

# Girl

NAME:  
CHRISTINA (CHRISSY) COPLAND

AGE: 13

DATE OF BIRTH:  
SEPTEMBER 20, 1990

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT FOR 2003:  
SHOOTING AT THE NATIONALS AND PLACING  
SUB JUNIOR LADY 3RD

HEIGHT: 5FT

WEIGHT: 97LBS

GUN: BERETTA 391 20GA

CARTRIDGES:  
CLAY CARTRIDGE  $\frac{7}{8}$  oz #8s

STARTED SHOOTING:  
FEBRUARY 2003



# Talk

**CHRISSY COPLAND** JUST 13 YEARS OLD, STARTED SHOOTING LESS THAN A YEAR AGO. HERE SHE TALKS WITH **LINDA JOY SOSEBEE**, ONE OF OUR TOP LADY SHOOTERS.

YOU HAVE BEEN ONE OF OUR TOP LADY SHOOTERS FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS – HOW DID YOU GET STARTED AND WHAT DID IT TAKE TO GET TO MASTER CLASS?

■ A friend introduced me to skeet in 1989 and from that point on I was hooked! Before that time I had only handled a gun a few times. My goal was to shoot International Skeet in the Olympics and began to shoot with earnest, but the Ladies division of International Skeet was eliminated from the 1992 Games. So in 1992, I turned my attention to sporting clays and have never looked back.

What it took to get to Master class, I believe, is my dedication and desire. In the beginning, I could not afford to shoot very much, so I made every practice session count. I worked very hard on the range and off by reading a number of books, such as "Golf is Not a Game of Perfect", "The Inner Game of Tennis" and "Thinking Body, Dancing Mind" to help with my mental approach. I also did not let it consume me. I realized that making Master class would be quite an accomplishment and it would happen at the right time, however long it took.

I'M ONLY 13 YEARS OLD AND WEIGH ABOUT 97LBS. IN BETWEEN STUDYING AND 'GROWING-UP' I PRACTICE AS MUCH AS I CAN AND ENTER DIFFERENT COMPETITIONS, BUT I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE LONG TERM EFFECTS OF RECOIL ON MY SHOULDER. DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS AS TO WHAT MY PRACTICE ROUTINE SHOULD BE, HOW I CAN MANAGE RECOIL AND AT WHAT STAGE I CAN STEP-UP MY PRACTICING.

■ 'Managing' recoil is really the keyword because unfortunately you cannot eliminate it entirely. By your data, it seems like you are well on your way to managing recoil by shooting an automatic as well as your choice of light ammunition. If you are recoil conscious, one important factor when choosing your ammunition is how fast the load is. If you shoot  $\frac{7}{8}$  oz but it is going 1400ft/sec you will still feel a tremendous amount of kick. Being recoil sensitive myself, I shoot three wonderfully soft-shooting loads by Fiocchi: a  $\frac{7}{8}$  oz load going 1200 ft/sec for the closer shots, a 1 oz #8 going 1180 for probably 80% of my shooting and then a 1 oz #7 $\frac{1}{2}$  going 1200 ft/sec for edge on targets. I don't feel I am giving anything up, in fact, I feel I have more physical staying power by shooting the softer loads.

As far as your practicing goes, you can do a lot of it inside your home without ever firing your gun. A smooth mount is one of the keys to successful shooting and I would



recommend practicing mounting your gun several times per day (This will also help strengthen your arms). I wholly believe in quality practice versus quantity so I would limit yourself to no more than 150 rounds per session to begin with. When you practice with intent this will be plenty of ammo to work with. Listen to your body as it will tell you when you have had enough. If you feel like shooting a couple more boxes during a session, go right ahead, but also know when to quit! As I mentioned before, a very important tip is to practice with intent. What I mean by this is don't just go to the range and burn up the ammo. Go with a plan – think about what you want to work on before you get to the club.

**WHY ARE THERE SO FEW WOMEN IN SPORTING CLAYS AT COMPETITION LEVEL?**

■ You feel there are so few women shooting at competition level, but I see it as there have never been so many!! We now account for 10-15% of the competitors up from only 5% just a few years ago. Hopefully with young women such as yourself, you can help spread the word to your friends that shooting is a safe, exciting sport.

**IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHAT ARE THE REAL CHANCES OF SOMEONE MY AGE MAKING THE US TEAM BEFORE I'M 21? WHAT ELSE WILL IT TAKE BESIDES NATURAL ABILITY?**

■ I think you have an excellent chance of making the US Team before you are 21. Other than ability, dedication and desire are key elements to a successful shooting career. Setting short and long term goals is a must as well as following a plan, otherwise eight years will vanish in the blink of an eye. First of all, get a coach you respect and trust. You cannot do it alone! You will waste too much time trying to figure it out, not to mention the terrible habits you will develop and a good coach will help you establish realistic goals.

Secondly, break it down into manageable sized pieces. For example, if you know you want to make the US Team within 8 years, you need to be shooting at a high competitive level within five years. Your five year plan should be something like this: All-American Team selection and placing in the top five at major tournaments. Now, you only have 5 years to work with so break those years down into 1 year goals. What do you realistically think you can accomplish in a year? Think about it for yourself, then go over your plan with your coach.

Let me give you a couple of tips for your plan. Don't think you will get your technique ironed out in the first few years. Your technique is constantly changing and evolving and will become the one element in your shooting that will take years to create. Be patient! Also, I would recommend jumping right into tournaments. There is nothing like the pressure of a match to show you where you really are, both physically and mentally. Use the outcome of a match for things to work on for the next match. Think of what could you improve on for the next time and more importantly, what did you do well? Lastly, have fun while you are doing it. Shooting is a sport that you can enjoy for a lifetime so in your mad dash to the finish line, don't forget to enjoy each moment as well.

**IT'S OBVIOUSLY AN ADVANTAGE TO HAVE SPONSORSHIP. WHAT SPONSORS DO YOU HAVE, AND HOW DO I GO ABOUT GETTING SPONSORSHIP IN THE FUTURE?**

■ I am grateful for each one of my sponsors – they are Browning guns, Briley chokes, Fiocchi ammunition, Pro-Ears hearing protection, Hi-Viz gun sights, Rudy Project eyewear, Michael's of Oregon shooting bags and accessories, SKB travel gun cases, Bob's Custom Guns custom stocks and GP Traps. I am deeply committed and loyal to each company. I believe in their product, I think they are the best in their field.

You have a good opportunity because you are a Junior shooter and a young woman. These are two very important markets. The best advice I have about obtaining sponsorship is what are you willing to give back? Sponsors are obviously looking for talent, but also they are looking for someone who can be a positive role model, someone they can count on. I would suggest keeping a in-depth record of your shooting progression and approach the company you have an interest in. Vendor's Row at the National Championship is a perfect place because most of the industry is represented there. Introduce yourself, talk about your shooting, about yourself and show your shoot progression book. Ask about possible sponsorship, ask them what they look for and ask them what you could do to help. You don't have to be at the top of your game to get help. My relationship with Browning started clear back in 1990 when I was just starting! They took a chance on me and I will never forget that!

**I SOMETIMES FIND IT DIFFICULT BEING THE ONLY LADY AND 'YOUNGSTER' ON A SQUAD AT A TOURNAMENT. HOW DID YOU COPE WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED – AND IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO MAKE IT EASIER?**

■ I have had the pleasure of shooting with many young shooters like Cory Kruse and Gregg Wolf when they were just beginning.

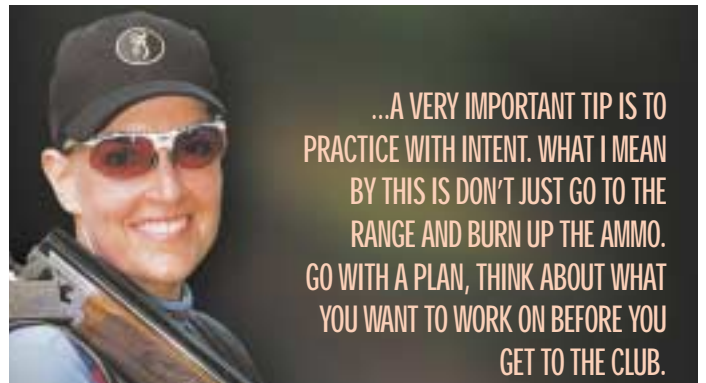
What makes a Junior shooter endearing to a squad is their attitude. Cory and Gregg are fierce competitors now, yet even when they were just starting out, I have never seen them throw a fit when they missed a few targets.

Just as importantly, now that they have risen to the top, I have yet to see them be 'too good' for the less accomplished shooters. They wear their accomplishments with grace. My main suggestion is to try and be upbeat and positive. If you miss a few too many targets, and you will, just like everyone else, do not throw a fit and ruin it for the rest of the squad. You are the future of our sport and everyone welcomes you. Your reputation begins today. How do you want people to remember you?

**I STILL GET CONFUSED SOMETIMES ON CHOKE SELECTION. WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST?**

■ I have the utmost confidence in my Briley Color Spectrum chokes and feel they will consistently perform to my expectations. My suggestion for choke selection would be to take all of your chokes out during your practice session and see what each choke is capable of, then when the tournament rolls around you will have confidence in the choke you select.

What I find works for me during a match, is to only take three chokes out on the course – usually improved cylinder, light modified and modified. I know I can break



...A VERY IMPORTANT TIP IS TO PRACTICE WITH INTENT. WHAT I MEAN BY THIS IS DON'T JUST GO TO THE RANGE AND BURN UP THE AMMO. GO WITH A PLAN, THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO WORK ON BEFORE YOU GET TO THE CLUB.

everything out there with those three and it also helps minimize my choke selection so I can focus on what is really important – which is breaking the target.

SOME OF THE COMPETITIONS I ENTER ONLY HAVE PRODUCT PRIZES FOR LADY CONCURRENT. DO YOU THINK THIS IS FAIR?

■ I understand where the shoot management is coming from when they give prizes instead of cash for Lady Concurrent. They feel there are not enough Lady shooters to warrant a bigger purse. I would love to see that change too!

The Seminole Cup was very popular with women shooters because the management rewarded the Ladies equally with the men regardless of the number of entries and proportionately, there were many more women entries. Imagine

that! I applaud the Seminole Cup management for encouraging women participation.

MOST LADY SHOOTERS SEEM VERY HAPPY TO GIVE ME HELPFUL ADVICE AND ENCOURAGEMENT WHILE I'M OUT SHOOTING. CAN I EVER EXPECT THE SAME HELP FROM THE TOP MEN SHOOTERS? IF IT'S JUST A CASE OF ASKING – HOW SHOULD I APPROACH THEM?

■ Oh, definitely YES! I think most if not all of the top men shooters would give you help and encouragement. I believe it is just a case of asking. Maybe a way to handle it would be if you are squadded with them to introduce yourself before the match starts and tell them you are a newer shooter and would appreciate any help. Tell them you don't want to disrupt their game by asking questions and if it will, you certainly understand.

Most times they certainly will be glad to help. Give it a try!

LINDA, DO YOU THINK THAT I SHOULD SHOOT WITH MY MOM & DAD AT COMPETITIONS OR SHOULD I SHOOT WITH SOMEONE ELSE THAT I AM COMFORTABLE WITH?

■ I would think shooting with your mom and dad would be a comfort being a newer, young shooter. They know you better than anyone else out there and are more in-tune to your shooting. The one problem I see would be a family conflict resulting from miscommunication from any one of you three. You might have a family discussion before the tournament so you are all aware of each other's goals for the match. For example, you might say, "I really want to try and do this myself, so don't help me unless I ask." Maybe your mom and dad are

doing really well and are in the hunt for placing well in their class. How should you act? Talk about it!

DO YOU EVER RUN CLINICS OR GIVE INSTRUCTION?

■ I work with the National Shooting Sports Foundation promoting the shooting sports and together we run clinics introducing shooting to people from our Congressmen to the PGA. Through my involvement with the National Shooting Sports Foundation I have also been a primary spokesperson to the media, from newspaper to magazine to television, trying my best to enlighten them about our shooting sport.

On a personal side, I do instruct privately when time permits. Callaway Gun Club, south of Atlanta about an hour, has a wonderful facility and it is where I call home.

I GET TIRED LATER IN THE ROUND AT A TOURNAMENT, IS THERE SOME SPECIFIC EXERCISES THAT I COULD DO?

■ Chrissy, I found myself in that exact position last year after taking 8½ months off from shooting for the birth of my son. When I started back shooting this past summer, I was having a terrible time finishing a tournament. I would shoot the first three quarters of the match fine then it was as if I had hit an invisible wall because my scores would plummet. I realized that although my technique was back, I did not have the stamina needed to compete at a high level.

I have given this quite a bit of thought and I believe that tournament toughness comes with experience and practice. If it were solely physical, I could suggest some exercises, but tournament

toughness is the balance of your mental, physical and emotional well being. It is something that is accumulative, you are constantly building on it from one tournament to the next. It will take some time to develop this, but here are a few tips to help prepare you for a tournament.

First, strengthen yourself physically; do your gun mounting exercises to help strengthen your arms. Secondly, do not clutter your mind with negative or unnecessary thoughts. If you tell yourself you can do it, then you will. If you are negative and are convinced you cannot do it, then you will *NEVER* achieve anything. You must believe in yourself. Also, realize that each tournament is a building block for the next one. You cannot expect to have it all together the first time. Shooting well, like any other

endeavor, is a series of progressive steps, built from one block at a time. My biggest suggestion? ENJOY what you are doing!

MY MOM AND DAD EACH HAVE A DIFFERENT STYLE OR METHOD OF SHOOTING, WHICH DO YOU USE MOST AND WHY?

■ Each person has a unique style that 'works' for them. Your mom and dad have different styles because somewhere along their shooting path, they developed a style that helped them gain confidence over the targets.

I shoot primarily pull-away, that is I mount on or near the target and then pull-away to the lead I have established in my mind. For me, pull-away gives me a little more time to focus on the target to determine how fast it is moving. I

also use swing through sparingly, because I feel it does have its place, but it also makes me feel a little out of control and that is why I say sparingly. With swing-through, your margin of error is minuscule to that of pull-away. The reason being in swing through you are coming from behind the target, passing through it and delivering the shot when the lead looks right. The problem being you are moving faster than the target is moving and the tendency is to 'blow by' the target and stop your swing. With pull-away, I feel I have time to match my gun speed with the speed of the target and this makes for a smoother, more controlled move.

It's been fun answering your questions and I hope my answers help. Good luck for 2004, I'll be watching your progress. ■