

Minnesota High School Trap League Is Now The Largest In America!

By Mark Zauhar

When I was elected President of your MTA, I proposed to the board that we initiate and fund an annual state high school trap shoot for the existing handful of teams that were already shooting in a virtual league. The concept behind this suggestion was the publicity generated from the event would cause rapid growth of the league as more kids and parents would seek the opportunity to compete in the sport. More kids shooting would mean more interest in registered shooting and the resulting growth in our youth programs. The funding for this proposal was to come from the live and silent auctions held at our state shoots. The majority of the board agreed with the proposal and we have had the fund raising-auctions every year since. Dollars raised in these auctions have totaled close to \$200,000 dollars which have been spent to fund the MTA youth program, the complete funding of the first two high school state shoots and strong contributions to every state high school league shoot held since. The results of our efforts have surpassed our wildest expectations. The first shoot had eight schools and one hundred thirty-nine kids participate in the one day shoot. The 2014 shoot had almost 190 teams and close to 4,000 kids competing in the five day shoot. The league had 6,100 kids participating in the spring league. We also have 1,800 shooting in a newly created fall league. The MTA youth day saw a 25% increase in shooters this year at our state MTA shoot. Mark and Sally Stevens youth chain league saw large growth in numbers as well. Projections for the 2015 spring league are over 8,000 kids shooting and around 5,000 for the league champion shoot which will be a six day shoot. It is expected the fall league to continue its growth rate and reach 3,500 shooters in 2015.

To put these numbers in perspective, Nebraska had the strongest and largest program in the country, until this year. They have been near the 2,000 number at their state shoot and in the last two years they have grown to 2,500. Our state passed them in just six years! This year, the league actually had more participants at their state shoot then the ATA had at the Grand American! And when you consider the league actually had 1,500-2,000 kids who wanted to participate in the league but could not due to limited numbers of available traps, the success is even more overwhelming.

But it doesn't stop there. After I lobbied with Representative Dave Dill for a trap club aid program funded by the state, and the league lobbied hard at their contacts in the legislature, a \$2,166,000 range aid bill was passed this year and already nearly \$500,000 dollars of that money has been awarded on a fully matched basis to over forty Minnesota trap clubs. This means our clubs will be spending \$1,000,000 dollars in the next several months to increase and improve their trap capacities.

It doesn't stop here either. Many of our trap clubs report having thrown twice the number of targets per year from just two years ago. Club memberships are increasing and the average age of club members is dropping. Even skeet shooting is benefiting. Some of the kids tried skeet, liked it, and now we have a small number of skeet teams in a league as well. Kids shooting means more future shooters and pro-gun voters. Kids shooting means more hunters and strong state game programs. Kids shooting in high school leagues will bring greater acceptance of the shooting sports in our high schools. For those that question these assumptions, they only need to look right here in Minnesota. Due to the success of the league, and the solid relationship built between the league and the Minnesota State High School Athletic Association by Jim Sable, founder of our high school trap league, the first state elite team shooting championship in the country was held right here in Minnesota. Paid for by the same organization that sanctions and runs the state hockey, football, basketball and all other high school sports championships. They paid for the shoot but they allowed our high school league to run it. When this proposal came up for vote, the high school athletic association passed it by just one vote. Now, I bet it would be unanimous!

But once again the successes don't stop here. Over the years, word got out to shooters in nearby states of our Minnesota high school shooting program successes. As a result, the league is continuing its growth by becoming a national organization. The USA High School League has been formed and already is operating in Wisconsin with the same format and leadership that has been so successful here. Wisconsin had 140 kids in the program last year. Expectations are Wisconsin will exceed Minnesota growth rates of 100% per year. The league hopes to have teams participating in North Dakota and Arizona in the near future. Interestingly enough, Arizona's High School Athletic Association heard about the Minnesota effort and just adopted it. This removes the need to "sell" individual schools on the safety and merit of the shooting sports.

Predictions for the future are even more ambitious than past successes. The \$2,166,000 range aid bill was big but in two years look for the passage of the metro area shooting range proposal we first proposed several years ago. The growth of USA High School Shooting organization will make it the nation's largest shooting organization in less than five years. Yes, it will exceed the ATA membership even though some league shooters will become new ATA shooters too.

Many people's efforts and donations as well as much hard work by the league have made this success possible. Those MTA members that donated and purchased from our auctions deserve a hearty thank you. Those board members that supported the initial proposal as well as yearly financial contributions to the league deserve a thanks too. Minnesota House and Senate members and especially Dave Dill, have earned our gratitude. But most of all, the huge success would not have been possible without the many years effort by Jim and Sharon Sable and the league Vice-President, John Nelson. Please thank all of these people when you see them at the ranges or at their work.