

# WORLD FITASC CHAMPIONSHIP

**GEORGE DIGWEED** SHOWED, ONCE AGAIN, WHY HE'S CONSIDERED TO BE NUMBER ONE IN THE WORLD AS HE GOT THE BETTER OF A THOUSAND STRONG FIELD AND THE SIZZLING HEAT OF ITALY TO CLAIM HIS 17TH WORLD TITLE. **DON BRUNT** WAS AT THE WORLD FITASC CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ITALY TO WATCH THE ACTION.

Tuscany is at the heart of Italy's tourist area – towns like Pisa, Florence and Sienna draw visitors from around the globe who enjoy the stunning scenery, historic monuments, fine food and wine as well as the pleasant summer climate. Located just a short drive from the town of Arezzo lies the shooting ground ASD Laterina, venue for this year's World Championship which attracted an impressive 1131 entries from 34 nations – including Team USA and some forty US individual entries.

The ground itself looked promising with a good variation in terrain, situated as it was in a bowl, with hills surrounding it in all directions and a large lake which looked likely to provide some interesting backdrops for the Spada designed Parcours. However, being down in a bowl, the ground was exposed to very little in the way of breeze. This you may think is a good thing – targets would be consistent with little variation. You'd be right, but in combination with a period of the hottest weather seen in the region for a hundred years, the layouts turned into something more akin to an oven, with temperatures soaring uncomfortably towards 110 degrees and beyond!

Those who had traveled to Italy early, to get in some practice, had the chance to acclimatize to the conditions. Those who arrived the day before found the going on day one to be very tough. Of course, temperatures like this are nothing to write home about if you're used to shooting in Texas during the summer months, but shooters from Northern Europe literally melted in the heat – as did some of the locals. Fortunately, walking around the ground was kept to a minimum thanks to the transportation service which ferried the competitors down to the layouts in SUVs and pickups.

## Eight Layouts

The Parcours were designed in a circular layout. Eight layouts, each with four pegs. Promatic layout (a sponsor that supplied 136 traps and technical support to the event) was over a mixture of open ground, woodland and lakeside terrain. Rizzini continued the lakeside theme and included a raised platform from which to tackle targets out across the lake. Both of these layouts featured some of



GEORGE DIGWEED WENT HOME WITH THE SILVERWARE. L TO R: OVER ALL CHAMPION, WORLD CUP AND SENIOR WORLD CHAMPION TROPHY.



Spada's signature targets, thrown across the water at very short range (some landing no more than ten feet away from the shooter). They proved difficult to master, especially for those shooting with tight fixed chokes.

The Eurotarget layout saw a move away from the water with competitors shooting from alongside a Tuscan hedgerow, while Krieghoff was once again out in the open shooting a variety of targets along a high bank. The Benelli layout included some pegs out in the open while others were in amongst the flora and fauna – some with short windows. Elfipa was Parcours 6, named after the Italian trap release control manufacturer, and included a series of pegs amongst the contours of another bank, linked by a winding path that was hard going in the heat. The Beretta layout had some interesting targets, including some from over

the shoulder, as well as some flash targets and a gravity rabbit that caused more than a few upsets. There was also a raised platform on the layout but no targets were thrown beneath the shooter, something that was in the opinion of many a missed opportunity. The final layout was Fiocchi, situated at the highest point on the ground that saw competitors shooting from woodland out into open ground. Mercifully, much of this layout was in the shade.

Together, the eight layouts offered a well balanced selection of targets. Long birds (50 yds plus) were intentionally kept to a minimum, with the target setter preferring to steal targets by the use of different speeds, angles and some short windows. If there was one criticism, it might be the over use of chandelle traps – 13 such traps were used on the eight Parcours.

## Day One

Digweed started as he meant to go on, putting in two 25s on Rizzini and Eurotarget in sweltering conditions. Hot on his heels were Christophe Auvret (France), Ben Hushwaite (GB), Byron Justice and Martin Papworth (GB). Will Fennell was close behind on 48 as was Gregg Wolf on 47 equal with Michael Taylor. Anthony Matarese Jr. was on 46 having shot two 23s on Fiocchi and Promatic.

In the Ladies concurrent, Diane Sorantino was in third place on 43, Jenni Clark a further target adrift while Amy Rule had shot a 40. John Kane was the leading US Junior down in 8th on a 43 closely followed by Cody Bailey on 42. Veteran John Woolley (45) was just two targets behind leader John Pool (GB), but in Super Veterans, USA was leading the way thanks to Taylor's impressive 47, closely followed by Floyd Hartlage and Will Falls in third and fourth respectively.

Those hoping that Day 2 would bring cooler weather were disappointed – a steamy 113° in the shade being recorded on the Blaser trade stand at lunchtime. Despite the heat, the standard of



**WILL FENNEL (SHOOTING) STARTED STRONGLY ON DAY ONE WITH 48.**

shooting continued to be top draw – Digweed putting in two more perfect scores on Krieghoff and Benelli. Matarese closed on the lead with a 48, just two birds on Eurotarget escaping him, to see him move to fourth while Fennell shot a 45 to drop to 7th place. Cory Kruse had a better day to finish on 92 along with Wolf and Justice.

Diane Sorantino had it all to do having finished the second day on 83, 3rd place being taken by a resurgent Cheryl Hall (GB) with Jenni Clark on 80 and Amy Rule on 77. J Henderson took over as top American Junior but with a gap to the lead of five targets after

two days it looked as though it might prove too much. There were no such worries for John Woolley, as he was now joint leader in Veterans on 91, nor for Michael

Taylor who was leading Super Veterans on 90.

By the end of Day 2, it was apparent that this would be a shoot where it would be difficult to make up ground if you had a bad layout. Those that didn't attend, but where following

### PINK?

the daily scores on the internet, could be forgiven for thinking that the targets must have been on the soft side. That may have been true for the top 20 or so, but for the majority, the degree of difficulty was probably spot on. However, scores reflected the fact that throughout the eight layouts, the most challenging target on each peg was rarely used in the doubles – a disappointment for many.

## Day Three

Digweed showed himself to be human after all – dropping just one bird during Day 3 on the Elfipa layout. That put an end to the speculation that the big man might shoot the whole event straight. However, the chance to beat the record score of 198 held by



**JOHN WOOLLEY**

### BRIAN DeQUESNAY ON THE BERETTA PARCOUR.



Richard Faulds was still up for grabs – though Faulds himself was having an uncharacteristically tough time, some 11 away from Digweed.

Ben Husthwaite (GB) continued to lead the chasing pack on 146 with Auvret (France) and Matarese on 143. Bardou (France) was on 141 and Damien Birgan (Australia) on 140 along with Gregg Wolf.

After 150 targets it was definitely Digweed's shoot to lose, even with a three target lead it wouldn't take much of a slip up for Husthwaite to win his second World title in two weekends, having won the World Sporting just a few days before.

Henderson shot a solid 43 and Kane a 42 in Juniors, but the top 5 places were being monopolized by the Italians and the Brits – Michael Spada continuing to lead on 139 ahead of Phil Gray and Chris Papworth. Woolley was still sharing the top spot in Veterans with Brian DuQuesnay being the second highest US shooter on 130. Taylor was looking as comfortable as Digweed in Super Veterans with a clear lead of five targets. Sorantino (124) shot a 41 for 4th place in the Ladies going into the final day, but with a 7 point deficit to leader Beatriz Lappara (Spain) it looked as if the win was firmly out of reach.

## Day Four

The last day started earlier than the previous days (by 30 minutes) at 7.00am. It was the ideal time for Digweed to start his run in to the plate. Not only was it the coolest time of day, but there was also, for the first time, some cloud cover which gave the day a fresher feel. It was no surprise then that Digweed straightened

Fiocchi, meaning that a new world record score was still on the cards. Ben Husthwaite would have to keep attacking in the hope that Digweed would succumb to the pressure on his final Parcour.

Husthwaite kept the pressure on with a straight on Rizzini just an hour later. Four days of competition would now come down to just one

Four days of competition would now come down to just one layout – you could, as they say, cut the tension in the air with a knife.



AS USUAL, A CROWD FOLLOWED DIGWEED WHEREVER HE WENT.

layout – you could, as they say, cut the tension in the air with a knife.

At 9.36am with the temperature now climbing fast as the cloud burned off, a large crowd had gathered around Promatic peg one to watch Digweed shoot what could be an historic final round. The targets were thrown across a wide open field, the peg located on

a downward slope. The first targets broke in typical Digweed style. Then an audible sigh of disbelief rippled through the crowd as he missed a single with both barrels. Had the pressure of defending such a big score finally got to him? Having shot the singles, he left the peg making a bee line for his other set of barrels which was with the

rest of his gear amongst the crowd. By the time he had got them, made the switch and got to the peg, he was straight on for the doubles without having had a chance to see them. To the crowd's further disbelief he missed another. With Husthwaite chasing hard, would he smell the chance to steal the win? Any further mistakes from Digweed would allow his fellow Brit to draw level and force a shoot-off. With the news of Digweed's misses, the crowd grew even larger as he made his way to peg two.

It presented no problems, nor did peg three with its tricky low green incomer over the water. Mathematically speaking, if Digweed dropped one more target and Husthwaite straightened his last layout then the two titans would be level. Digweed cleared his last peg, now safe in the knowledge that the title was his no matter what Husthwaite shot on his final round. His 17th World title was in the bag and he had achieved his long

IT WAS EASY TO BE OVERCHOKED.



DOWN IN THE VALLEY IT WAS LIKE AN OVEN.



SOME TESTING SHOTS OVER WATER.





sought dream – to win a World title in every one of the four decades in which he has been competing. It’s an incredible achievement and one that may never be bettered.

“The standard of shooting now is so high – I didn’t know whether I could push the bar any higher,” said Digweed. “As to the World record score of 198, I doubt it will ever be beaten.

“I think its been a fantastic event – transport, infrastructure, catering and organisation have all been excellent,” continued Digweed. “To put on a championship of this magnitude and to do it so well is a real feather in the cap for the Italian Federation.”

Huthwaite eventually finished runner-up on 195, two behind

Digweed, with Anthony Matarese Jr. having overcome his first day 46 to take the third step of the podium with an impressive 192.

In Ladies, Clark overtook Sorantino at the last, finishing on 163 for 5th. Laparra (Spain) took the Gold on 180, Cheryl Hall (GB) got Silver (175) and Stefanie Steinkraus (representing Germany) secured Bronze (169). J Henderson finished joint 8th in Juniors on 175 while the top three remained as the day before – Spada (188), Gray (185) and Papworth (183). In Veterans, Stürzaker (GB) and Woolley battled it out, both finishing their campaign on Rizzini and Eurotarget. The Brit took the win by a single target though Woolley



LEFT: RICHARD NAZZARO IN ACTION ON KRIEGHOFF. BELOW: JOHN KANE WAITS TO SHOOT. FAR BELOW: SHOOTING IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY WAS HARD WORK.

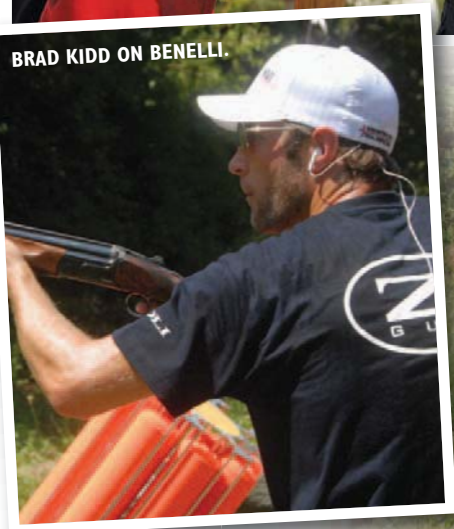


BELOW: SORANTINO FOUND IT HARD TO MAKE UP LOST GROUND.

ANTHONY MATARESE Jr. SHOT WELL TO TAKE THE BRONZE.



BRAD KIDD ON BENELLI.





**MICHAEL TAYLOR (CENTER) WON SUPER VETERANS GOLD AND JOE CANTEY (R) WON BRONZE.**

the Bronze. Paula Moore, Sandra Cogdill and Diane Sorantino had a tough time in Ladies, finishing 6th, while Juniors Colton Raley, J Henderson and Cody Bailey narrowly missed out on the podium, finishing 4th behind France, Great Britain and Italy. Norman Reuter,

such magnificent terrain was entertaining and while not as challenging as some World Championships of the past, there were plenty of targets missed over the four days – speed and angle being Spada's preferred style, rather than eyesight tests.

had to shoot-off against Frenchman Loyen for Silver – finally taking the place comfortably by 18 to 13.

Michael Taylor continued to dominate Super Veterans, his lights to flag victory being an exercise in supreme concentration to see him score 178, seven targets clear of David Payne (GB). Bob Davis and Joe Cantey were tied in third so they also had to shoot-off – Cantey making the better of the tricky targets to win the Bronze 18 to 16. Taylor was understandably very pleased with his performance. "It's a goal that I set out last year to achieve. I won the Super Veterans World Cup last year and I thought maybe I could get the Gold here. With the help of others and a plenty of practice, it came to fruition. It's been a long journey and I've had to work hard – but as they say, nothing that is worthwhile is easy."

In the team event the US Seniors took Gold (Wendell Cherry, Andy Duffy, Jon Kruger and Anthony Matarese Jr.) scoring 744, some eleven targets more than their French pursuers, while host nation Italy took



**GEBBEN MILES**

designed to please the majority of the competitors and they certainly did that. Of all those that completed the championship, only 21 failed to shoot less than 50 percent. Next year's World FITASC Championship will be held in Orville, France and is sure to attract another record entry.

With such a large entry, the targets were

Lewis McMurrin and David Lauzen matched the Ladies performance in Veterans, having to settle for 6th place. But there was more gold to come for Team USA in the shape of the Super Veterans team, thanks to the efforts of Floyd Hartlage, Michael Taylor and Bob Davis who finished an impressive 28 targets clear of the Great Britain team.

## World Class

The Championship ran well with a good mixture of typically European targets – there was very little out further than 50 yards while most targets were well within 40yds. The mix of target types and colors across



**WENDELL CHERRY**

Looking at the scores, they suggest that Benelli was the toughest of the layouts, averaging 17.6, followed by Rizzini on 17.9 while Fiocchi proved to be the softest on 19.2. Those that complained that the shoot was too soft to allow people to make up ground may have had a point, but the likes of Digweed and Taylor avoided having to play catch-up by not making mistakes in the first place. With such a large entry, the targets were designed to please the majority of the competitors and they certainly did that. Of all those that completed the championship, only 21 failed to shoot less than 50 percent. Next year's World FITASC Championship will be held in Orville, France and is sure to attract another record entry. ■