

# AL HAGUE IN CONVERSATION WITH **MIKE WILGUS**



**I**f you've ever watched Mike Wilgus shoot sporting clays, his enthusiasm, focus and love for the game is very apparent. His friendly and competitive nature makes him a popular competitor with other shooters. He has earned the respect of the sporting clays community – not only for his success but also his positive attitude.

Born in Galveston, Texas, Mike's family moved to Washington State early in his life and he grew up in Pasco, one of the Cities referred to as the Tri-Cities. In 1990 he moved to Bellevue, Washington, a fast growing city over the bridges and east of Seattle.

Wilgus went to school at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, and today has a successful career which includes his own consulting firm specializing in environmental waste and also brokering hazardous and non-hazardous materials disposal. To keep himself busy he also has interests in the local real estate market. He counts himself lucky to have the support of his lovely wife Julie and soon to be 4 year old daughter Kayla.

I first met him at the US Western Open in 2010 which took place at the famed Top Gun Club north of Seattle. It was quickly apparent to me that here was a guy who really loved to shoot. He was

also willing to help anyone who asked and that sportsmanship permeates sporting clays like no other sport I know. In conversation, we discussed much about the sport, his personal goals and what he thinks can help promote the sport.

■ **How did you first get interested in shooting?**

■ I grew up hunting in Washington, mostly ducks, but also big game – so I guess I've been at it as long as I can remember.

■ **When and how did you get started in the clay sports?**

■ In 1998 a friend took me to a trap

shoot. It was fun, but we also tried the 5-Stand and I liked it a lot. Shortly after that I tried sporting clays for the first time at the Tacoma Sportsman Club. I was hooked immediately.

■ **What was your first clay gun.**

■ I started out with a Browning O/U.

■ **Did you take any lessons early on?**

■ No, and looking back I might have done better if I had. I've not had any lessons or formal coaching since then either. I wouldn't recommend my path today – there's now so much great coaching and information available to newbies.

■ **When did you start competing?**

■ Pretty much right away. In 1998 I self declared into B class, not sure why, and the following year I reached Master class.

■ **Any early success?**

■ I guess you could say early, as I did win a couple of local registered shoots in my class but then in 2000 I was fortunate and had improved enough to be able to win State titles in Washington, Oregon and Montana. I don't recall the exact dates.

■ **On the National scene, you went to the top level almost immediately.**

■ Yes, I went to the Nationals in 1998 and 1999 and made my first All-American team in 2005 and have made it for four years subsequent.

■ **Since you now shoot in the top tier of shooters, you are obviously sponsored. Who was your first sponsor and who sponsors you today?**

■ In the late '90s I was sponsored by Angleport and have since been very fortunate to have been picked up by some of the best companies in the shooting industry. In 2009 Blaser became my gun sponsor and today I shoot the new Super Sport. I'm very fortunate to have a great relationship with them and have also had a ten year sponsorship and relationship with Hi-Viz. I also enjoy the support of Extreme Chokes. My newest sponsor is Gamebore Ammunition. I recently switched from Remington to Gamebore after trying their shells and discovering their amazing patterns and consistency. The White Gold 1 1/8 for clays and the 1oz for FITASC has given a significant boost to my confidence and I'm seeing true improvement in my scores.

■ **How was 2010 for you in terms of meeting your goals and do you have specific goals for 2011?**

■ I placed at the Nationals again last year and was pleased with that, but I've also improved my average – and that has real benefits. For the last two years I've shot more than 10,000 registered targets. For 2011 I am working towards doing well at the major tournaments. Winning one or more would be at the top of my list – just like all the guys out there.

■ **At a local level, do you always shoot with the same people and who do you like to squad with at the big shoots?**

■ Locally we have our usual squad which most of the time will be Dave Barton, Mark Kieffer, Todd Anderson and Tracy Wright from Spokane. When I travel to the majors I often squad with Bill McGuire and Brad Kidd

■ **How often and where do you practice?**

■ Never as much as I would like! However, I'm lucky to have the support of Jeff Van Den Top, owner of the private Top Gun Club in Mt Vernon (WA). It's an amazing facility that is opened once a year for the US Western Open. Jeff is also an accomplished shooter in his own right, having won the Skeet US Open more than once. He's my training partner and he pushes me all the time. I also get in some practice rounds at the new course at the Seattle Skeet and Trap Club, south of Seattle.

■ **What do you think of the new NSCA Classification system?**

■ Not sure about all the details. There are a lot of shooters trying to compete at levels they are not competitive in and hopefully the new system will make those corrections and prevent manipulation of the system.

■ **What big events are on your shoot schedule for 2011?**

■ I am looking forward to the World English, the Triple Classic, The US Open and the Texas State – and of course the 2011 Nationals. Locally I'll shoot the Washington and Oregon States, the US Western Open and the Zone 7 Championship.

■ **What can be done to promote the sport more?**

■ That's a tough one. Of course, marketing is the key and how we achieve that is a challenge. Educating the public is paramount. If we had television coverage, that would bring more sponsorship. On a personal note, I think a true Pro Class would help and give the other classes more opportunity to win – there's a trend headed that way. We can also increase and do more with youth programs but

that's a long term payoff – but necessary for the future.

■ **What's your least favorite shot you often face at events.**

■ That's easy – I hate minis.

■ **Do you have a favorite place to shoot?**

■ Not really a favorite club – besides Top Gun. I always enjoy myself wherever I go. That's one of the great things about this sport. However, I have had a lot of success in Texas with a total of 22 punches so I guess that's also on the top of my list.

■ **Tell me about Professional Shooting Solutions.**

■ It's a company I formed with the idea in mind that I can help new shooters who need specific help with shooting problems. I enjoy the sport and it's fun to work with other people who share a love of the sport. Currently I don't have the time to coach or teach, but my plan is to one day be able to do just that.

■ **Do you have any other hobbies or passions?**

■ I still love hunting – and I also play in a local basketball league which is a bunch of fun and a good workout.



*Mike Wilgus is certainly one of the good guys out there – and shooting top scores. He's approachable, fun to watch and always has a smile and a handshake. If you're at a big event and see his name on his vest, say hello and spend some time watching him do what he loves to do. In book terms, he's a 'good read'. ■*