

SMOKEPOLES VS. MODERN SHOTGUNS

On Saturday August 13, 2005 there was a showdown between Old and New. The Lansing (Michigan) Muzzle Loading Gun Club invited the Ashley Sportsman Club to a trap shoot challenge. Lansing brought muzzle loading shotguns and Ashley brought their modern shotguns.

The rules were not too complex. It was a 30-bird challenge. The first round of 15, each shooter shot their own gun. Ten birds from 10 yards and five from 16 yards. The second round is where it got interesting, the two clubs had to trade weapons and shoot another 15 bird round, again ten at 10 yards and five from 16 yards. Oh, by the way, harassment was legal and fully encouraged (and employed). Team scoring was done by adding each shooter's total birds together, and dividing by the number of shooters on the team to get an average. The club with the highest average won.

As the visiting team, Ashley got to shoot first. I have to say they were impressive. They did not miss many birds. Then the smokepolers stepped up. They were equally as impressive. They were shooting various styles of muzzleloaders, inline shotguns, traditional caplocks, side hammer double barrel, and an under hammer. Unfortunately, there were no flintlocks, maybe next year.

After a really nice buffet potluck lunch break is when it got really interesting. Lansing shot first after the break using the modern shotguns. They did pretty well, only a couple of people forgot to set the safety off before trying to pull the trigger. Then it was Ashley's turn to shoot the smokepoles. They had trouble loading, could not find where to break the action open to insert the charge. After some lessons from the Lansing team, they were ready to step up. They were accompanied to the line the first couple of shots by the Lansing member whose gun they were using, just for safety and final instructions. The first time they shot that muzzleloader, they came back to the loading bench with the biggest grin you could imagine on their faces. They were surprised by the loud bang of the blackpowder compared to the modern cartridges they were used to, and especially by all the smoke! They laughed that they could not even see if they had hit the bird or not because of the smoke screen.

Ashley had 8 shooters and had a team average of 20.25 birds. Lansing had 13 shooters and had a team average of 20.92 birds. That is incredibly close.

The winning team gets a very nice traveling trophy, which was made by Mr. Basil Jones. Fortunately for Lansing, it will not be traveling very far this year.

At the end of the day everyone agreed that it had been a lot of fun and Ashley was looking forward to next year's meeting on their home field. It was quite obvious that they were impressed by the ability of the muzzleloaders. One even bought a muzzleloader, which had been set out for sale, and took it home with him so that he could practice for next year.

This will be the 12th year and the competition is still going strong.