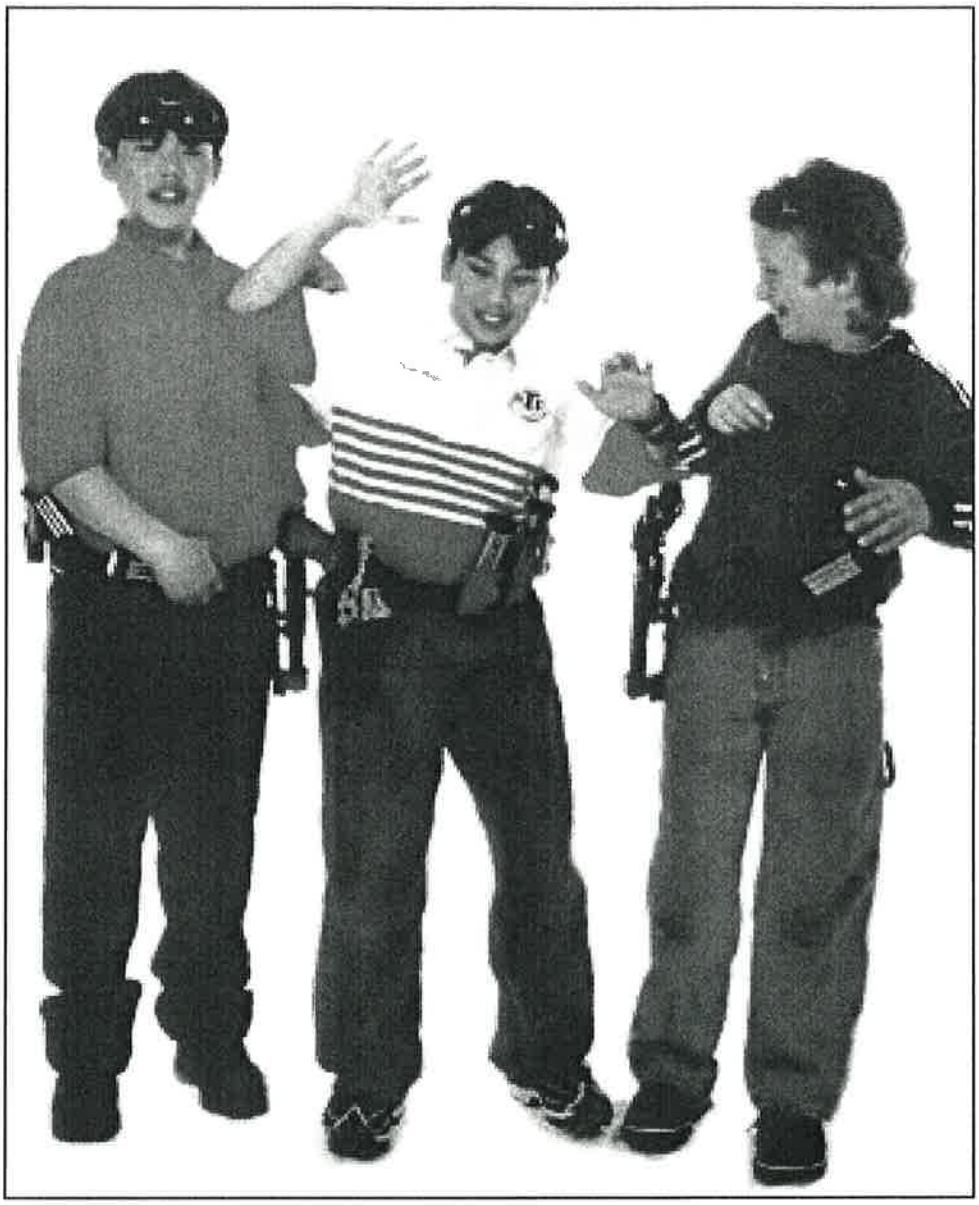
The web page offers combat shooting role models for children. A "Photo Gallery" section features the "GunGames Kids," three boys armed with holstered handguns, ammunition clips tucked into their pants (see page 13). The caption reads:

> Julian, Izak and Chase are just your regular pre-teens who love to shoot. As the official members of 'GunGames Kids—America's Youth' team, they will be touring the different major shooting events across the country to promote more youth participation in the different gun sports.[22]

The section also features profiles of leading youth combat shooters, including one teenager who, after professing his love for his girlfriend, notes, "Yes, I lead a fairly boring life, very few friends. Oh well, that just gives me more time to shoot."

Another 17-year-old recounts how he began combat shooting:

> I started shooting competition when I was 8½ years old! Yep, I started with a S&W [Smith & Wesson] model 19 and shot 38 [S]pecial loads. At first I had to pull the trigger with both index fingers. But after 6 months could just use my right index finger. At 9½ my dad bought me a Springfield Armory .38 Super. Of course it was all tricked out, but at



Julian, Izak, and Chase, the "GunGames Kids"

> that time the optic sights hadn't caught on. Oh yea, I got this gun because I made a bet with my dad. He told me if I got straight A's he would get me a race gun. Ha ha dad, you lost on that one! That summer, at the age of 10, I competed in my first USPSA match.[23]

The web site also contains information on "Camp Shootout," which is described as a "practical pistol camp for USPSA Junior Members" ages 12 and over (see photos on page 15). This year's Camp Shootout will be held July 27th to 31st in Princeton, Louisiana. The "main objective of the Junior summer camp program is to teach young shooter[s] the basic techniques and skills required to successfully compete in USPSA style practical pistol matches."[24]

During the five-day program, participants learn how to assemble and disassemble Model 1911handguns and undergo "live-fire" training, including "getting in and out of shooting positions, shooting around obstacles and through ports." They also receive "'run and gun' instruction...shooting on the move and engaging moving targets." Among the funders of the USPSA Junior Program are Glock and Clark Custom Guns, Inc.[25]

A year after the Jonesboro massacre, the USPSA web site features a section titled "IPSC Needs Its Juniors." In it, IPSC sales and marketing representative Annie Lory Bachrach urges junior members to help her in gaining Olympic recognition for combat shooting:

> Having considered many arguments and listened to many 'adults,' it has become apparent to me that YOU are the very best representative of IPSC. YOU kids are the truth behind the sport. If I can show these committees just how great YOU are, then I can sell the truth about IPSC. You kids represent the success of the IPSC structure, discipline, training and support for bright, athletic young people who are committed to a dynamic shooting sport within the healthiest of environments. You are the promise for a better future. Please help me by sending your 'story,'...a resume of sorts...how you started, where & how you trained, who influenced you...why you like it...your successes and your failures...all the cool stuff. I appreciate your effort in this. Remember, we're all in this together! Thanks a million![26]

A comprehensive study of gun ownership in the United States, published in 1996 by the Police Foundation, found that "those whose parents kept guns are three times as likely as others to own one themselves. In fact, 80 percent of all current gun owners report that their parents kept a gun in the home."[27]

Camp Shootout, the USPSA Junior Program Summer Camp

These statistics presage a giant marketing disaster for the gun industry. As gun ownership shrinks, the future customer base for firearms erodes. Ensuring that young people are familiar and comfortable with guns—so that they will buy them as adults—has become an industry imperative to which companies and trade groups devote significant attention and resources. With the decline of hunting and the end of universal military service, two traditional introductions to guns for young people, this effort has required increasing creativity. Many within the industry see combat shooting as one way to attract the wandering attention of children in an era of video games.

This argument was baldly stated by Wally Arida, one-time publisher of the magazine *GunGames*. In a web site article entitled "Our Children Can Play With Guns," Arida bragged that his 10-year old son "won the world speed shooting title for competitors 12 years old and younger." He continued, "We must involve our children into [sic] our gun games. As an industry, we must build the structure for various youth shooting programs."[28]

By sponsoring and supporting combat shooting for children—and involving them in the campaign for Olympic recognition—the firearms industry has signalled its agreement with Arida's call to action.

Section Four: A Combat Heritage

The military roots of combat shooting can be traced back to its infancy in 1948. In that year, Jeff Cooper and a colleague developed the "Advanced Military Combat Pistol Course" to teach the "realistic use of the sidearm." This was eventually published as a manual to teach soldiers to kill efficiently with handguns in what Cooper refers to as "combat pistolcraft."[29] Nowadays, combat shooting is arguably the world's most popular method of training military, paramilitary, and police forces to shoot in close-quarters battle.

Attempts to transform this serious training exercise for military and law enforcement officers into a diversion and a "sporting" event for the general population began shortly after its initial development. As Cooper describes the early stages:

> In 1959 the Bear Valley Gunslingers were established in California with the avowed purpose of introducing realism and variety into sporting pistol competition. In due course the Gunslingers evolved into the Southwest ('Combat') Pistol League....The purpose of all this was to 'get real' and to evaluate the systems by which fighting skills with the handgun could be properly evaluated and rewarded.[30]

Cooper continued his promotion of recreational combat shooting and, in 1976, was elected first president of the newly minted IPSC and named its Honorary Lifetime Chairman.

Given its military pedigree, the continued focus of combat shooting on lethality, self-defense, and the "practical" application of anti-personnel shooting skills is not surprising. Indeed, enthusiasts frequently emphasize these links when they talk about combat shooting—and companies stress them when selling related products.

Wilson Combat President Bill Wilson makes this sales pitch clear in an advertisement for the company's Model Special Ops CQB—supposedly a "sporting" weapon—in which he declares, "I personally trust my safety and the safety of my family to a Defensive Combat Pistol."[31]

The IPSC also highlights the link between combat shooting and military and law enforcement trainees by organizing special tournaments for them. According to IPSC President Nick Alexakos, the IPSC Executive Council should choose "a Director of Military Competition and a Director of Law Enforcement Competition for each continent." Alexakos notes that the "IPSC needs to assist in the organization and promotion of inter-military and inter-law enforcement competitions."[32]

While thus exploiting its "practical" heritage, the IPSC and others involved with combat shooting also recognize that its emphasis on lethal force is—understandably—a severe impediment to its widespread acceptance as a sport. In response, while continuing to trumpet these aspects with sympathetic audiences, promoters have consciously downplayed them when speaking to the public at large.

This subterfuge began with the very name of the activity. Cooper and his colleagues acknowledged as much when, in 1976, they altered the public description of combat shooting to the more innocuous "practical" shooting. In its official handbook, the USPSA explains that the name change was necessary "in deference to public image."[33]

Cooper recalls such concessions in a tone laced with sarcasm—placing the blame on society's failure to see the sport in his deadly diversion:

> Any international competition must submit itself to the jurisdiction of the nation in which it is held. Certain useful techniques are viewed askance, or in some cases forbidden, in countries where the nature of the art [of combat shooting] is not fully understood—and that includes most of them.
>
> Pistolcraft is by nature a fighting art, and in our increasingly emasculate century fighting is held to be politically incorrect. (We had to extract the word 'Combat' from the title of the Southwest Combat Pistol League because it offended the California Secretary of State. The poor fellow!)[34]

This acknowledgement of the controversy surrounding combat shooting extends even to the descriptive language used at combat shooting events open to the public. "Head shots" become "upper A-B zones," "assault trials" are downgraded to "field trials," and "hostage" targets change to the less offensive "no-shoots."[35]

Having rechristened themselves and their activities, the "practical" shooters face a more fundamental image problem involving the very nature of their activity. In a 1994 *Blue Press* article explaining how U.S. gun clubs could recruit new members to aid the National Rifle Asociation, pro-gun advocate David Kopel alluded to this challenge:

> [A]t any shooting event open to newcomers, don't even think of using human silhouette targets, which many people find extremely threatening. Stick to the good old-fashioned bullseye. Save the silhouettes for advanced IPSC shooters.[36]

When a change in the shape of the official IPSC target was proposed in response to such concerns about public relations, the ensuing debate over the idea provided a window into combat shooters' views about their public image.

Overtly humanoid, the original target is a life-size cardboard cutout of the human head and torso (see page 20). The highest scores are awarded to "head shots" and "heart shots." In catalogs offering "IPSC Combat Type Shooting Targets"[37] there is no doubt regarding the purpose of the official human shape:

> Combat shooters have almost as many choices as bullseye [sic] shooters. Called variously 'police combat,' 'silhouette,' or 'torso,' they are designed for those who must shoot to the center of mass—meaning police, military, and combat competitors.[38]

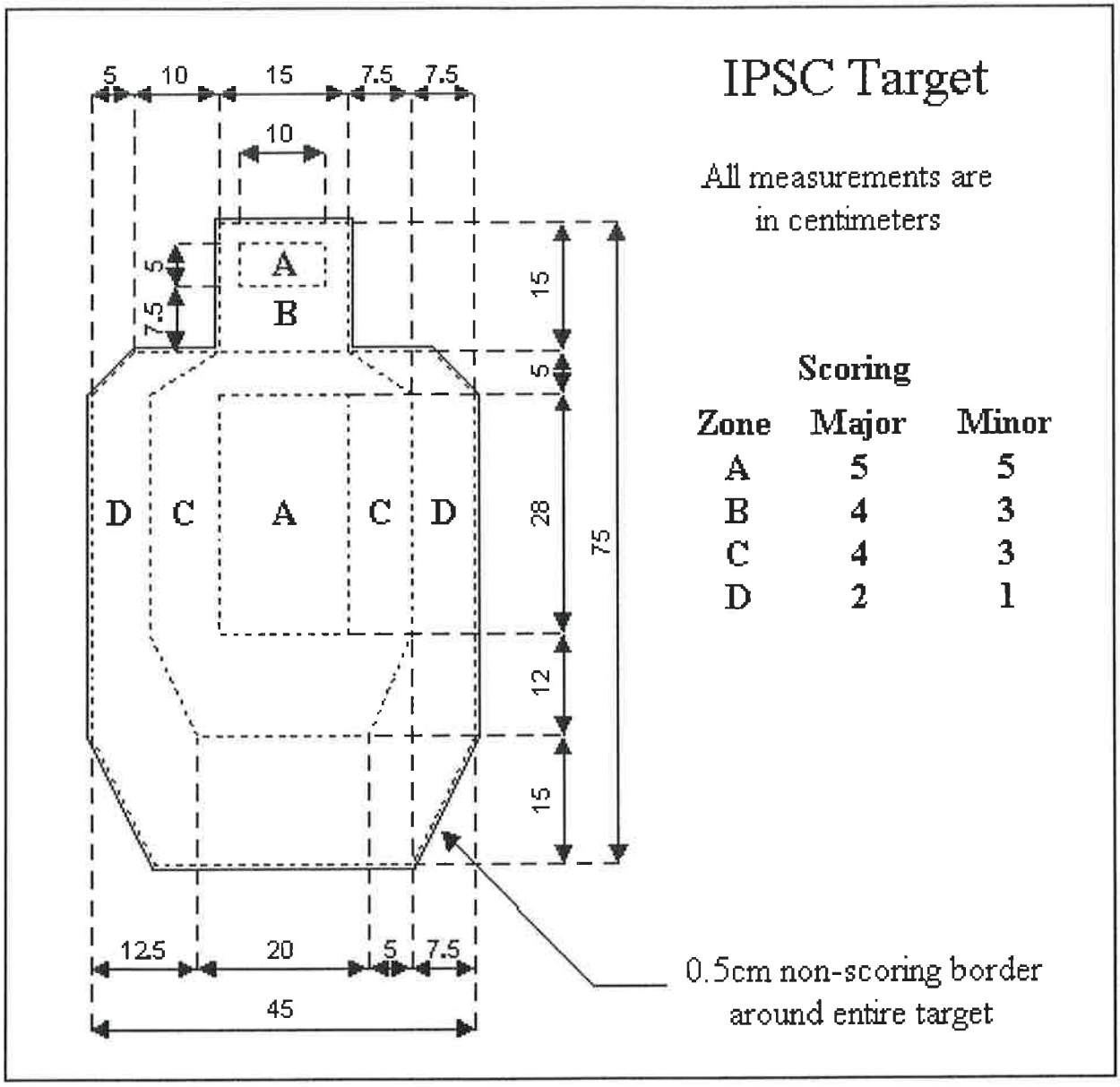
Needless to say, this image—human targets being shredded by high-powered weapons—does little to advance the IPSC's goal of worldwide respectability and participation in an international sporting event dedicated to "encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity."

IPSC leaders have long recognized that to obtain Olympic recognition they must change the shape of their target. In the established shooting disciplines that have been a part of the Olympics, targets are designed to avoid any human resemblance. Current Olympic shooting sports—which involve considerable precision and skill—still use age-old circular "bull's-eye" targets.

So, as it set its sights on Olympic recognition, the IPSC announced a new target which retained the same size and scoring pattern as the traditional combat shooting head-and-torso silhouette, but bore a more abstract resemblance to a human target (see page 21). The new target was dubbed the "Classic," perhaps in an attempt to conceal its recent vintage.

The appearance of the "Classic" target on the IPSC and USPSA web sites immediately caused controversy among members. In publications and Internet correspondence, combat shooters voiced their concerns about the new target. In one newsletter, USPSA President Andy Hollar wrote:

> What do you think? Should USPSA/IPSC adopt a 'headless' target? Would doing so be seen as a step toward capitulating under pressure



Original IPSC Target

New IPSC "Classic" Target

> from the left?...Would we get more sponsorship with less humanoid targets?...[Humanoid targets] reinforce our heritage as a self-defense oriented sport....I say let's add some new, fresh challenges, have more fun and not worry about what non-shooters think.[39]

In response to such criticisms, IPSC President Nick Alexakos, a Canadian and Olympic booster, offered reassurances that, although the target was modified, it still retained its human characteristics:

> A common misconception is that the proposed target is 'headless.' Not so. The Classic has all the same features as the current target. It can 'peek' over, or around walls. It can be used in exactly the same manner as the current target, however the actual overall dimensions are smaller. This is a good thing.[40]

Typical of the reaction by rank-and-file members to the debate was this contribution to the IPSC E-mail Digest:

> Regarding lopping the heads off targets...whatever, but it won't change non-shooters' perception of the sport...of the hundreds of people I've helped bring into the sport over the years, the SINGLE BIGGEST FACTOR has been that these people thought the courses were cool. Every time a hot movie featured a 'Hogan's Alley' type shooting scenario, I got a blip in my club memberships...the biggest praise from shooters and the gun media comes for courses with lots of cool props that closely resemble either the Real World (such as it is) or our Fantasy World....Only a complete moron would fail to understand that the targets are 'humanoid'...using R2D2, tombstones or whatever type targets in order to blunt media/public perception that IPSC shooting involves humanoid targets assumes that the media and the public are stupid.[41]

Some contributors to the E-mail Digest, especially those from outside the United States, were more sympathetic to the IPSC's efforts, including these writers:

> Making the targets less obviously humanoid is simply one very small logical step to securing our future.[42]

> To divide ourselves is not the way to fight the anti-gun international lobby. If this sport is going to grow we need to be in the same global boat. Personally, I don't give a s**t what the target looks like, but...some regions need...this sport in order to keep their guns, think about that. This sport must grow and be internationally based to be

> recognized by the public in general. That's the way to go! We can make it happen but only if we are united.[43]

Such foreign views drew rapid return salvoes from the U.S.:

> How naive can you be to think that by changing the target you are going to give the appearance of being politically correct. We shoot guns with real bullets, remember?[44]

> I have no desire to see IPSC lead us headlong into global 'compromise'. We should be drawing a line in the sand.[45]

Ultimately, the lure of Olympic participation and its associated respectability appears to have won the "Classic" target debate. In early 1999, IPSC president Alexakos announced:

> It looks like the Classic target is here to stay. More and more IPSC Regions have officially requested to use and evaluate the Classic and presently there is little doubt that it will be voted in as an authorized target at the next General Assembly.[46]

While the IPSC's leadership has made the quest for Olympic recognition its Holy Grail, a small but vocal segment of combat shooters—composed primarily of United States "right to bear arms" pro-gun advocates—has begun waging a war within the organization to abandon the quest for Olympic recognition. These shooters object to any form of compromise aimed at making combat shooting more politically acceptable.

In answer to the "no compromise" wing of combat shooters, Alexakos assured members that any changes, such as altering the combat shooting target, would be purely cosmetic:

> IPSC has no intentions of changing our character, our dynamics, or our 'raison d'être' to conform to anyone else's sense of correctness. We are however, going to continue to grow and evolve—evolve into a recognized, respected, and accepted sports shooting organization.[47]

In their attempt to balance the happiness of hard-core members with the goal of Olympic recognition, Alexakos and other IPSC leaders face a daunting challenge. With promises such as these, they declare their intention to preserve the lethal shoot-'em-up character of combat shooting, whatever image they present to the general public.

Section Five: The Road to Olympic Recognition

The Olympic process is not a simple one. A place in the Games' opening ceremony is one of the most sought after prizes in all of athletics. At the Sydney Olympics in 2000, just 28 sports will compete with full Olympic medal status.[48] The IOC also recognizes 25 additional non-medal sports. These "sports in waiting" hope that one day they may be granted full Olympic recognition and medal participation.

As president of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch, along with a panel of representatives from various countries, is the final arbiter on Olympic recognition. In fact, however, much of the influence over the decision lies with IOC Director of Sport Gilbert Felli, who advises Samaranch on such matters. Interviewed for this report, Felli was oblique in his assessment of the IPSC's application for admission of combat shooting, stating: "All sports applying for Olympic recognition begin with an equal chance. These people [the IPSC] have made application to the Committee, and we will accord them the same consideration as any other applicant."[49]

Felli's diplomatic caution offers little hint of the IOC's inclinations on the admission of combat shooting. Most "new" sports take seven years or more to complete the process of admission to formal Olympic recognition.[50] While supporters of sports such as whitewater kayaking, karate, water skiing, and bowling are careful not to sound presumptuous about their future role in the games, combat shooting proponents seem to have received all the encouragement they need to be publicly confident of their place in this lineup.

The IPSC began its race for recognition in 1997, with the hope of being included in the 2004 Olympics in Athens as an exhibition sport. The organization's first move was persuading Indonesian authorities to admit combat shooting as a warm-up event in the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, Asia's version of the Olympics. This victory caused unbridled—and perhaps premature—excitement in the U.S. combat shooting magazine *GunGames*:

> Indonesia...presented an IPSC tournament as an official demonstration event. That was the first time Practical Shooting was featured in an Olympic-sanctioned affair!...But the best news of all comes from IPSC President Nick Alexakos who reported to us that Practical Shooting has been officially cleared as an exhibition event at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece. In 2004, IPSC shooters will march at the Olympic stadium in Greece alongside the rest of the world's best athletes![51]

There was similar early optimism in other countries. The New Zealand Pistol Association's magazine, *The Bullshooter*, reported:

> Practical Pistol Shooting has been confirmed as a demonstration sport for the 2004 Olympic Games in Greece. The speed, challenge and skill level of competitors, combined with spectator appeal that Practical Pistol enjoys, will undoubtedly see this sport draw considerable attention.[52]

At its General Assembly in Caracas in 1997, the IPSC voted to approach the International Olympic Committee.[53] Assistant IPSC Secretary Doug Lewis recalls:

> The Executive Council was instructed to continue to pursue the Olympic application process and make formal request for recognition....The Hellenic Shooting Federation forms part of the organizing committee for the 2004 Athens Olympics and has pledged that IPSC will be a demonstration sport. There was a great deal of applause here![54]

Although this bold promise was made by the IPSC Regional Director for Greece,[55] such confidence was perhaps excessive. By the next year the IPSC already faced a setback to its Olympic hopes, finding itself—

> in a dispute with the Greek Minister of Sports who says that IPSC is not a sport but simply a 'distraction'—a hobby. We are not at all amused and have taken this battle to the highest levels. Without the approval from the good Minister there would be no gun permits issued to our Greek members and this is a serious matter.[56]

According to one Greek combat shooter, "The Ministry [of Sport] has actually instructed the Greek Shooting Confederation (SKOE) not to organize any more IPSC matches!"[57] Alexakos, the IPSC president, acknowledged in 1998 that the formal application to the IOC was only the first step in a "colossal application process."[58]

In the following months, the IPSC stepped up its lobbying efforts to gain supporters to intervene with the Greek authorities on their behalf. IPSC officials met with the IOC's Felli[59] and with Tamas Ajan, vice president of the General Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF). After the latter meeting, Alexakos enthused:

> Dr. Tamas Ajan...[is] an IPSC shooter! We spent an hour together in his office discussing the upcoming GAISF General Assembly in Monaco and the procedure for GAISF application....[I attended] the Congress of GAISF. Every sports federation in the world was in attendance."[60]

Finally, in a December 1998 IPSC newsletter piece entitled "IPSC Victory in Greece: An Early Christmas Present," Alexakos wrote:

> We are extremely pleased to announce that the Greek Minister of Sports has agreed with the Hellenic Shooting Association [sic] and officially recognized the legitimacy of IPSC. I would like to personally thank the Regional Directors from around the world who rose to the 'call for action' by writing their concerns to the Greek minister.[61]

Even after this early success with the Greek authorities, other obstacles to Olympic status for combat shooting remain.

In November 1998, Annie Lory Bachrach, the IPSC's sales and marketing representative, wrote to the IOC to ask that the process of Olympic recognition for combat shooting be advanced to the next stage. Such direct application to the IOC is somewhat unusual. Sports bidding for Olympic inclusion generally cooperate with one of the existing international athletic federations. In this normal course of events, the IPSC's application would have been made with the help and approval of the world body for all Olympic shooting, the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) in Munich. The leaders of the ISSF, however, are anything but supportive of combat shooting.

In an interview for this report, ISSF Secretary General Horst G. Schreiber explained his group's reaction to the IPSC:

> They have approached us once, but we said we are not cooperating with them. We want nothing to do with them. The black sheriffs [security guards], the bodyguards—they're all members of this practical shooting. We want none of them in our group....It is not a sport. I think it's a camouflage for those who are supposed to deliver their high-power .45 pistols to the government, and they [seek to] find some sort of a legal possibility to keep possession of their revolvers or pistols.[62]

According to Schreiber, combat shooting partisans in many countries have responded to this opposition at the international level by persuading national shooting sports federations to support them. In some instances, Schreiber said, combat shooters have come close to taking control of the national groups, including those in France, Australia, and New Zealand. Schreiber explained that he and other ISSF leaders would fight such attempts:

> I know in France, a year or two years ago, this practical shooting federation tried to take over the Federation Francaise du Tir, our member federation. Some of the practical shooting federation's officials were sneaking in[to] the French federation. We warned them that we don't want any [practical shooting] officials dealing with us. We want to keep the [French] sport shooting federation recognized as our member, but if

practical shooting takes over, we will not keep up recognition. We probably might exclude them. We might suspend membership.[63]

Clearly, hurdles to Olympic recognition remain. Yet, the IPSC has already proven its skill at navigating the labyrinthine process. Winning the Greek government's approval of its sporting status was a major step forward. In addition, by making direct application to the IOC, the IPSC may have neutralized the effect of the ISSF's objections.

Moreover, there has been virtually no other opposition to combat shooting—either from gun control advocates or from others concerned about subverting the aims of the Olympic Charter with an activity built around lethal weaponry and violent fantasy.

If the IPSC continues its determined push without scrutiny or objection, it is entirely possible that future Olympics will feature competitors packing riot shotguns and assault weapons, jumping around in imaginary bank vaults or city streets, firing at the heads and hearts of human-shaped targets.

In that case, the ideals of the Olympic Charter and the targeted "bad guys" will not be the only casualties. The cause of international gun control would be badly damaged if combat shooting is legitimized. It remains to be seen whether the IPSC will face any real opposition in its quest for this gold medal.

Appendix: Combat Shooting Web Sites

International Practical Shooting Confederation
www.ipsc.org

United States
www.uspsa.org

Canada
www.ipsc-ont.org

United Kingdom
www.ukpsa.co.uk

Australia
www.ipsc.org.au

New Zealand
www.pistolnz.org.nz

IPSC Sites Worldwide
www.pla-net.net/~rcomer/ipsc.htm

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22. "GunGames Kids," *United States Practical Shooting Association web site* at www.uspsa-juniors.org. Downloaded 25 June 1999.

23. "USPSA's Junior Program," *United States Practical Shooting Association web site* at www.uspsa-juniors.org. Downloaded 25 June 1999.

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