

Linda

JOY

IN CONVERSATION
WITH LINDA JOY

WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE RECENT WORLD SPORTING CHAMPIONSHIP WAS YOUR LAST MAJOR TOURNAMENT — IS THIS COMPLETE RETIREMENT FROM SPORTING CLAYS — AND WHY — OR JUST A STEP DOWN FROM BIG BLASTS?

■ Yes, the World Championship was my last major tournament. Over this past winter I had seriously contemplated retirement and after giving it much consideration, it was the solution that made best sense for my family. As most mothers know, this sport requires enormous commitment and devotion. As an older parent, I cannot seem to keep all the balls in the air. It seems that each day I say to myself, “*Oops! forgot to do that*”, or “*I’ve got to remember to do such and such.*”

Somewhere in that dialog, shooting became something I had to really work at to fit into my life — so I decided something had to give. Because I felt I could no longer give it my very best, and I didn’t think it was fair to all those people who helped me along the way, I decided retirement was the honorable solution.

DO YOU PLAN TO MAINTAIN YOUR INTEREST IN SPORTING CLAYS — PERHAPS COACHING OR WORKING WITH YOUNGSTERS?

■ Shooting will always be a part of my life in some form or another. I will still be a part of Dan Carlisle’s Teaching Academy and teach when time permits and possibly later on down the road enter the occasional tournament — I just love San Antonio in September! Most importantly, I want our son to experience the joys of shooting and who knows, you just might see his name on the Sub-Junior All American Team.

LOOKING BACK, WHY AND HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN SPORTING CLAYS?

■ I started shooting in 1989 when a friend treated me to ‘a day at the range’ for a birthday present and he introduced me to American Skeet. I was hooked after I fired my first shot — so I jumped right into the competition circuit after just a few months of lessons. American Skeet really didn’t hold my interest and after a short while, I decided International Skeet would be more challenging — and, unlike American Skeet, there was the opportunity to shoot in the Olympics.

Unfortunately, this was during the time when the Olympic Committee decided not to have a separate division in the Olympics for Women’s International Skeet. I

knew it would almost be impossible for me to gain a berth competing in the open category — and then I heard about sporting clays. So, in the fall of 1991, I decided that was the direction I was going to take. I was living in Arizona at the time and there was only one place to shoot that was within 150 miles of me. It was called the Arizona Hunt Club and for years they had been throwing targets that simulated hunting.

Each month they would host a tournament and people from all over the State would come to visit friends and enjoy a relaxing day of shooting. It was very informal and yet they would attract well over 100 people each month. I had such a good time and felt, for my entertainment dollar, this was something that would keep me interested because of its complexity, challenge and fun factor.

CAN YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST NOTABLE WIN AND HOW LONG AFTERWARDS DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST TEAM USA PLACE?

■ Oh, yeah! I can remember my first notable win but it didn’t come until 1993. I attended the National Championship in 1991 after just a few weeks of shooting sporting clays and thought because of my success in International and American Skeet I would walk away with it. Well, I ended up somewhere in the top twenty, a far cry from winning, but I think that is what gave me the push to try to be the best.

In 1993, the Women’s Shooting Sports Foundation hosted a women’s only shoot and had invited a select number of women to compete for the title ‘Champion of Champions’. Unbelievably, I won that match and to this day I can still

remember the butterflies that fluttered in my stomach. After that I gathered up some steam, but I couldn't afford to travel much, so my wins were mostly on the West Coast.

I could only gauge my improvement nationally by the one trip eastward I could make – and that was to the Nationals each year. The second year I broke into the top 10 and in 1993 I was in the top five. I made the All American Team for the first time in 1995 and had been third at the Nationals for a couple of years. Then, in 1997, my shooting shifted into gear. At the World Sporting Clays Championship I was tied for the lead with two top shooters from the UK, including the defending World Champion. We had a sudden death shoot-off and I ended up coming out on top. It was one of the most exhilarating and exhausting

moments of my shooting career. I was the Alternate for Team USA for the first time that year.

FROM THEN ONWARD YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS ARE WELL DOCUMENTED, BUT GIVE US AN OVERVIEW OF THE TITLES YOU'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER.

■ Probably one of the most notable awards was being named Shooter of the Year in 1997. The National Shooting Sports Foundation gives this award to a shooter, male or female, for outstanding achievement and sportsmanship in the shooting sports.

Some of my other notable Ladies titles are: 1997 World Sporting Clays Champion, 1999 Grand Slam Champion, (a feat no other woman has ever accomplished by winning all of the major US titles in a single year. I captured the US Open title in both Sporting and FITASC, I was the

NSCA National Champion as well as the Professional Sporting Clays Champion, National FITASC Champion and the Seminole Cup Champion.) I have back-to-back national titles (1999-2000), six consecutive national FITASC titles 1997-2002 and have been a First Team All-American every year starting in 1996 and have been a member of Team USA, in Sporting and FITASC, 13 times.

WHAT SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP HAVE YOU HAD THAT HAS ENABLED YOU TO ACHIEVE SUCH SUCCESS?

■ I have had very long relationships with a few key sponsors and I literally could not have made it without them. Most notably would be Browning. They took a chance on me in 1990 when I was really just getting started in shooting. Another sponsor was Briley Mfg. – I have been with

them since 1993 and with Pro Ears hearing protection since 1997.

When Winchester decided to pull sponsorship from the sporting clays shooters and only focus on the Olympic team, Fiocchi graciously stepped in and began helping me. It was actually a blessing because I never would have realized what a wonderful, soft shooting shell they manufacture.

Michaels of Oregon not only helped me, but provided for our Ladies Team. Over the years, as I became more successful, and other companies showed interest, I felt no desire to change my sponsors as I felt my relationship with them was more than just how well I shot. I felt like I was family. Sponsorship played a vital role for me because without that financial help, I could not have competed at the level I had set for myself.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation was also tremendously helpful. Most people only know them as the organization who hosts the annual Shot Show, but that is only a small part of who they really are. They work tirelessly on trying to keep guns in our households by not only going to bat for us politically, but also by introducing celebrities from many genres such as football, baseball, basketball, golf, music and acting to shooting. They work endlessly with the environmental groups trying to preserve hunting and our shooting heritage. The NSSF constantly rounds up the media to enlighten them on the positive aspects of shooting. I worked with them for years as a spokesperson, traveling all over the country, working with the media of all categories from magazine to newspaper to radio trying to get

them to understand what shooting was really all about.

OF ALL THE VENUES YOU'VE SHOT, IN THE US AND ABROAD, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FAVORITE — AND WHY?

■ I would say my all-time favorite venue and tournament is our National Championships. It is so much more than a competition, it is an event. It is essentially a week of revisiting old friends with some shooting thrown in. I will always look back with fondness on the 14 straight years I competed.

Probably one of the most beautiful places I ever shot was Belgium when they hosted the World FITASC in 2002. The tournament was laid out on an old dairy farm and the countryside was stunning. When I first heard it was going to be at a dairy farm my thoughts were, "Yuck", but I have to say it was

nothing like I had envisioned and it had some of the most beautiful rolling hills I have ever seen!

HOW DID THE TRANSITION FROM SPORTING CLAYS TO FITASC COME ABOUT AND WHICH WAS YOUR PREFERRED DISCIPLINE AND WHY?

■ I shot my first FITASC in 1996, I think. It was the Pan Am and it was at the National Gun Club. I was there to shoot sporting clays so maybe they held the tournament in conjunction with a sporting tournament – I really cannot remember! I've never been so terrified in all my life. I had heard about 'the rules', actually not so much the rules as 'the warnings'! I was told that any small misstep would result in one warning then after that, targets would be taken away.

Looking back, I chuckle at myself for putting that kind of anxiety on myself. FITASC is

definitely my preferred discipline now, I love it! I think of FITASC as chess and sporting clays as checkers. There is so much more thinking and strategizing involved with FITASC. Also, because there is only one and not four pairs of the same presentation, it holds my interest and limited focus. Another point is the layout itself. There is such an infinite variety of target presentations because the layout can be as big as the target setter wants. I also like the idea of each layout being 25 targets, because then it is like four mini matches to make up 100 targets. It's easier for me to focus when it is broken up like that.

HOW MUCH COMMITMENT WAS NEEDED FOR YOU TO SUCCEED IN THIS SPORT — AND WAS THERE A DOWNSIDE ON FAMILY LIFE TO ACHIEVE THAT SUCCESS?

■ I feel to be successful in any endeavor there has to be 100 per

cent commitment. It is certainly no different for shooting. Commitment has many faces: commitment to shoot to the best of your ability, commitment to spend loads of time training, commitment to be loyal to your sponsors, commitment to be honest and play the game with integrity and commitment to be a positive role model for those following in your footsteps. I feel all these are interrelated and make up the complete package. If one of those pieces is missing, total commitment just isn't there. It is easier when you're single or have a partner who enjoys the sport as you do, but it becomes more difficult if there are small children or if work outside of shooting is all consuming.

One of the most exhausting tournaments for me was the 2003 US Open at Hopkins Game Farm. I had delivered our son a few months prior and wasn't even sure I was going to shoot. Because I entered so late, room accommodations were extremely difficult to find, but I ended up finding a room 45 miles away. I would drive to shoot my sporting rotation, then drive back to the hotel to nurse, then drive back to shoot FITASC, and then drive back to the hotel to nurse! That was just the beginning of many times when I was trying to juggle both shooting and caring for our son.

I couldn't have asked for a better partner in my husband, Hugh, to help me through those times. He would take time out from his busy schedule to accompany me to a tournament so he could watch the baby while I shot.

I started to realize that this wasn't fair to either Hugh or the baby and so I entered fewer and fewer tournaments. Then, I realized this wasn't fair to my sponsors. As I looked at my puzzle, named commitment, I noticed that there

were many puzzle pieces missing. So, I made a difficult decision – to retire from competitive shooting and devote my energies to raising our son. This is a long-winded answer to your question, but no, I don't think you can have it all. You just can't be 100 per cent committed to shooting and be 100 per cent committed to family – something has to give.

IN YOUR OPINION, HOW DO YOU THINK THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORTING CLAYS IS PROGRESSING COMPARED TO WHEN YOU WERE COMPETING A DECADE AGO?

■ In some ways sporting clays has changed tremendously and in

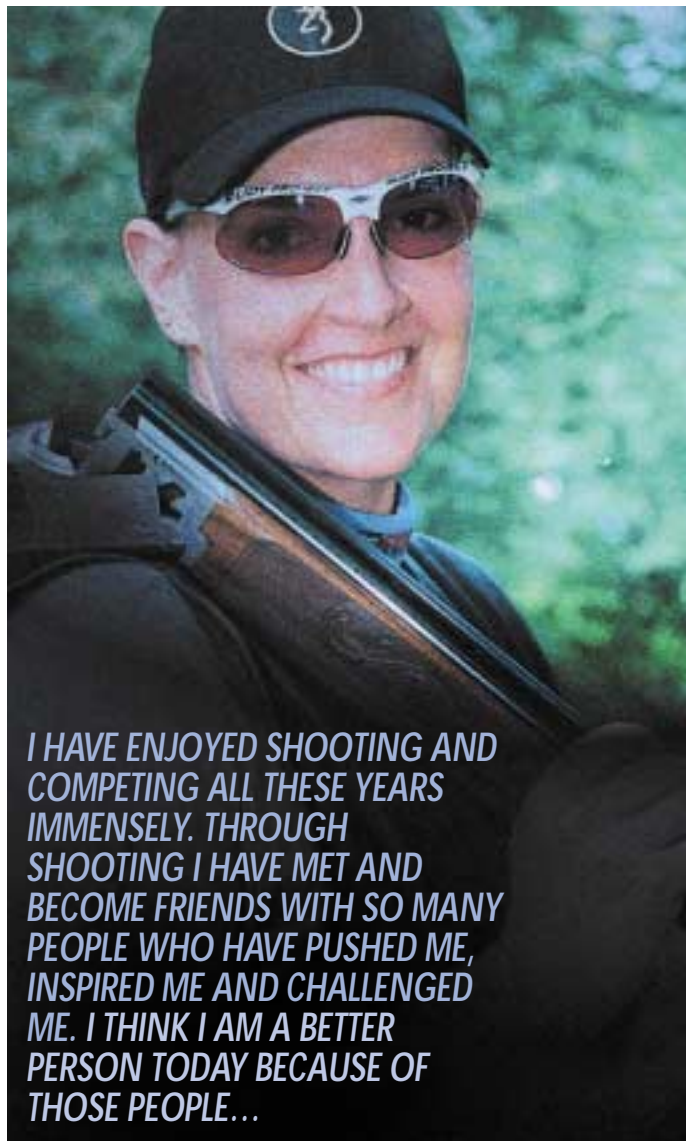
other ways hardly at all in the 14 years I have been shooting. However, to see the many women now enjoying the sport is very encouraging for the future of shooting. Every tournament I would go to, I would see more and more women competing that I didn't even know. So many organizations, like the NSSF and the gun companies like Browning, try to target women to introduce them to shooting and it looks like it is paying off. That makes me happy because if the women are involved then more than likely the children will be too. I know our son will be an avid shooter.

On the flip side, I feel that media coverage of the sport is still lacking. It would have been wonderful to see it absolutely explode like tennis did in the seventies. Oh, it has steadily grown, but it is nowhere near where it could be. That is very disappointing to me.

WE JOIN OUR READERS TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO SPORTING CLAYS OVER MANY YEARS. YOU WERE A GREAT AMBASSADOR FOR THE SPORT AND WERE ALWAYS A KEEN AND ENTHUSIASTIC COMPETITOR — YOU'LL BE MUCH MISSED ON THE CIRCUIT BUT LONG REMEMBERED FOR YOUR SUCCESS AT THIS DEMANDING SPORT. PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO USE THESE PAGES TO SAY YOUR OWN THANK YOUS.

■ First, I would like to thank you all at ClayShootingUSA for giving me the opportunity to publicly thank those who meant the most to me. I have enjoyed shooting and competing all these years immensely. Through shooting I have met and become friends with so many people who have pushed me, inspired me and challenged me. I think I am a better person today because of those people and because of the extreme demands of competing and traveling. Putting myself 'on the line' over and over, sometimes with success and other times in failure, has taught me to prioritize and enjoy the moment. It has also given me the greatest gift of all – because of shooting, I met Hugh. We married and now have a beautiful son.

I have had a wonderful run and now want to focus on my family and give my son the best possible start in life. My deepest thanks goes to Browning Arms and Briley Mfg because of their belief and trust in me as only family can do. They gave me such a wonderful opportunity to be the very best I could be. These two companies let me find my own way, confident in the quality of their product, knowing it could take me all the way. ■



I HAVE ENJOYED SHOOTING AND COMPETING ALL THESE YEARS IMMENSELY. THROUGH SHOOTING I HAVE MET AND BECOME FRIENDS WITH SO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE PUSHED ME, INSPIRED ME AND CHALLENGED ME. I THINK I AM A BETTER PERSON TODAY BECAUSE OF THOSE PEOPLE...