
3 RIVERS

2025

Shooting ★ Sports ★ Academy

REPORT: BARRIERS TO YOUTH CLAY TARGET TEAMS

Breaking Barriers to Breaking Clays



Visit 3RSSA Website

3RSSA Vision

To make youth participation in the shooting sports as easily accessible and professionally run as other school sponsored sports in the Western PA area.



Our Mission

Provide welcoming, expert, and professional entry to recreational and competitive level shooting instruction for teams focused on youth development and the parents and organizations that support youth athletes.

3 RIVERS

Shooting ★ Sports ★ Academy

What We Have Learned

1 Competition for youth time and interest has increased
- few sports are “hobby” sports anymore

Clubs, industry, and organizations misunderstand the barriers to youth shooting sports

2

3 Resources have increased, but few organizations are taking advantage of them

National and regional resources are fragmented, increasing the knowledge gap for youth teams

4

5 Facilities are extremely important for attracting athletes, parents, and coaches

Youth teams bring resources, revenue, and members to aging clubs

6

7 Clay target teams support conservation efforts and increase participation in conservation activities

1 Competition for youth time and interest has increased - few sports are “hobby” sports anymore

Today's high school and college students enjoy more choices than any previous generation regarding how they spend their time. The internet, social media, and online gaming vie for their attention, while schools and communities provide an unprecedented variety of sports and activities, many of which are well-funded, professionally managed, and well-resourced. Simultaneously, the rise of travel teams, personalized training, coaching, and off-season preparation has led to a higher level of commitment required from participants than ever before. With more options and higher levels of commitment, the environment facing 12-24 year olds limit their ability to explore multiple interests or transition to new ones.

As a result, the shooting sports need to present offerings that can compete with the environment students encounter. To achieve this, it must create an atmosphere that stands up against the offerings available. This includes providing options that are social and team-oriented, led by professional coaches, supported by their school and peers, well-equipped, and offer genuine competitive opportunities.



Most importantly are the parents who significantly influence young individuals by selecting activities and sports that align with their interests and fit their lifestyles. They invest time and resources in worthwhile activities but will withdraw support if expectations are not met. In youth hockey, this balance is achieved by enhancing offerings while lowering barriers to entry, ensuring a positive experience for both parents and players. There is a lesson here that the shooting sports can model.

Clubs, industry, and organizations misunderstand the barriers to youth shooting sports

2

The most significant challenges youth face when trying to enter shooting sports are financial constraints, lack of facilities, and limited access to qualified instructors. Unlike many mainstream sports, the cost of simply trying shooting sports can be prohibitively expensive. Without affordable entry points, many young athletes never get the opportunity to explore the sport.



Another major barrier is the fragmented landscape of the shooting sports community. While interest in the sport is strong — from individual athletes to school and university leaders — it's difficult to navigate the resources necessary to form teams or establish programs. Many institutions lack the infrastructure or knowledge to bridge the gap between interest and participation.

Additionally, the shortage of professional, certified instructors compounds the issue. Unlike past generations, where parents often served as coaches, today's shooting sports require qualified instruction for both safety and skill development. Access to these professionals is not widespread, leaving many youth without proper guidance.

3 Resources have increased, but few organizations are taking advantage of them

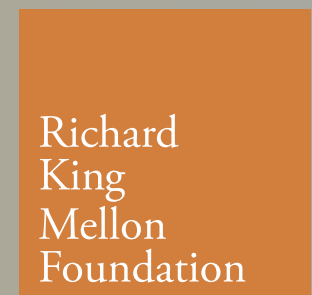
Over the past decade, national and regional resources supporting youth shooting sports have grown significantly. Funding, coaching programs, endowments, clinics, and equipment grants are more available than ever. National organizations like the MidwayUSA Foundation offer structured financial support that matches team fundraising efforts, provide annual grants, and work directly with school alumni associations.



Regionally, organizations like the Pennsylvania Youth Shooting Association have similar programs that complement MidwayUSA Foundation's and help clubs who support youth teams with grants.



Beyond organization whose mission is directly linked to the shooting sports are philanthropic organizations like the Richard King Mellon Foundation whose work to support youth development programs, conservation, and sustain Pennsylvania values see close alignment between youth shooting programs and their goals.



Despite the growing support, many youth teams struggle to build sustainable programs. The issue isn't resource scarcity — it's navigation. Without clear guidance, teams miss out on funding, training, and competitive opportunities.





The issue is particularly pressing regarding industry support. Youth organizations lack familiarity with the industry, and conversely, the industry has not prioritized understanding the needs of young shooters and the organizations that support them. For instance, when a high school basketball coach requires new equipment, they know exactly which company to contact. However, when a high school wishes to establish a shooting team, they often don't know where to begin.

Manufacturers such as Beretta, Winchester, Browning, Federal, and MEC have developed youth-focused programs that offer gear discounts, range grants, and sponsorship support. These initiatives are valuable, yet they remain underutilized due to a lack of awareness about available resources and points of contact. Furthermore, these industry leaders have not effectively communicated their support.

To advance, the shooting sports community must strengthen connections with the youth market and the organizations that assist these teams. The 3RSSA has emerged as a central hub for schools and industry to collaborate in supporting the sport. The resources are available; the key now is to ensure that teams know how to access them, utilize them effectively, and foster growth together.

4

National and regional resources are fragmented, increasing the knowledge gap for youth teams

Youth shooting sports are growing across the U.S., from high school trap teams to collegiate skeet and sporting clays. Yet, starting and sustaining a team remains challenging due mostly to a fragmented system of sanctioning bodies, confusing coaching credentials, and limited coordination across age levels. Access to clay target shooting is rooted in private clubs, not schools, and still lacks a natural league structure that aligns to a landscape that parents and students, who are not familiarly with our sport, easily understand.

Several organizations govern different segments of the sport. USA Shooting oversees Olympic disciplines, while ATA, NSSA, and NSCA manage domestic trap, skeet, and sporting clays. The Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) offers a structured competition path for youth, hosting state, regional, and national championships. However, many new teams, parents and coaches don't know these events exist or how to access them. Similarly, the USA Clay Target League provides school-based leagues but operates independently, offering competitions that don't always align with SCTP's format or progression.

At the collegiate level, the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) organizes national competitions and supports college shooting teams. Yet, other sanctioning bodies host collegiate events without clear alignment to ACUI, creating multiple, uncoordinated tracks that can confuse athletes and limit continuity between high school and college shooting.

New programs face a steep learning curve: finding instructors, securing equipment, navigating sanctioning bodies, and developing budgets — often with no roadmap.

Building an education center to serve as a centralized hub—helping teams navigate the maze of independent organizations and providing clear guidance on competitive pathways, coaching resources, and long-term program development is required to build and sustaining growth in the sport.

Facilities are extremely important for attracting athletes, parents, and coaches

5

First impressions matter — especially in youth sports. For the youth shooting sports, outdated and under-resourced facilities remain a major hurdle in attracting and retaining new participants, especially parents and coaches.

Many shooting ranges were built decades ago for adult male shooters. Today's youth programs, however, serve a much broader and more diverse group. Parents expect an environment comparable to other sports — clean, safe, professional, and welcoming. Yet far too many shooting facilities still have aging infrastructure, minimal seating, poor accessibility, and neglected restrooms — particularly inadequate accommodations for women.



Remodeled female restroom that the club was using as a storage closet

This isn't just a cosmetic issue. In youth sports today, parents are making the decisions about where to invest their time and money. If they don't feel comfortable staying at the range, they're far less likely to allow their child to participate — regardless of interest or talent. Coaches, too, are more willing to volunteer their time in facilities that reflect a level of professionalism and care.

Moreover, a modern, well-maintained facility signals to new athletes that the program is serious, safe, and worth their commitment. Whether it's a school deciding to start a team, a university considering a club program, or a student athlete thinking about trying the sport for the first time — facilities often make the difference.

Facility improvement is a core component of team success, and a priority for 3RSSA. By supporting range development grants, renovating clubhouses, and prioritizing adequate restrooms and common spaces, 3RSSA is creating environments where families, athletes, and coaches feel proud to spend time.

FACILITIES MATTER

Clean and convenient restroom facilities improve the shooting sports for Coaches, Parents, and Athletes.

During the 2024 SCTP Clay Target Championships we piloted how improved restroom facilities affect athletes, parents, and coaches. We provided two restroom trailers (complete with power, water, and air conditioning) to supplement the standard port-a-let chemical toilets available on the far bank of skeet fields. We then surveyed over 250 athletes, parents, and coaches throughout the week to get their feedback.

The main findings of the pilot and its survey are striking, but not surprising.

- **More than 80% of all categories of participants rated having the better restrooms as a “major improvement” or “life changing improvement”**
- **Females (athletes, coaches, and family members) rate the importance of having better facilities available higher than males.**
- **The trailers provided more than just clean restroom to participants.**

Clean and convenient restroom facilities have multiple purposes.

Through our pilot and survey we also learned the importance of facilities to athletes, parents, and coaches. Athletes, especially female athletes, used the facilities to adjust their clothing, fix their hair, apply sunscreen, and wash their hands before taking the field. Parents and coaches — many of whom spent hours on the fields — were willing to stick around longer to support their athletes.

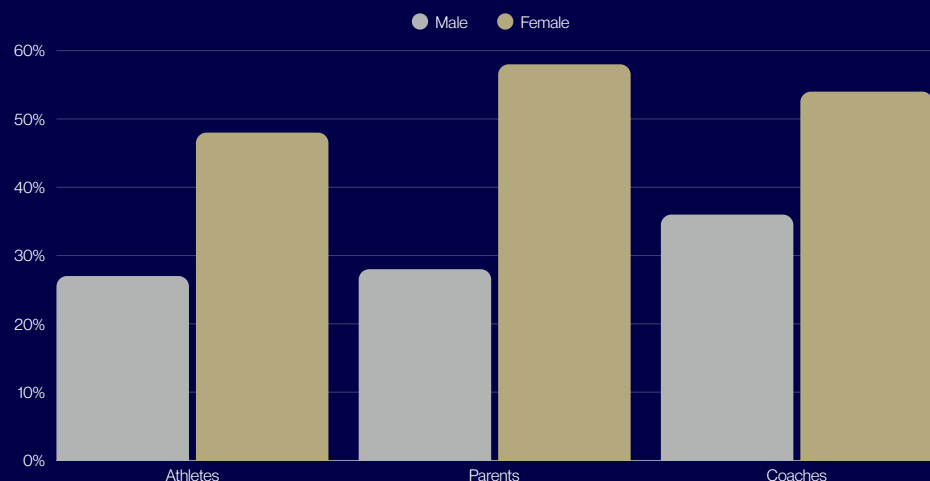
CONCLUSIONS

Facilities can act as a barrier to the shooting sports for the people that matter the most.

The youth shooting sports competes for youth time and parent support against the growing number of youth activities offered by schools and communities. The facilities offered by these activities matter — especially when they are considered basic amenities. Clean, convenient, and comfortable restrooms can be a powerful amenity that attracts and keeps athletes and the parents and coaches that support them in the shooting sports.



Percent of Athletes, Parents, and Coaches that Rated Improved Restrooms as a “Life Changing Improvement”



Our experiences show that clubs benefit when they welcome youth teams to their facilities. These benefits come in three ways:

New Resources: One of the most immediate advantages of hosting a youth team is access to new funding and resources. Over the past 15–20 years, organizations such as the MidwayUSA Foundation and PYSSA have developed extensive funding mechanisms for youth teams. These grants, combined with school-affiliated team resources, can fund capital projects.

Increased Revenue: Youth teams increase revenue for clubs. Unlike most members who visit sporadically, youth teams bring 20-30 athletes to the range several times a week (typically during off peak times) to shoot cases of targets and ammo.

The introduction of a youth team at Western Reserve prompted significant investments, including grants for repairing trap machines, upgrading restrooms, and creating a family-friendly environment. Club members coaching youth teams are receiving professional development and coaching certifications funded by industry donors, benefiting both the youth and increasing the club's appeal to shooters.

Sustained Membership Growth: Many shooting clubs struggle to attract younger members, as their membership base primarily consists of older adults with disposable income. Traditional youth engagement efforts, such as youth days, rarely translated into sustained membership growth. However, by establishing a relationship with a school-affiliated team, clubs introduce an entirely new generation to the sport in a structured, ongoing manner. Some clubs have reported membership increases from parents and athletes who come back for additional practice or who have made the sport a family affair.

It works because it allows two organizations—schools and clubs—to focus on their core strengths. Schools are experts at organizing and managing youth teams, while shooting clubs provide the facilities and expertise to run safe, effective shooting events. By aligning these strengths, clubs can grow their membership organically, with former youth shooters continuing to engage in the sport long after graduation.

7 Clay target teams support conservation efforts and increase participation in conservation activities

CLAYS TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

75%

Conversion for
ATHLETES

22%

Conversion for
PARENTS

Clay target shooting encourages hunting among non-hunters.

During the 2024 SCTP Clay Target Championships we surveyed over 250 athletes, parents, and coaches about their past, present, and future hunting experience. Of previous non-hunting athletes over 70% stated they now hunt or will hunt in the future. For parents who did not hunt previously, over 20% stated they now hunt or will hunt in the future. Interestingly, **female** parents and **coaches** had higher conversion rates than males.

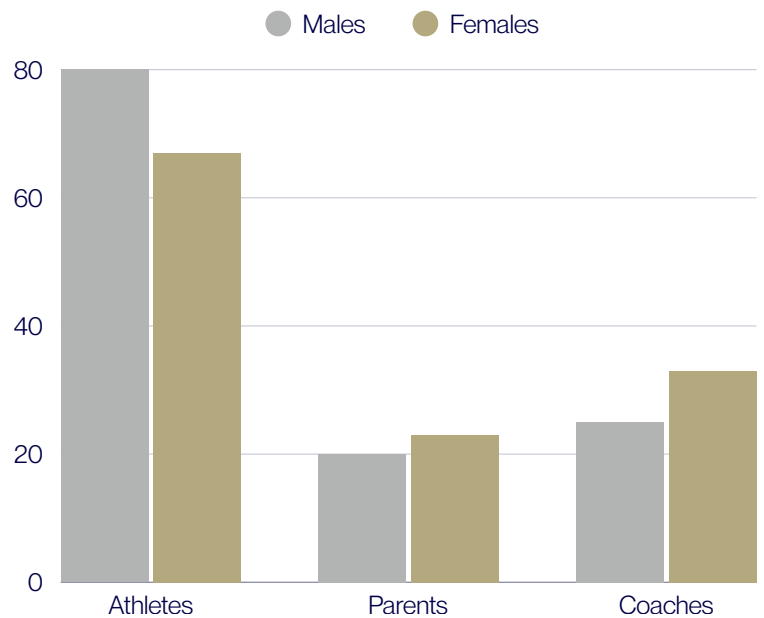




Already possessing the right equipment, skills, and comfort for the shooting sports, the conversion rate for both male and female athletes who did not hunt prior to participating in a clay target sport to future hunting is very high.

More importantly, athletes participating in the clay target sports appear to also increase the likelihood of parents and coaches participating in hunting. This reinforces the notion that parents today are often influenced by their children's participation in teams and sports.

Percent who stated they didn't hunt before clay targets but will hunt in the future





Visit 3RSSA Website

3Rivers Shooting Sports Academy is a 501(c)3 founded to assist youth-oriented organizations with promoting the shotgun shooting sports by bringing together local and national expertise and resources.

3RIVERS

Shooting ★ Sports ★ Academy