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Sporting Legend

John Woolley

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John Woolley

A man wearing a light blue bucket hat, sunglasses, and a light blue short-sleeved shirt is aiming a shotgun. He is also wearing a tan mesh shooting vest with a pocket. The background is a blurred green field with bokeh light effects.

John Woolley has competed as a member of the national sporting clays teams for Great Britain and the United States.

Woolley, a renowned shooting instructor and FITASC course designer, is shown here at the 2020 World FITASC Championship at Providence Hill Farm in Jackson, Mississippi.

Photo by Tommy Kirkpatrick

Legend on Two Continents



by Maggie Kelch

*Photos courtesy of
John Woolley
(except where noted)*



John Woolley

In the world of sporting clays, there are Master Class shooters — shooters who have won a number of events and are at the top of the game. There are Champions — shooters who have won their state championships, as well as regional and national championship events.

And then there are Legends — shooters who have excelled at the sport on a local, national and international level; members of their country's national teams who are recognized for their contributions to the sport.

John Woolley is truly one of the Legends. Woolley's list of accomplishments is lengthy and goes back over decades. He has competed as a member of the national sporting clays teams for two countries: Great Britain and the United States. He shot 13 times for Great Britain and won 12 gold and one silver medal shooting for the British team.

Shooting for the U.S. team, he won bronze and silver in FITASC and

won team gold with the Senior team. He served as Captain of both the U.S. Veterans Sporting Clays team and the U.S. Veterans FITASC team in 2012 and 2013. In 2015, he was inducted into the National Sporting Clays Association's Hall of Fame.

Woolley, who resides in St. Augustine, FL, is also regarded as one of the top shooting instructors and coaches. He owns Woolley Shooting Clinics (WSC) where he does individual instruction, group instruction, clinics and corporate entertaining. WSC is located at Saltwaters Shooting Club, where he also has a gun shop and does gunfitting.

The list of successful shooters who have learned from John is long and distinguished, including Wendell Cherry, Gregg Wolf and Ashley Little. At one time, four of the five men on the U.S. shooting team, one of the women, one of the juniors, all three of the veterans and all three of the superveterans were Woolley's students.

Woolley is regarded as the #2 FITASC course designer in the world. FITASC, with 55 countries in its membership, selected Woolley to design World, European and Pan American championship

courses in Cyprus, Andorra, Germany, Wales and the United States.

Woolley also headed and taught the world's first international course design program for FITASC. The program certifies successful candidates to design courses for international championships.

While all of these accomplishments are impressive and imposing, John Woolley himself is a kind, considerate and approachable man who is a congenial ambassador for the shooting sports he loves.

Humble Beginnings

Like many sporting clays and FITASC shooters, Woolley was a hunter before he became a competitive shooter. Born in England, Woolley began shooting game on his family's farm when he was seven years old. It was 1960, England was still paying off its war debt from the Second World War and rationing books were still in use. "So how we supplemented the protein we needed was me hunting rabbits and pigeons and the occasional pheasant. And fish, too. I would get trout and saltwater fish. That is where my love of fishing comes from," Woolley reminisced.



He first started shooting clays when he was 15, and a friend took him clay shooting at a small local shoot held on Sunday mornings. "It was just a dozen guys who came together. I always seemed to be able to shoot birds that were further away and to kill more game than the average person. But, when I first tried to shoot clays, I really didn't do very well at all," he said.

When he was 17, he was watching one of the more-successful members of the Sunday morning group and realized he could learn from him. "He made it look so easy. And, even though it was only in our little group, I was trying to work out what he was doing and how he was doing it. I'm an analyst by nature. I analyze people, animals and things," he said.

"When I was watching him, I realized what he was doing so I tried to emulate that. And to cut a long story short, once I understood it, I did it and within six months I went from being not that good to winning everything locally. It was a big transition for me," he added.

The shooter he watched was actually using what is now called the Move, Mount, Shoot Method. "I didn't know it was called that, but it is based on the Churchill Method of the old days, except

for being more advanced because the type of targets we get today is so much more advanced from what we used to have back in those days," he explained.

Coming to America

Woolley was an accomplished shooter and shooting coach when he lived in Great Britain where he had a well-known shooting school, Fieldsports. He was also a writer for the top European sporting clays magazine, *Sporting Gun*.

John arrived in the United States in 1990 and worked here for six months for a Tennessee club called Grinder's Switch. The club was one of the largest sporting clays grounds in the world at that time with 1,700 acres. In 1992, he came to live in the U.S. full-time. When the club was sold and no longer open to the public, he went to work for another club in Paducah, KY, called Grassy Lake. In 1995, he and several friends started a company called Wild Hare which sold shooting apparel, vests, outerwear, pouches and other shooting products. They sold it to a company in Florida in 2000. Part of the agreement was that Woolley would stay on with the company for a year as head of sales. So, in 2001, he moved to Florida.

Because of family commitments, Woolley took a number of years off from shooting. As a single father, he focused on raising two of his three daughters and coaching for several years. In 2008, he met his wife, Gretchen McGlory, and he credits her support and help with the children with enabling him to start shooting again.

Woolley became a U.S. citizen in 2010. "I became a citizen to see how good I could be, to have another go. By that time, I obviously was a Veteran and ended up winning a silver medal in FIT-ASC in Italy in 2010 in the Veteran class. That really got my heart pumping for the competition again," he said.

Today, he and Gretchen enjoy working and fishing together as well as enjoying their blended family. His stepson, Nick McGlory, runs the gun shop along with gunsmith Phillip Foy. He credits much of his success to the support he receives from Gretchen, Nick, Phillip and his three daughters: Charlotte, Jordan and Taylor.

Move, Mount, Shoot

When he came to America, Woolley brought a wealth of knowledge, including the Move, Mount, Shoot Method with



*Coach Woolley
imparts his wisdom
during a clinic at the
2020 World FITASC
Championship.*

*Photo by
Tommy Kirkpatrick*

him. Today he teaches his own version of the Move, Mount, Shoot Method that he developed.

Woolley said he has seen there is a common misconception about the shooting method.

“Most people think it is maintained lead. In actual fact, it is not. It’s all done within the gun mount. So you actually shoot all three methods: swing through, pull away or maintained lead. The predominant method on a left-to-right-hand target for a right-handed shooter would be pull away or maintained lead. On a right-to-left target, the predominant method would be pull away or swing through. To have your eyes look at the target. That’s the way I teach,” he explained. *(Editor’s note: John’s DVD Be Your Own Coach In Sporting Clays The Woolley Way is found on page 49.)*

What is the one thing Woolley would recommend to an average shooter who wants to improve his or her shooting? “The one thing? Practice their gun mount, because it is the most important thing. You have to keep your head still. You must practice the gun mount in the mirror to stop yourself from moving your head. Obviously, along with the gun mount is gun fit,” he said.

Woolley teaches six rules to shoot well:

- Keep your head still
- Gun Mount
- Focus
- Never let the bird get past the gun
- Stance – standing correctly
- Gun Fit

So, why is gun fit number six and gun mount number two? He explained: “Well, you’ve got a chicken and an egg situation. To have the perfect gun mount you have to have the perfect gun fit. To get perfect gun fit, you have to have a perfect gun mount. The two go together. When you get a really good gun mount, then you can get a pretty good gun fit. Then you can go back and perfect the gun mount with the best gun fit you have. Then you go back and get the gun fitted to you absolutely perfect.”

Woolley said the gun sales side of his business actually started and grew because of the gunfitting that he does. “So what we try to do is fit the gun to them for where they are going to be when they actually have a good gun mount. That takes out a lot of those middle guns that people buy,” he explained. “So many people buy this gun, that gun, this gun, that gun and trying to find the magic gun. But really what they are actually doing is bad gun fit after bad gun fit. So when you get somebody who

is prepared to trust you, like we have been fortunate to do, we can actually fit them into the right gun early on which really increases the growth of them as a shooter.”

Preparing for Competition

Having won gold in multiple world championships, Woolley has a lot of experience in preparing for competition at a very high level. He offers some good advice for shooters preparing to compete.

“A lot of people go out and like to shoot 200, 300 or 400 rounds leading up to a big event. But personally I’d rather shoot 50 really good targets and just keep it at that. You know a week before, or 10 days before, you can shoot a few extra if you like. But coming up to an event, if I can shoot 50 good targets that would definitely make me happy,” he said.

Woolley said he shoots a mix of easy and difficult targets when he is preparing for competition. “First of all, I like to do some easy targets and just get a feel to help my confidence a little bit. Making sure my movement is right. A lot of people can hit easy targets with the wrong motion. But I try to make sure I am hitting the easy targets the right way,” he explained.

“Then, I like to go and stretch myself some and shoot the longer targets and more

John Woolley flanked by his daughter Taylor Woolley (left), his stepson Nick McGlory (center right) and his wife Gretchen McGlory (right) in the gun shop at Saltwaters Shooting Club.



difficult stuff. At Saltwaters Shooting Club here in St. Augustine, we have two 14-station courses. One is an easy course, and one is a very difficult course. And then we have FITASC and 5-Stand, too. Because of that, I get the opportunity to shoot on the easy side and on the hard side. So I mix and match them. I really try to prepare my mind for a tournament by doing some mental training beforehand as well,” he added.

Woolley shoots a Caesar Guerini and has stuck with the brand for many years. “I’ve had a long relationship with Caesar Guerini. I like the way they do business. Wes Lang and Tom Smith have been very, very kind to me over the years,” he said. “I’ve been very fortunate, I’ve been able to shoot for several different companies over the years; I’ve been offered to get paid a lot more money from different companies, but I stay with Caesar Guer-

ini because I like the longevity of our relationship. They have a good product, and their service is second to none.”

Woolley is also sponsored by Experiencia, Soundgear, Pilla, Dr. Frank Rively and S & S Stocks Plus.

In the advent of Covid-19, Woolley has chosen not to compete in many events, but he did compete at the World FITASC at Providence Hill Farm Sporting Club in Jackson, MS, last November. He is focused on staying close to home and making sure his business stays on a solid footing.

Greatest Accomplishments

Looking back on all he has done in his career and his many accomplishments, Woolley said one of the things he personally gets a lot of pleasure out of is seeing his pupils improve and seeing them go on to win medals.

The accomplishment he is most proud of is his membership in the NSCA Hall of Fame.

“Obviously, I’ve been very fortunate and won a lot of medals, and won a lot of events both for Britain and the USA. The one thing I can say stands out in my mind was being voted into the 2015 Hall of Fame, which wasn’t necessarily just for my shooting. It was for my shooting, my coaching and everything else that goes into the business side of it. I really felt like that was a true honor to be voted by the American shooters who voted me into the Hall of Fame, especially being born in Britain,” he said. **SS**

Maggie Kelch is an avid outdoorswoman who enjoys fishing, camping, hunting and shooting. With a degree in Journalism from Ohio State University, she spent more than 40 years in communications. She has written for numerous local, state and national publications.



John was the Super Veteran Champion at the 2019 World English Championships at Northbrook Gun Club.



John (above, left) has been on the podium as champion or runner-up at FITASC shoots around the world both for Team USA and the United Kingdom.



John was a member of Team USA which won Gold at the World English in 2014 along with Mark Hall (center) and Brian Du Quesnay (right).



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