

Family approach helps shotgun team stay on target

By Olivia Shapiro and Molly Linder on Wednesday, March 15, 2023



Jacob Spidle, a senior at Oglethorpe County High School, practices with his dad David Spidle, who is one of several coaches with the 4-H shotgun team. Jacob Spidle hopes to finish in the top five at state this year. (Photo/Olivia Shapiro)

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Jacob Spidle, who is on the 4-H shotgun team, sternly signals his coach to release the clay with one word – “pull.”

He takes a deep breath and firmly holds his shotgun to his shoulder, with his cheek pressed against it, ready to watch for the flying clay. When practicing, he sometimes hits and misses the clays, but when witnessing a hit, Spidle smiles after showing his precision and focus.

The Oglethorpe County 4-H shotgun team began practicing weekly in January to prepare for the two competitions of the season – qualifiers and state.

“I shot my first-ever perfect score at state, and then went on to doubles and shot a seven out of 10, and I needed an 8 out of 10 to make the top 10,” said Spidle, a senior at Oglethorpe County High School. “I’m hoping to make the top five this year.”



Last year, Nolan Holloman finished in the top 10 at the state tournament held at Rock Eagle in Eatonton.

The team consists of sixth through 12th graders. Although the team is primarily boys, the co-ed team has one female competitor.

Madow Shannon, an eighth-grader, has been on the team for almost two years and said she likes to compete with the shotgun team because it allows her to get outside.

“She’s young ... so we’re working really hard on improving,” said Dean Langford, one of several coaches.

The shotgun family means a lot to everyone on the team, including Langford.

Parents and family members set up chairs while they sit back and watch each competitor practice, two at a time. Some make critiques and others just make conversation with fellow spectators.

“You know, seeing the parents, when we have grandparents that come out, watching them smile and just enjoy watching their child or their grandchild, get better,” Langford said.

The team has been around for over 15 years and practices on Sundays on the land behind the Oglethorpe County Jail.

“There’s like, like a dirt road before you get to the jail, and we get back there. And that’s where we practice,” says Stephanie Langford, the team’s head volunteer.

Competitors bring their own shotguns and shells to practice, but competition and other necessities are covered by team dues, a team fundraiser and sponsors.

“Yeah, the dues are \$50, and we haven’t raised those for any reason,” Stephanie Langford said. “We’ll do a raffle for the year, and the kids and the parents and everybody goes and sells raffle tickets to raise money.”

Raffle prizes are usually gift cards to sporting stores or cash.

The clays – the orange, disk-shaped objects the competitors shoot – come at a discount from the Elberton County Gun Club, which calculates the team goes through about 17,000 per season.

Jerry Erwin, at Sporting Arms in Winterville, has also been assisting the team from “way back” with purchasing equipment.

“I used to do a lot more when the shells were available,” Erwin said. “I always bought them their shells and stuff and sell them to them at cost, you know, and their shotguns and stuff like that.”

Although there is a shell shortage, he still assists with gun maintenance.