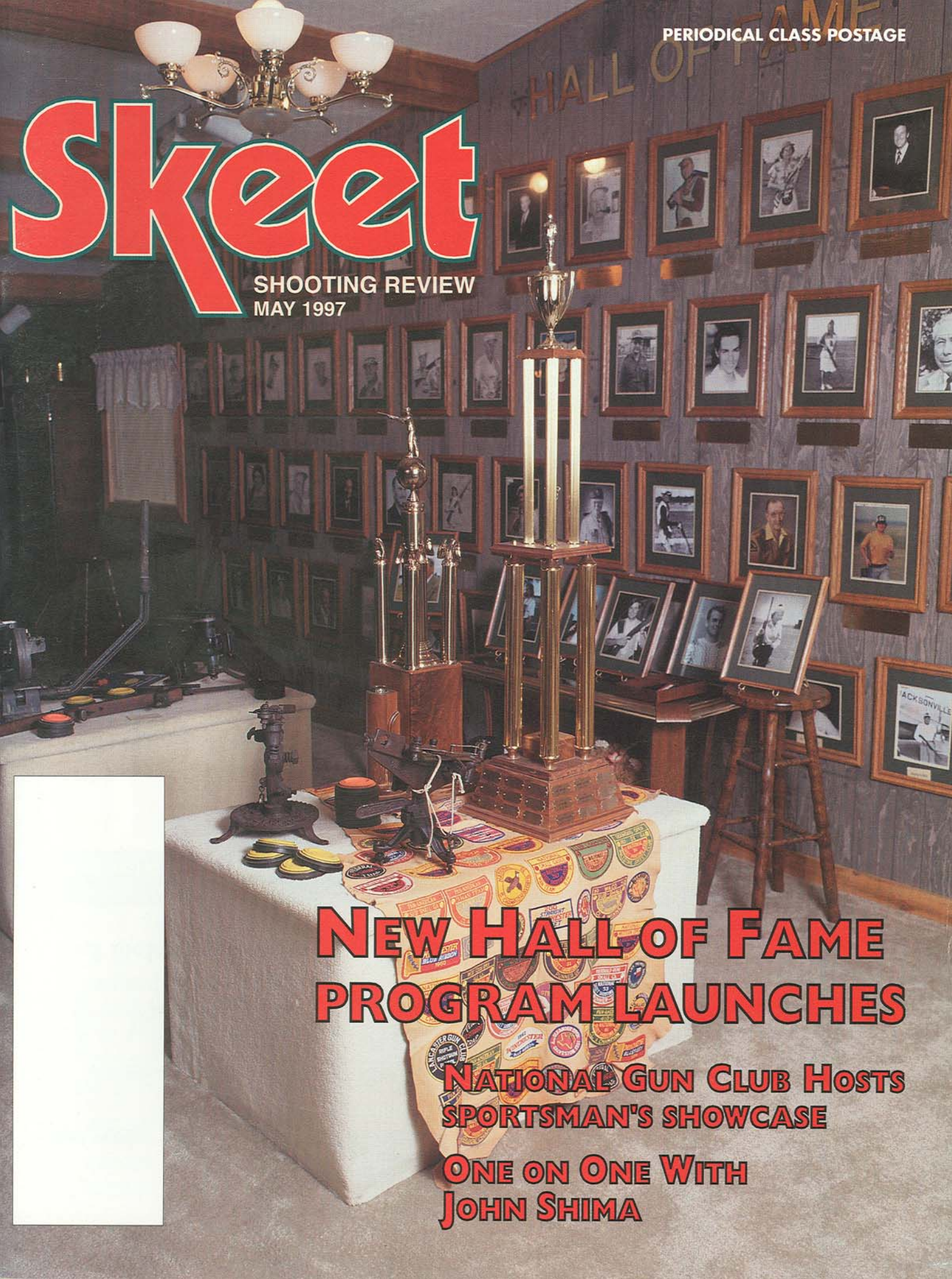


HALL OF FAME

Skeet

SHOOTING REVIEW
MAY 1997



NEW HALL OF FAME PROGRAM LAUNCHES

NATIONAL GUN CLUB HOSTS
SPORTSMAN'S SHOWCASE

ONE ON ONE WITH
JOHN SHIMA



John Shima

Shooter, Teacher, Mentor Extraordinaire

by Morris Gresham

How does one begin a profile on a shooter as recognizable as John Shima? Is there, after all, a skeet shooter in the world who doesn't know him? As a partner in the Bender/Shima Clinics, the popular, perpetually smiling Shima has competed against, visited with and taught shooters from all corners of the earth.

But he wasn't always the confident, accomplished person he is today.

"I was dyslexic as a kid," Shima explained. "As a result, I never was a high achiever in school. My brother and sister are both doctors. They, of course, did very, very well. I had trouble in school so shooting kind of became more *who* I was as opposed to just what I did. It really defined who I was as a young person because it was the one thing that I could do well—that I could kind of fall back on."

As it happened, Shima established his identity early, shooting skeet for the first time on his eighth birthday. He began shooting competitively in 1967 at age 10 and competed in his first World Shoot four years

later. He made his first All-American Team in 1974 (*Junior Honorable Mention*) to begin a 20-year run on one team or another. Then, three years later, Shima claimed his first two of five World titles, the 1977 HOA World Championship and the 28 gauge World Championship. He later added the Champ of Champs crown and two straight 12 gauge World Championships.

"John was always a sweet kid," said Dr. Art Shima, John's father and a popular fixture on the skeet tour. Dr. Shima is a perennial member of John's squad, including the 1996 World Shoot when he was 83 years old. "In the early years, John went with me to all the shoots when

school was out. His older brother and sister shot and John was inspired, I think, by the rivalry with his older brother. He wanted to do well and beat him every once in a while."

"My dad started me shooting," John stated. "There was such a big age difference between him and me that we didn't consider going out and playing ball. So he kind of took me into his sport and I got addicted.

"Shooting helped my hand-eye coordination quite a bit," Shima continued. "Because of that, I could excel at shooting. Growing up as a child you always need one thing that you can do well—for self esteem purposes. Skeet shooting helped me there quite a bit."

When John was about 11 or 12 years old, Dr. Shima flew them to the Jayhawk Gun Club just outside Latham, Kansas, for a shoot that still burns brightly in John's memory. "At the time, he was real good friends with Ernie Simmons and Pop Simmons and Ernie Simmons, Jr.," John recalled. "I shot my first 100 straight, but we couldn't stay for the shoot-off because I had to get back to school. At the time, Dad was quite a flyer and as we were leaving, he said, 'Well, let's just buzz 'em



once.' So we buzzed them and headed home. That was my first taste of, 'Gee, I can do this.'

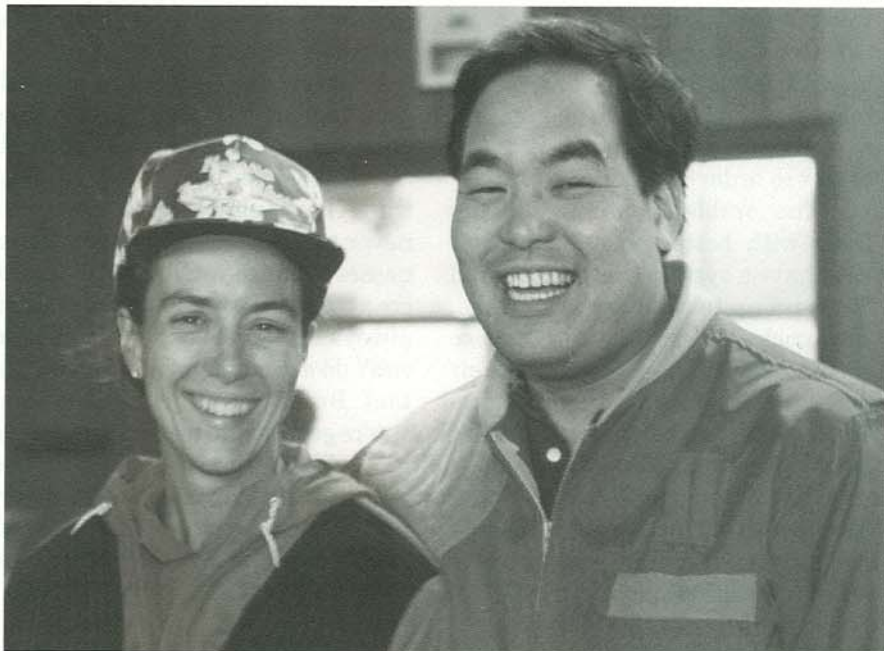
"By starting so young, I've been through it all," Shima stated. "I'd stood up, I'd crouched down ... I'd called loud, I'd called soft ... I'd shot swing through, I'd shot sustained lead. You do the whole thing."

After doing the whole thing for 30 years, Shima finally failed to shoot minimums a couple of years ago. As a result, he missed making an All-American team for the first time in two decades. "And do you know what?" he asked. "The sun kept coming up every morning! I was amazed! I love the game and I love the shooting. However, the coaching is really ... I love coaching! As I tell people in my clinics, 'You have to make sure you know what you wish for ... because it might come true.' I loved shooting my averages. I loved being a world champion and high average leader in a gun or two, but the bottom line is, the closer you come to perfection, the more it becomes work and the less it becomes fun. This year I've only shot 400 targets and I've enjoyed it. The fun of skeet is kind of coming back to me now."

"John has a lot of patience and he absolutely loves what he's doing," said Ellen Nelms, a Hall of Famer and a regular on Shima's squad for ten years or so. "I'm so happy for him. It's wonderful to see him so happy doing something that he loves so much. How they can stand out there teaching from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night is beyond my comprehension. You'd have to love it to do that. But he does, he really does!

"John has helped me a lot," Ellen continued. "One thing he always used to say that stuck with me was, 'Go out there and shoot with wild abandon. Don't be careful—just charge ahead.'"

"When John was at Trinity, the one thing Col. Hanzel stressed," said Dr. Shima, "was that he taught them to teach. That way it sticks better. The Colonel once said to me, 'John is the best student I've ever had in teaching.' And teaching has been good for John."



John and wife Cecilia enjoy the sport together.

After admitting that he had "had a pretty nice life," Dr. Shima recalled high points of John's youth, including a Ferrari he bought him and a stint in racing school. "I have a little trouble remembering sometimes," Dr. Shima admitted, "but when you're 84 years old, you're lucky that you can remember a lot of things." (*John reported that doctors later determined that Dr. Shima had suffered a mild stroke just prior to the World ... but it didn't keep him from competing!*)

Dr. Shima, a high-ranking military anesthesiologist who also was Secretary of the American College of Anesthesiologists, and the lady he gently refers to as "Mother" have three children. Their oldest son, an invasive cardiologist, is a popular cardiac surgeon and the only daughter, also a doctor, is second in command at the San Diego Zoo. He is understandably proud of both older children, but his eyes take on a special gleam when he speaks of John, the baby of the family.

John is very much aware of the special bond he has with his father. He credits Dr. Shima, of course, with providing him a great foundation in skeet shooting. "And the Ferrari story was a little more complicated than Dad made it sound," John revealed. "When I broke 100 straight with the

28 gauge at the World in 1977, he told me that if I won a World title, he'd buy me any car I wanted. Well, I won the 28 as well as the HOA and when I got home the bright red Ferrari was sitting in the driveway. He said, 'You have the car. Now you've got to learn to drive it.' That's why he sent me to the driving school."

Shima credits two other factors with his climb onto the upper plateau. The first was his coach at Trinity. "Not only was Col. Hanzel a wonderful coach and person," Shima said, "but he made you look at the skeet field in a pretty different light. And he believed in you, which I think was a big part of it."

The second factor was his regular tournament squad. "I've been shooting with my squad for so long. As much as I enjoy meeting new people, it's so nice to be able to shoot with the same people every time. I shot with Jim Prall who was a multi-world champion and now I shoot with his son Kevin and Fred Peters, and of course, my Dad, which is nice and Ellen Nelms. I think that squad, through thick and thin, has really helped me."

When the instructor's instructor was asked what one tip he would give a new shooter, he replied, "For the new shooter who wants to become competitive, one of the biggest

things we tell people is that you have to watch the **target**. So many people look **AT** the end of the gun and try to measure off the end of the gun, but we tell them, you **have** to look at the target in order to hit it.”

The problems Shima usually finds with better shooters is that they have a system that has worked for them up to an A or AA average. The trick, he says, is to convince them that slight changes in their games might improve them, not because John Shima or Todd Bender say so, but because logic demands it. It might be as simple as moving a hold point out or dropping a hold point down. Or it might just involve learning to shift their eyes a little better for the doubles game. A shooter might experience a slight dip in his scores for a few weeks as he acclimates to the new strategy, but he usually enjoys a tremendous advantage as his game matures.

Shima calls the game of skeet a game of perfection and a game of subtraction. Unlike tennis or golf, sports where you can make up a bad set or a bad hole on the next one, you can never catch up if you miss in skeet. “They give you a hundred targets and say, ‘Let’s see how many you can miss,’” Shima explained. “And if you don’t miss any, now you have your ticket to the main game which is the shoot-off. It takes a certain type of individual who likes to be challenged by perfection, not just achieve it occasionally with a 25 straight, but be challenged by the possibility of making himself do it on every station in every 25, 50 or 100 targets. That either drives people out of the game rather quickly or keeps them in it for life.”

Shima has known Todd Bender, his partner in the Bender/Shima Clinics, since their college days at Trinity. During their stint as teammates on the skeet team, the pair became great friends and sometimes found themselves discussing career possibilities. During one philosophical discussion on what they wanted to become when they grew up, another

shooter made an observation that changed Shima’s life forever.

“Roger Kasle was an up-and-coming skeet shooter who went to Harvard,” Shima remembered. “Roger told us one day, ‘The first thing they taught us at Harvard was never try to strengthen your weaknesses because you’ll only be mediocre at them. If you can’t type, you can always hire somebody to type. If you can’t do accounting, hire an accountant. But if you can figure out what you’re good at and work at perfecting it, you’ll always succeed.’ I turned and said to Todd, ‘You know, the only thing I know, heart and soul, is shooting. And you do, too. Do you want to

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do it?” He said, ‘Let’s try it.’”

History records the rest. The duo did, indeed, try it and have rewritten the book on how to conduct shooting clinics. The major problem they found is one of too much success.

“It’s been great, but I was only home 44 days last year. I’ve been home less than 50 days for the last six years with all the traveling for clinics and for shooting. You never want to knock having too much business, but I have to find a balance that allows me more time at home.”

In an attempt to organize schedules, for example, Shima and Bender spent the entire month of January in Florida and the month of February in Arizona and let shooters come to them. Using Dr. Shima’s new bus as a home base, the duo flew back and

forth as required, but had a firm base on two fronts.

Shima, who will turn 40 just days before this reaches your mailbox, looked back on 32 years of shooting and did not hesitate when asked the high point of those years. “One of the things I can be most thankful for is when I met Cecilia, my wife,” he replied. “She pointed out that there are more things to do in life besides skeet shooting every weekend. And that doesn’t take away from the game. I find that as I become more diverse, I actually appreciate the game more. And, as far as focus goes, you can over-focus. You can get so wrapped up in, ‘Oh., my gosh, I’m having trouble with this high 2 now,’ that you really never step back and realize that, ‘I’ve got all my fingers and toes,’ or ‘I’m still healthy.’ Maintaining a balance in life and attitudes is as important as being able to focus on the targets.”

His wife also was responsible for part of Shima’s new look. He often is spotted strolling down the walks of a skeet club sporting a beautiful green bird on his shoulder as he entertains (or bird-sits) the Senegal parrot Cecilia adopted a couple of years ago. “The bird’s name is Goa,” he revealed. “He goes with me to all the gun clubs when I do clinics and he’s not gun shy at all.”

There are many possible explanations for Shima’s widespread popularity—the vast number of people whose games he has improved, his perpetual good humor and ever-present smile, his genuine love for people. Likely, it’s a combination of all the facets of John Shima, an acceptance and reflection of his own attitude and personality.

“Skeet is the greatest sport I have ever competed in,” he insisted. “It’s a people sport.”

As Ellen Nelms said, it’s great to see John Shima so happy doing something he obviously loves so much because the skeet shooting fraternity is far better because of his participation.