

WEDNESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> April – Queen's I and a first big win, by This Correspondent

The Grand at the end of Tuesday had four Brits in the lead:

1. Patel
2. Watson
3. Ball
4. Messer

The fact that only one of those four was due to shoot in the SABU International Match on Wednesday may help give an indication as to the thinking behind the team selection. For those in the know, it mirrored that for the America Match in Canada in 2006: it was designed to help determine selection for the Protea Match, with some of the best shots left out in favour of some of those on the cusp of selection for the big one. In Canada those from other countries who had expressed disappointment that they would not get to shoot against Great Britain's best were confounded when the team went on to break the match record by a handsome margin and win. Fingers crossed that anything similar might be achieved this time.

It was another early start on Wednesday before a long day of competition: six shoots for those who were shooting, and effectively twelve for the coaches!

The first shoot (or rather three) was a Queen's I course of fire for the first stage of the State President's competition. Conditions were pleasant at 300m, with the sun still low and a cooling breeze helping, without causing too many problems in terms of loss of points. Most of the team started well with 35s, and quite a few of those continued in the same vein at 500m where the conditions were a little warmer and a bit trickier.

At 600m, the wind conditions became rather more difficult, especially for detail 2, and the weather became hotter and sweatier. At the end of that range, five of the Great Britain team were left clean with scores of 105 out of 105: Nigel Ball, Parag Patel, Matt Charlton, Ed Compton and Toby Raincock, with the first two top-scoring on 105.15.

Some places (including Bisley until recent years) would see your shooting day over by the time you had finished a Queen's I course of fire... but not Bloemfontein, where there was still another shoot to go before lunchtime! It was the Municipal Cup, fired in tricky wind conditions (for the second detail at least, after Chris Watson cursed it by saying "looks like it's a steady right wind at last now!") The first detail must also have been fairly tricky because nobody on the GB team managed to score a 50: the best efforts were from Jane Messer, James Lewis and Adam McCullough, all on 49.4... oh and a late admission from the captain, Steven Thomas, who had failed to record on our scoreboard his 49.5!

After a very quick break for lunch and a team briefing, the various vans headed out onto the range in preparation for the SABU International Invitational Match against

South Africa. In fact, there were several South African teams out to shoot against us, which explained why, for a change, the range was full of cars when we got there – normally we arrive well ahead of the others but this time the South Africans had all their team meetings on the range half an hour before the match, since all their teams had only just been selected.

The SABU match was the first of two opportunities to take on the might of South African shooting; lest we forget, these were the World Championship silver medallists, shooting on their home range.

The match started in sweltering conditions, with the wind changing quickly and frequently enough to cause a lot of stops and so some disjointed shooting. However, the wind coaches were seeing it well and were sufficiently on the ball to avoid most of the potential points losses. The shooters largely coped well with the stop-start rhythm and the heat, although there were a few shots lost to elevation. To fault them for that, though, would be to hold the team members to an extremely high standard – the reality was that, having dropped 15 points (out of 900) at 800m, the team was two points ahead of a South African team that was shooting very well indeed and was in with a chance of a record score.

All were instructed to take as much shelter, shade, liquid and rest in between ranges as possible, although the time allowed between ranges was shorter than we might have hoped and certainly shorter than we were accustomed to. Having said that, we are not accustomed to using quite so much of the time allowed at a single range as we had done. In general, GB shooters at this level tend to shoot fast; on this occasion, though, shooting fast was only accomplished in bursts and caused us (as was noticed by some behind the firing point) to be able to avoid some of the periods of wind conditions that appeared less certain – certainly to a greater extent than the opposition.

At 900m the pattern continued, although one or two of the steadier periods were slightly more sustained and the heat was somewhat less oppressive. This correspondent was confident that Great Britain was in a good position to win the match, as his firers produced better performances than at 800m and their scores were just as good as at the shorter range. However, across the rest of the team and the whole of the South African team, the scores were – astonishingly – increasing from their already high levels. Whatever the result, we were going to be pleased in no small way with the performance.

As it turned out, the match came down to the very last shot, fired by Jon Underwood with the other two targets having finished a few minutes earlier.

South Africa had managed to record a higher score at 900m than at 800m and, all the more impressively, had beaten the record score for the match by 16 points: a huge margin, given that they had only dropped 30 for a score of 1770.

Great Britain, who had led after 800m by 2 points, were behind by 2 half-way through the 900m range, and that despite Ed Compton having shot brilliantly for a 75.12 and a match-leading 150.21 in the match.

Strong knocks by the last four British firers, though, brought the result we wanted as Great Britain took the 900m range by a single point and the match by 3, with a new record (by 19 points) score of 1773.

Great Britain scores:

Capt: Steven Thomas, Adj: Gary Alexander, Main Coach: Martin Townsend

Left target (coach Matthew Charlton):

Adam McCullough	74.8	74.8	148.16
Ed Compton	75.9	75.12	150.21
James Lewis	74.7	74.7	148.14
Chris Watson	74.10	74.5	148.15

Middle target (coach Jane Messer):

Ed Jeens	74.5	73.6	147.11	
Marcus O'Leary		73.6	73.4	146.10
Rick Shouler	74.6	75.8	149.14	
Jon Underwood		74.5	75.4	149.9

Right target (coach Matt Ensor):

Paul Sykes	73.6	74.6	146.12	
Ian Davison	72.4	72.8	144.12	
George Gilpin		73.9	75.10	148.19
Toby Raincock		75.9	74.11	149.20

Totals: 885.84 888.89 1773.173

Reserves: Nigel Ball, David Dyson, Parag Patel (spy)

Alongside, three South African "hopefuls" teams also shot, divided by age, with the middle team (the President's team) finishing on 1736, only 7 points off the match record themselves.

There was also a Junior International match held at the same time, with teams comprising six firers instead of the seniors' twelve. The three competing nations were the Under 19 teams from South Africa, Great Britain and – separately – Scotland, represented by Dollar Academy (guided by Craig Stewart and Julia Adamson but responsible for all of the shooting and coaching within their group of six for this match. GB U19s won the match by 12 points on 841 out of 900, but not before Scotland (whose firers' ages ranged from 15 to 17) managed to record the highest score at 900m. Amazingly that meant that the overall result was Great Britain 1<sup>st</sup>, Dollar Academy 2<sup>nd</sup> and South Africa 3<sup>rd</sup>: well done GB U19 and especially well done Dollar!

The match was followed (other than for the four people pushing back ammunition for later in the week) by the first of two prize-giving receptions during the championships, which might have dragged on but for the fact that Great Britain team members were regular visitors to the stage to receive their medals. Of particular note was the South African Team Championship, in which the three British Commonwealth Rifle Club teams (coached respectively by Matt Ensor, Matthew Charlton and Martin Townsend) had placed 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. BCRC Captain Jane Messer was very pleased!