



DAN MITCHELL OVERSEES THE SHOOT-OFFS.

THE 2011 U.S. WESTERN OPEN

IN EARLY AUGUST, SHOOTERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARRIVED AT THE FAMOUS TOP GUN CLUB IN PICTURESQUE MT. VERNON, WASHINGTON, FOR THIS YEAR'S US WESTERN OPEN. BY AL HAGUE.

According to those competitors attending, host, Jeff Van Den Top, and shoot director, Dan Mitchell, combine talents and experience to put on one of the best shoots in the country – year after year. In amongst the beautiful scenery and backgrounds found in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest, every detail of this event is carefully planned – especially the targets that were set by Jason Menke of Briley and Dave Fiedler from Nevada. They challenged the best but for the most part the targets were fun and entertaining.

Major sponsors, Filson and Mitchell's Clay Target Sports,

were on hand to lend their support. The Filson Masters is an event within the main tournament, offering the best in each class over the weekend the opportunity to take home a unique Filson Masters shooting vest – made only for this event.

In addition to the Pre-lim and Main Event, the long weekend included 5-Stand, Sub gauge, pump and side-by-side events, just in case you wanted to shoot almost every minute of every day – and many did. According to Dan Mitchell, the number of entries was overwhelming and required two additional 5-Stand layouts to be built. Practice targets were always available and the Make-A-Break



EVENT HOST JEFF VAN DEN TOP.

was there for those who like to test themselves against some really tough targets.

Thursday

Thursday's events included Sub gauge, pump and SxS. 2011 US Open winner, Mike Wilgus, got his long weekend off to a good start by posting a 49 in 20ga and a 47 in SxS to take HOA in both events. Ken Sides, a local top shot, grabbed 28ga honors with a perfect 50 and the .410 event with a solid 48. Chris Stephens took HOA in pump with a perfect 50. Four hundred and twelve entries for the Sub gauge action reflects the ever-growing popularity of small gun events.

Friday

Pre-lims got underway at 9:00am on both the Red and Blue courses – with competitors selecting which 100 bird course they wanted to shoot. According to Dan Mitchell, most of the big guns were squadded on the Blue Pre-lim course. Zach Kienbaum from California, the resident Pro at Triple B Clays, topped 124 other competitors with a blistering 97, one target better than Runner-up Curtis Lessel, also from California and owner of Extreme Chokes, who had to shoot-off with Tom John (M1) and Andy Duffy (M2) all knotted at 96.

On the other side of the facility, 125 shooters took to the Red Pre-lim course. Randy Kear produced the best score of the day (98) followed by Runner-up Phil Martin (97) and Matthew Miranda (94) who took M1.

Saturday

The Main Event was over the redesigned Red and Blue courses – 100 targets each day. The

Saturday morning rotations began at 9:00am under clear skies and comfortable temperatures. The vast choice of presentations for target setters on this amazing terrain is virtually limitless. Fortunately, both target setters subscribe to the same mantra – that sporting clays should



primarily be entertainment and not a contest between setter and shooter. While the targets were certainly not easy, they were fair, mixed in with a couple of tricky stations that really made the shooter pay attention – or suffer the dreaded 'lost' call. The day ended with Zach Kienbaum posting a 99, two targets ahead of Tom John and Andy Duffy. Everyone had now shot the Blue course and on Sunday would shoot the Red course. Sometimes a two target lead is enough, but would it be for this event?

LEFT: NEW TOWER AT TOP GUN. THIS EVENT ATTRACTED TOP SHOTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY, SUPPORT FROM ALL CLASSES – AND YOUNGSTERS.



Busy Vendors

This event always attracts good support from vendors. On hand this year were sponsors, Mitchell's Clay Target Sports (providing Fiocchi ammunition and clothing), while Filson displayed their top quality clothing and shooting accessories. Next door was Kesselring's Gun Shop from the Seattle area. Among others, TrapHappens.com, a shooting accessories company from Oregon and manufacturer of the Miz Mac women's shooting vests had an extensive product display. S&S Plus stock fitters from Polson, Montana, were on hand along with Truck Vault, a company from Washington. Together with the food venues, this made for a fun gathering place for shooters – and most of the vendors were busy all weekend.



L TO R: DAN WHITE OF TRAPHAPPENS.COM AND CURTIS LESSEL OF EXTREME CHOKES.

5-Stand

The 5-Stand layouts at Top Gun Club are situated in wooded areas, making for shadows, varied backgrounds and interesting target presentations and combinations. According to a straw poll among shooters, the target setters of Homer Hansen and Sam Delegates produced a perfect balance of difficulty that made for an entertaining event.

Each day, competitors could shot one of four 5-Stand competitions that had different target presentations each day. The number of entries required Top Gun to build two new layouts so that each day Red and Blue could be rotated so everyone shot each course.

Friday's Red layout had Bill McGuire and Curtis Lessel tied at 49. After the shoot-off, McGuire took HOA and Lessel was Runner-up. On the Blue layout, Tom John was alone with his HOA score of 48 followed by Ken Sides one back at 47 along with Richard Couper who took M1.

Bill McGuire continued shooting to perfection on Saturday's Blue layout with a 50 straight followed by Zach Kienbaum one back at 49. On Saturday's Red layout, HOA was

One by one the contenders slipped down the leaderboard – except for Andy Duffy who eventually took HOA with 195.

Toby LeNeave with a 46 over Runner-up Richard McCready, also with 46.

On Sunday, shooters switched courses and on the Red layout Bill McGuire was on top again with 47 with Zach Kienbaum one back at 46. It would appear that all the 5-Stand layouts were tightened up



LEFT: L-R BILL MCGUIRE, JON KRUGER, ZACH KIENBAUM HAD TO SHOOT-OFF FOR M1, 2, 3 IN THE MAIN.

a notch for the final day – and scores showed it. The Blue layout for Sunday was won by Jon Kruger (46), one better than Scott Cusanek.

Sunday

At 9:00am, under cloudy skies but still very pleasant temperatures,

the rotations began for the second 100 targets of the Main Event. The chatter was still about Kienbaum's 99 the day before. Could anyone catch him? Six competitors were up to four targets adrift and shooting well. It was shaping up to be a real chase – perhaps ending in a shoot-off.

One by one the contenders slipped down the leaderboard – except for Andy Duffy who eventually took HOA with 195, two targets ahead of Jon Kruger (RU), Zach Kienbaum (M1) and Bill McGuire (M2) who had to shoot-off for their final positions.

Mike Wilgus took M3 finishing with a two day total of 192. Andrew Van Den Top won AA with 181 and Ken Sides won top spot in Veterans over 99 other shooters with his 185. The Lady winner was Diane Nelson (177) and Juniors was won by Greg Mackintosh (184), three clear of Mike Hoffman.



WESTERN OPEN HOA
– ANDY DUFFY.

Youth Shooting Program

Filson and Andy Duffy provided a clinic to those youngsters selected, based on their shooting in the Filson Open, the Washington State and Oregon State Championships. This year five Juniors were given top level instruction – Rick Lengele (16), Meagan Rice (14), Emma Simmons (12), Matt Pandol (14) and Wesley Winstead (16). These up and coming youngsters were also able to compete in the Main Event in their respective classes.



This event runs like clockwork – thanks to Ellen Deleganes and her staff. The entries, managed by Casey at CH Shoot Results, were flawless and registration was very well organized. The Van Den Tops are amazing hosts and open their club (often referred to as ‘Disneyland for shooters’) once a year for this event. If you’ve not been able to shoot Top Gun yet, it’s a must see and must shoot facility.

Next Year

The 2012 US Western Open is already being planned – and will evolve into the ‘first of its kind’ according to the hosts. 5-Stand events will be done away with and the Main Event will be extended to 400 targets – 200 birds on Saturday and 200 birds on Sunday with time off for lunch! The Sub gauges will be offered on Thursday and the Pre-lim will be on Friday. The event will only be able to accommodate 300 shooters (as allowed by permit). ■

US WESTERN OPEN

		RED BLUE		
CH	ANDY DUFFY	98	97	195
RU	JON KRUGER	97	96	193
M1	ZACH KIENBAUM	94	99	193
M2	BILL MCGUIRE	98	95	193
M3	MIKE WILGUS	96	96	192
AA1	ANDREW VAN DEN TOP	92	89	181
AA2	DARREN HALL	86	88	174
AA3	BRIAN BAINES	84	84	168
A1	RICHARD LENGELE	87	88	175
A2	MIKE TUPPER	83	88	171
A3	H ALLAN VINCENT	83	86	169
B1	JAY KOETJE	91	83	174
B2	ROBERT WOODS	87	82	169
B3	RICHARD LARSON	79	87	166
C1	RON OLSON	85	83	168
C2	PHIL ROARK	87	79	166
C3	GARY BAXTER	82	84	166
D1	ROER JUNGQUIST	74	80	154
D2	ERIK GEHRKE	74	79	153
D3	MICHAEL GALESKI	82	68	150
E1	STEPHEN PARKS	72	69	141
E2	G JOSEPH CORLETT	69	69	138
E3	WESLEY WINSTEAD	67	70	137
LADY	DIANE NELSON	83	94	177
S JR	MATT PANDOL	92	80	172
JR	GREG MACKINTOSH	90	94	184
VET	KEN SIDES	93	92	185
S VET	ART HEGEWALD	93	89	182
SS VET	WAYNE MAY	81	76	157