

TOWN *SPORT*

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Calling the Shots:
Through his renowned Paragon School of Sporting, Dan Schindler is sought internationally for his knack for turning laymen into marksmen.

Right on Target

Dan Schindler instructs in the way of sporting clays



Trigger Point: Dan Schindler (left) has been sharing his shooting skills with sporting clays enthusiasts for decades through his Paragon School of Sporting. His continual practice has led to the publishing of his most recent book, *Beyond the Target: From Methods to the Mental Game*.

Gentleman's Calling

For more than 30 years, Dan Schindler has taught legions to be ace marksmen

/by Stephanie Trotter // photography by Derek DiLuzio

Pull! A blaze of deep orange flies out from behind a grass thicket, rising through the air. Lead it. Lead it. Squeeze. Kaboom! Forty yards away, the speeding disc suddenly explodes into a cloud of clay shards that drifts to earth. "I've devoted my life to this sport and have no complaints. None," reveals Dan Schindler.

The veteran outdoorsman caresses the custom stock on his Perazzi MX8 shotgun with 31.5" barrels and fixed chokes. Rarely a day goes by that the

seasoned shooter doesn't spend time on a sporting clays course, or range. Schindler is one of the reasons sporting clays participation has jumped 20 percent in the last six years. The Flat Rock, North Carolina, resident has competed, promoted, and instructed within the shooting discipline since its U.S. inception in 1980. He's authored books, fronted magazines, and created awareness for his profession with the Outdoor Channel. Today, more than ten and a half million men, women, and children set their sights on sporting clays, and the dedicated sharpen their shot through Schindler's Paragon School of Sporting.

MUZZLE AWARENESS / "What method did you use there?" It's a perfect day for practice in the Carolinas, as autumn settles in for good. Schindler is standing behind one of his many students, wearing his trademark Tilley hat and field vest. He assesses every movement the gunman makes. "Folks want to know why they shoot well on Thursday, and then not quite so well on Saturday,"



shares Schindler. "The primary reason for this is because there are inconsistencies in their setup and in their swing. From behind, it's easy to see the error. The shooter sees the perception, but the coach sees the reality from behind."

Folks fly from around the world to take lessons with Schindler at River Bend Sportsman's Resort, his home course in Inman, South Carolina. Clients have included Bush staffers to NASCAR drivers to the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium. The approachable teacher has spent 25 years on "gentleman's coaching" (with social and corporate shooters) and formal instruction (with individuals, groups, and competitors). Schindler has even certified more than 230 instructors using his handcrafted curriculum—a system that signaled his qualification as the first American admitted to the British Guild of Shooting Instructors. "He's very patient and concise," explains Linda Ayers Turner Knorr, a longtime patron. "Shooting, like golf, or anything like that, is a mental sport, and he has the mental game down so well." To find out how he calibrated mind with metal, we head to Japan.

KAIZEN / Spend any time with Schindler, and he'll eventually mention the Far East. Growing up as an Air Force "military brat," he lived quite a few places, but Japan left the deepest mark during his formative years. He embraced martial arts, and the order and methodology that fill the Japanese culture. As a young boy, Japan is also where he got his first gun: a Red Ryder BB gun. He actually lost the gun the very day he received it, after accidentally tagging a woman with a BB. He laughs about the Military Police-filled story now, but at the time it was devastating. Still, he'd discovered a passion for the sport.

As a teen, when the family moved stateside, Schindler pursued his unquenchable thirst for hunting and shooting in the land around Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He realized one of the most important elements in hitting his desired target involved *kaizen*—a Japanese philosophy bringing steady, continuous improvement to a select process. One shell, one target, one improvement at a time, and in 1980, his target became sporting clays.

FEATHERS & FUR / Prehistoric drawings showcase the importance of early man's accuracy with a weapon. Good shots survived and ate. Bad shots, well, didn't live long enough to tell tales around the campfire. Over time, spears evolved to guns, and Europeans and Americans held shooting competitions across the centuries with muskets, pistols, and rifles. In 1825, Ohioans hosted the first recorded trap-shoot match, releasing live pigeons from hats and cages. Eventually, men and women (think Annie Oakley) showed the birds mercy, and started shooting glass balls stuffed with feathers. Falling glass wasn't the wisest idea, and the orbs gave way to clay "pigeons," similar to those used today.

By the 1920s, hunters practiced their wing-shooting skills in the off-season with trap and skeet—the other two shotgun



"Improvement is a process, a journey. I couldn't begin to count all the wonderful moments I've derived from this game."—Dan Schindler

disciplines. Both utilize machines throwing clay targets in standardized, predictable patterns. In 1980, a group of gun enthusiasts hosted a "hunter's clays" tournament in Connecticut. Unlike trap and skeet, this new format sent clays skittering from multiple stations into unpredictable flights that mimicked ducks, pheasants, and quail. The name didn't stick, but the format did. Today sporting clays is commonly called "golf with a shotgun." No two courses are alike, each featuring acres of land filled with multiple stations flinging up to six different-sized birds, some clays even resembling rabbits on the ground.

BEYOND THE TARGET / "The game of sporting clays is both science and art. I am incredibly blessed to be so busy in a sport I love," admits Schindler. "I work with many, many people of all ages and skill levels." Across his 35 years of shooting, Schindler estimates he's fired millions of rounds. He's compiled his experience to pen a trilogy of stories and lessons for fellow enthusiasts. Just released, *Beyond the Target: From Methods to the Mental Game* has shipped to seven different countries. Schindler admits it's not so much for those who spray and pray, but for intermediate and advanced shooters. However, it shows how *kaizen* can canvas many walks of life, both personally and professionally, just as sporting clays spills across Schindler's. "Improvement is a process, a journey," he says in closing. "I couldn't begin to count all the wonderful moments, lessons, and unforgettable memories I've derived from this great game." Kaboom! He's hit his mark. **T**

For more on Dan Schindler and Paragon School of Sporting, go to www.paragonschool.com.