



ONE TO

STATE OF OUR GAME INTERVIEW WITH WHITE FLYER'S PHIL MURRAY BY NICK SISLEY

ONE



IN THIS NEW SERIES OF ARTICLES, NICK SISLEY GOES 'ONE TO ONE' WITH SENIOR INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL BACKGROUND, THEIR COMPANY AND THEIR VIEW OF OUR FAVORITE SPORT.



Phil Murray's life has been almost fairy tale in nature – certainly from a shooter's standpoint. Born in San Francisco in 1949, he started hunting with his Dad at the tender age of nine – though he was not allowed to carry a gun until several years later. They did a lot of hunting together back in those days – ducks, doves and deer.

Graduating from High School in San Mateo, California in 1972, Murray went on to graduate from San Jose State University in 1976. But even in High School he had become an accomplished clay target shooter, making the National Skeet Shooting Association's All-America Team for his first time as a Junior. During his freshman year the great D. Lee Braun had seen him shoot and asked his father if he might give the youngster some instruction – and that was the start down his road to shotgunning expertise.

HAVE FUN

I asked Murray about some of the things that Braun had instilled in him during those early days. "Shoot one target at a time – taking each shot to a more intense level. Shoot every shot like it's the very last target you are ever going to shoot in your life," recalls Murray. "But more importantly, Lee was always preaching that the game was supposed to be fun. Frankly, I hear that phrase, or something like it, often – but only recently has this instructive phrase started to sink in with me," continued Murray. "What it really means is allowing your subconscious mind to take over – putting your conscious mind on the back burner while you are on the station. If you stay happy, stay positive, enjoy the game, view missing as something to learn from – you're on the right track. If you think negatively in any way about

missing, you'll shoot worse – and certainly won't be having any fun."

But Braun wasn't Murray's only outstanding mentor. The other was his shooting idol – Bill Rogers, inducted into the Skeet Shooting Hall of Fame in the 1960s. Rogers was there when any youngster asked for help – he had nearly 15 kids under his shooting wing during Murray's formative years, and, notably, they all became All-Americans.

GOLDEN AGE

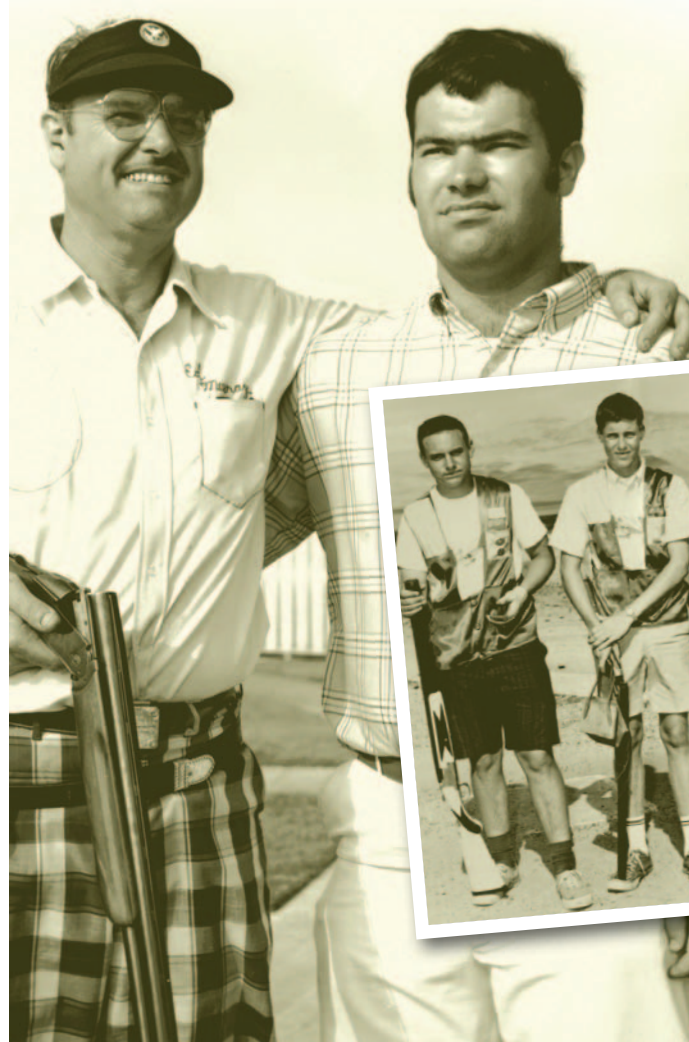
Murray told me that he thought the late 1950s and the early 1960s was the golden age of competitive

shotgunning, where everyone pulled for one another – maybe even more so than today – though that attitude took nothing away from the competitive drive among the individuals. "But then along came Purbaugh sub-gauge tubes," said Murray. "Yellow targets were switched to orange. Scores started going up and Kenny Barnes showed us all what was possible with his first ever 400 straight." (Ed: Murray was on that same squad when Barnes shot that first 400 straight with a pump gun.)

Murray then taught school for four and a half years – ideal in that he had the summers off to shoot! Then, from 1969 – 1977, he was

Editor and Publisher of a magazine devoted to clay target shooting in the western USA – The Skeeter. From 1977 – 1984 he was hired as Deputy Director of the National Skeet Shooting Association under Director Ann Myers – but still had time in 1983 to shoot 650 straight at the World Skeet Shooting Championships.

"I've been lucky to shoot with some great squad members – like Kenny Barnes, Robert Paxton, Ricky Pope and many others," said Murray. "Shooting with the best can't help but make anyone a better shooter." These days he shoots a lot with John Imbt, Ellen Nelms, Gayle Osborne and other top shots – most of them Hall of Fame inductees. "All of Lee Braun's students, once he was not able to shoot anymore, would receive a telegram when the World Skeet Championships started, encouraging them to do well. What a beautiful touch from a true class gentleman," Murray told me.



PHIL MURRAY WITH HIS DAD BACK IN 1965.



PHIL MURRAY (FAR RIGHT) AS A 15 YEAR OLD – ALREADY AN ACCOMPLISHED SHOT.

NEXT STOP

In 1984 Murray went to work for Beretta in Maryland – as the Club Manager at the Prince Georges County Gun Club and the company’s Shooting Promotions Manager. “During those years I really built up my shooter’s knowledge, learning how to run a gun club and learning more about handling people well. That was also the year that the gun club (Beretta leased the club during those years) built the first sporting clays course. It was still called ‘hunter’s clays’ back then. Beretta also put in a full International Trap layout. I think it was the first one in the eastern USA.

“This is also when I was awakened to the fact that if folks

came out to shoot sporting clays, and received some instruction, they would come back to shoot again,” continued Murray. “This was also at a time when Beretta was very active in trying to get their shotguns into shooter’s hands – showing potential shooters that, yes, this shotgunning game was great fun.”

Around 1992 Murray left Beretta for yet another great job within the industry – to work for Don Mainland at Kolar. He was the shooting promotions guy at Kolar at a time when they were in the final stages of the Kolar gun development – yet another great learning experience. After two and a half years with Kolar, Reagent Chemical’s Brian Skeuse offered him an opportunity to join their

White Flyer clay target business – and a move back to a warm climate (Houston, Texas). Murray has now been with White Flyer for 11 years.

CURRENT MARKETS

In 1995 Murray was inducted into the National Skeet Shooting Hall of Fame – having won numerous World, State, Zone and local championships. With this in mind, I asked him what he thought about the current state of affairs in clay target shooting? “Luckily, sporting clays came along at the right time. I really believe that sporting probably saved the clay target industry. At the National Sporting Clays Championships this year we had 1400 competitors – a record. In comparison, the numbers at the

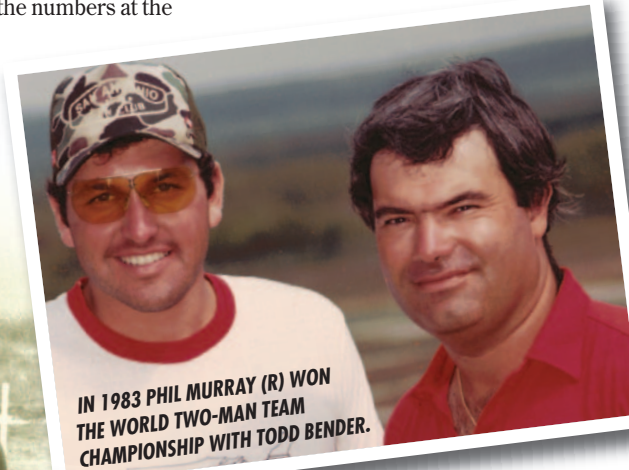
World Skeet Shooting Championships were way down. Ditto for trap’s Grand American, now switched to Sparta, Illinois from Vandalia, Ohio.

“I think sporting clays offers something different – and that’s had a lot to do with its success. But now, some course setters have started making targets much more difficult for the average competitor. Course owners have to realize, and many of them already do, that shooting has to be fun for the participants. If not, they are not going to come back – basic Business 101. The shooter is the customer, and sometimes this basic continues to be forgotten,” says Murray. “I also think that sometimes the new shooter is

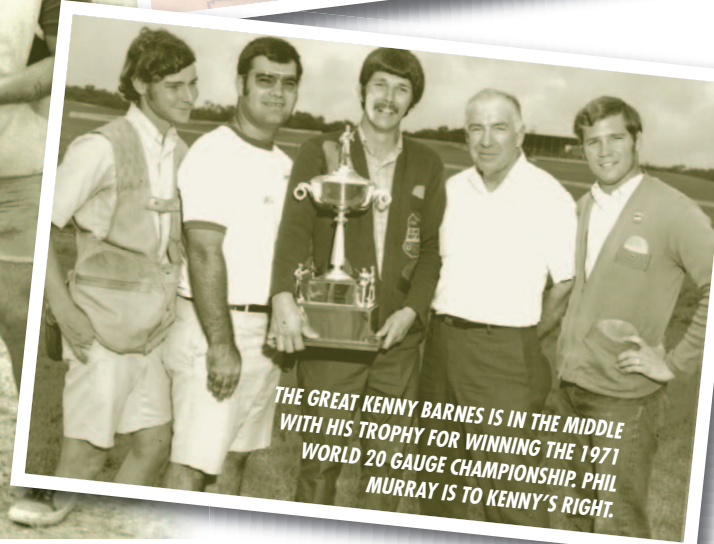
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PHIL MURRAY IS IN THE MIDDLE WITH THE GREAT WAYNE MAYES ON THE EXTREME RIGHT (1978).



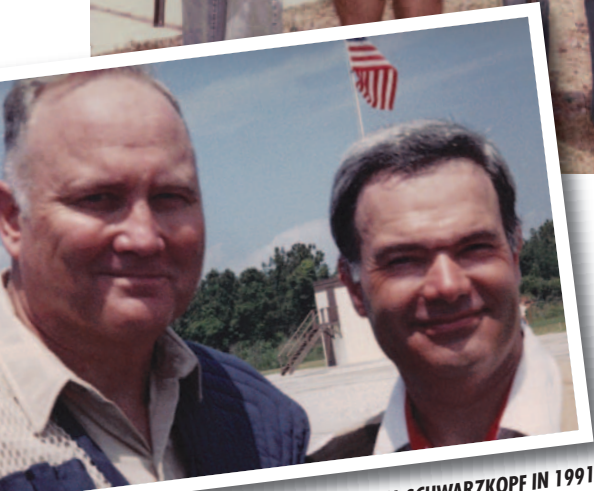
IN 1983 PHIL MURRAY (R) WON THE WORLD TWO-MAN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP WITH TODD BENDER.



THE GREAT KENNY BARNES IS IN THE MIDDLE WITH HIS TROPHY FOR WINNING THE 1971 WORLD 20 GAUGE CHAMPIONSHIP. PHIL MURRAY IS TO KENNY’S RIGHT.



IN 1982 PHIL MURRAY, SECOND FROM LEFT, WON THE WORLD 5-MAN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP WITH DONNIE KAUFMAN, ROBERT PAXTON, JIM BIDDLE AND RALPH PETLEY.



PHIL MURRAY, HERE WITH GENERAL SCHWARZKOPF IN 1991.

economy comes back? Murray thinks we've turned a big corner in shooting development. "We're certainly on the right track with the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP). It's not only showing youngsters the value, fun and importance of guns and shooting, it's also showing their families that shooting and guns are good – not bad. The parents can vote now on important issues. The kids will vote when they become of age. Further, the National Shooting Sports Foundation's (NSSF) First Shot's Program is bringing in young shooters who have never had a gun in their hands before."

MY CHOICE

So, what guns does Murray shoot? His sporting clays gun is a Browning 525 with 30-inch barrels and rigged with .410, 28 and 20 gauge full-length tubes. He enjoys all the events, but maybe because of his long skeet background he enjoys the small gauge sporting events the most. Murray also told me that he is really enjoying sporting clays – it's relaxing after 40 years of constantly trying for perfection in skeet and trap.

His skeet gun is a Kolar Competition with Kolar sub-gauge tubes, but over the years he has had the opportunity to shoot most all the great competition guns. When he shot his 650 in 1983 he did it with a Krieghoff Model 32 four-barrel set. "I remember my two-man team shooting partner, Don Lavelly, asking about the chokes in the .410 barrels of that model 32. They were done by Stan Baker in the State of Washington – Stan for so long was heralded for his choke work on trap guns. Lavelly thought my .410 Baker chokes (fixed – not screw-ins) were the best he had ever seen."

HE ENJOYS ALL THE EVENTS, BUT MAYBE BECAUSE OF HIS LONG SKEET BACKGROUND HE ENJOYS THE SMALL GAUGE SPORTING EVENTS THE MOST.

looked down upon – both by the course operator and some of the more experienced shooters – sadly, this happens in skeet and trap as well."

Murray continues, "Because so many English are such good shots, maybe that's been the driver for USA-based course setters increasing the level of difficulty – their philosophy is probably based on the premise that more tough targets would be the way to 'educate' our shooters to match the expertise of those on the other side of the pond. But I think it's more a time thing. We are catching

up fast – but the English have simply been at this game longer than we have. Using the recent Nationals as an example, I think target 'deception' is now becoming the more significant concept rather than 'super difficult' targets – and in that regard the scores of our top guns at this event proved we already have a dozen or so top ranked shooters on the world stage."

THE ECONOMY

What about White Flyer target sales? "Despite current economic

conditions," Murray begins, "White Flyer sales are still good, but the sport needs to encourage more local clubs to promote local shooting. With travel costs so high, local clubs could take advantage of high gas and travel costs and attract new local shooters. In addition, a certain percentage of shotgunners are cutting down on their travel, but they still want to shoot. Consequently, now is the time to promote club activities, not back off from spending marketing bucks."

What about when the



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SPONSORSHIP

I asked Murray what he thinks about industry sponsorship at sporting events? Basically,

according to the requests he gets at White Flyer, most clubs feel the industry needs to ‘give back’ at every shoot. “Fiscally, if this were done, the company would be bankrupt! While the company continues to be totally supportive from a philosophical standpoint, the company can only go to the well so often and still stay solvent.”

What about suggestions for clubs wanting to increase levels of sponsorship? “Look first at how you can help the sponsor – before asking for their sponsorship. An advertisement in a program is not worthwhile unless the price is very low. Remember, an ad in a program, or other similar promotions, is preaching to the choir! Think about how your club can gain new shooters. If you can do that convincingly, you will have the ear of potential sponsors. Make

shoot sponsorship more of a win-win for both parties – sponsors and clubs – that’s the key.”

How can we get greater exposure for our sport? “Fortunately or unfortunately, the NSCA’s biggest source of income is from fees paid by registered shooters,” says Murray. “Consequently, the organization’s main emphasis has been and is toward registered shooters.” So the question becomes how much of the NSCA’s efforts should go toward new shooters? Sure, the organization does have efforts in this regard, but are shooting organizations doing enough? Are they spending enough? If they don’t have funds to expose new people to shooting, where can they get such funds? Maybe one way for the NSCA to become more closely involved with new shooter development is through local gun

clubs. Could the NSCA develop a program to show clubs how to run things more professionally? Could a professional instructor be on hand at each club – say one day a week or one day a month to teach new shooters some basics? Could a simple newspaper ad and flyers create interest in such an approach? These are all ideas that Murray continues to ponder.

Summing up, Murray says, “This has been one heck of a run – this life of mine. I’m trying to give a lot back, but I just can’t seem to give enough back. Even so, all my 100 straights and all my championship titles have been part of a wonderful experience – but all the friendships I’ve made along the way are even more important.” ■

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