In 2015, Bill Rabbitt, Jeff Paddock, Roger Barker, Rick Smelko, Mark Oehlberg (RIP) and I embarked on a journey to start a field target club. At the time, we had no idea if there was a demand for Field Target (or airgunning in general) in Northeast Ohio, but we knew we wanted somewhere to shoot airguns, and hoped others would find their way to us. That spring, we hosted our first FT events and to our surprise we found there were a decent number of folks, just like us, that wanted to shoot their pellet guns. In the span of 8 years, what started from rather humble beginnings has morphed into what I would like to think is one of the premier field target clubs in the country. So when we discussed the possibility of hosting a National Championship match, I wasn't surprised when everyone responded positively to the idea.

When we discussed the idea with our property owner, Ashley Reily, he was downright excited and giddy at the thought of such an event being held on his property. He and his wife, Anne, graciously agreed to allow us the use of the property. We cannot thank Anne and Ashley enough for their generosity, graciousness and assistance in making our club's dreams a reality. I think two of the most frequent questions/comments through the weekend of the competition were: 1) What's the deal with this property? And 2) How did you guys get so lucky to shoot at a place like this? Whether you call it fortunate or lucky or blessed, we are all of those things when it comes to the Twin Oaks Air Rifle Range. Thank you Anne and Ashley.

I also need to thank all of our club members that made this event a reality. Everyone that came out to our work parties to spread mulch, clean the clubhouse, fix some things around the grounds, all of your help is greatly appreciated. I also want to specifically thank the following individuals:

- Larry Justinus for spending his weekend at the club shooting pictures instead of shooting pellets.
- Tim Baylor and Bill Rabbitt for their work on the awards.
- Jeff Paddock, Bill Rabbitt and Eric Jones for volunteering, along with myself, to marshall the match.
- Conrad Griffith for taking the time to do some drywall repair work in the clubhouse and making things look better than new.
- Roger Barker for helping to organize the tents and port-a-potty deliveries.
- Joe Edwards for his help with the mulch.
- Paul Nickerson, Dan Putz, Dave Hitchcock, Randall Hoppert, Lucas Marusiak, Rick Smelko and Erik Anderson (as well as everyone else above) for pitching in as needed with various set up duties.

An event like this does not happen without all of you there to assist, and our club is stronger thanks to each and every one of you.

I would also like to thank all of the fantastic sponsors that the BOG was able to gather donations from. There were some fantastic items for the auction and it was very successful. Many of the sponsors donated stickers, hats and other swag items that we were able to distribute to each shooter. Benjamin even donated a tin of their new single die pellets for each shooter also. Leapers provided bags and name tag holders for shooters as well. We distributed all of the

swag and name tags for each shooter at check in on Friday. Along with a shirt that was designed by our own Jeff Paddock.

As we prepared the courses on Thursday, we knew the weather forecast looked ominous for the weekend ahead. While Friday looked pleasant, Saturday and Sunday were set to be a bit colder and full of wind and rain. I'd be lying if I said this didn't factor into the design of the courses, and I'm glad (both as a shooter and match director) that it did. It certainly also factored into some shooters' decisions to attend, as we had some no-shows for pistol and rifle.

The 40 shot pistol course was set with a Troyer rating of 32. The average target distance was 24.4 yards. Set in our woods course, it was fairly dark, even with the sunlight peeking through the trees. After the shooters equipment was chronograph tested, we had the shooters meeting and hit the woods! The match ran very smoothly, with no protests or cold lines. A special thanks to Brad Troyer for walking the courses before the matches began, and catching a few things that could have turned into issues through the weekend. Always good to have a second set of eyes, and Brad's are some of the best when it comes to targets and course layouts.

We had 25 shooters in Hunter, and just three shooters in Limited. As the scores came in, it was clear that two shooters stood above the rest. In Hunter, Bill Rabbitt posted an impressive 36/40 to take the top spot. And in Limited, shooting just his first pistol match, Zach Loesser also shot a 36. Great shooting to both of you! Zach was followed by Nathan Thomas, who shot just one point less with a 35. The same story in Hunter, as Brian VanLiew and Paul Porch also shot 35s to tie for 2nd and 3rd. We held our shoot off on Sunday after the rifle match concluded, with two targets, a 1" at around 25 or so and a full size target at the near max distance of 35 yards. Both shooters missed the near target, and Paul was unable to match Brian, who was able to knock over the full size target. Congrats to all of the top finishers.

We then turned our attention to the rifle matches and the impending weather that was bearing down on us. We have two courses at NOA, a field course and a woods course. Our field course is nestled in and out of old vine rows that used to be a part of the winery that the property used to be home to. Our woods course is set back into some thick woods where we have about 25 lanes cut in. It doesn't typically see much wind, but the darkness typically plays tricks on shooters. To help shooters in the field, we put up 9 pop up tents to help keep folks dry through the day. We hoped that the tree and leaf cover in the woods would also do a good job of keeping folks dry. We split shooters between the two courses, with Hunter PCP and a handful of Hunter Piston shooters in the field, and pretty much everyone else in the woods, the rifle match had finally arrived.

A little about the courses in terms of setup. Both courses are 15 lane, 60 shot courses. Our courses are typically longer in terms of target distance here at NOA, as I believe that distance is the great equalizer for the various divisions. The field, where we knew the wind would be toughest, was a 33T with 16 of the targets over 40 yards. 13 of those 16 were at or over 45 yards. The average target distance was 39.2 yards. In the woods, the story was a little different but not by much. There were 18 targets over 40 yards and the troyer rating was 32.2T. Of those

18 targets, 12 were over 45 yards. Ultimately, the difficulties came from the same places they always do, wind, lighting and distance.

After chronograph testing all 84 shooters in attendance, we held our shooters meeting in our clubhouse while a fire kept everyone warm in the fireplace. Then shooters dispersed to their respective courses and lane assignments. With squads of 3 for most, the day would move steadily, but probably a little slower than everyone would have liked considering the conditions. In the woods, it spit down rain with regular frequency, but I wouldn't say it was ever really coming down hard. The wind however, definitely made an appearance, particularly in the early lanes of the day. I know on the field course, the wind must have been considerably more intense. Thankfully, there were minimal stoppages through the day. We had no protests in the woods, and just one cold line to fix a target that was shifting on its block. In the field, there were three stops, once for a protest that tested fine and twice for some friendly chicken visitors. When I say that, I do mean it like it sounds. Some of the Reily's chickens made their way onto the course, and ended up in the lanes. So Bill had to wrangle and direct them off of the course.

Wrangler Bill must not have been phased by this task, because he managed to turn in the highest score of the day on that course with a 55. He was equaled by Rod Parks, and both were followed closely by Ryan Parks and Philip Hepler on 54s. In Hunter Piston, Eric Jones came away with the day one lead, shooting an impressive 45 with his Diana 54. He was followed by Dan Putz who was on a 44. In Open PCP, Brian VanLiew led the way with a 57 and had Artie Claudino clawing at his heels with a 56. WFTF PCP was topped by Greg Sauve, shooting a 58 in the woods, and followed by Lukas Richter, Lauren Parsons and yours truly on 56. And in WFTF Piston, Ken Hughes and Leo Gonzales were tied neck and neck at 53.

After shooters returned from their courses, they were greeted by lunch catered by our favorite local restaurant, the Cowboy. They brought a wide array of delicious options, including pulled pork and pulled brisket. Everyone chowed down, dried off and warmed themselves by the fire before the AAFTA auction got underway. There were so many items that I think the auction was one of the longest I can recall. Pyramyd Air donated multiple rifles and scopes from Air Arms, FX, Weihrauch, Air Venturi, Athlon and more. Airguns of Arizona donated two BSA R10 rifles and a few Action Armor targets. Paul Porch donated a few of his targets and faceplates. Bill Corder also donated some FT targets. Hawke sent a new Sidewinder scope. Creedmoor sent a bum bag and a few gift cards. Penchetta donated a bum bag as well, along with a nice Boker knife and a custom carbon fiber pen. Crosman/Benjamin donated multiple rifles and a few cases of their new single die pellets. JD Custom Design donated three awesome sidewheel kits. Sportsmatch donated a fully adjustable one piece mount and Predator International donated a few sleeves of JSB pellets. There was something for everyone and most of those in attendance got in on the bidding at some point or another.

Shortly after the auction, the yearly AAFTA meeting was held where the BOG goes over who is elected to the open positions on the board as well as a host of other hot topics. Thankfully, it was a relatively quick meeting this year with some updates regarding the upcoming Worlds being hosted in Phoenix next year. Thanks to Greg Sauve and all of the other board members

that work to keep everything moving forward and running smoothly in our great sport. As the meeting concluded, the rain was still pouring down, so we made the decision to leave the target painting for Sunday morning. The forecast looked better for the morning with some potential showers through the early afternoon.

I made my way out to the courses Sunday morning before the sun was up. In darkness, with a head lamp and a few cans of pain, Jeff Paddock and I began to repaint the field course targets. We finished just as shooters began arriving to sight in, and then while I handled chronograph testing, Bill and Jeff hit the woods to repaint there. Thankfully, the morning was clear of rain and we even saw the sun poke through a few times as it made its way up into the sky. Our shooters meeting was brief, as there were only a few notes from the prior days shooting to cover. One thing I enjoy about the final day of a Grand Prix match is the seriousness that is inevitably in the air. But while some may think that the intensity leads to cut throat behavior in an effort to win at any cost, those folks would be sadly mistaken. Within the first few shots on Sunday, I could hear the normal chatter and subdued laughs that often fill the shooting line at an FT match. It was a pleasant reminder, that while a lot in our worlds have changed over the last few years, FT and its shooters are still the same. The camaraderie that we all enjoy is still very much alive my friends!

I can only speak for those of us in the field, but trust me when I say that the conditions may have been dry compared to Saturday, but they were far from calm. The wind picked up, and then would vanish. Or it would appear to be still, and then you'd watch your pellet sail across the kill zone and wonder, "where was all that wind?" Then a few seconds later, you would watch your wind flag begin to flutter and think, "oh, there it is." It was frustrating, but also rewarding when you managed to get it right. And then, about halfway through the course, the sky opened up and it began to rain. It rained on and off for the next hour or two, nothing unmanageable, but enough to annoy you for sure. Thankfully, again, there were very few stoppages. We did have another appearance from our friendly chickens, that Jeff Paddock, David Alsup and I promptly handled to the best of our abilities.

As we worked our way through the course, the wind continued to plague everyone. I clearly recall the long target on lane three. It's a target that always gives people trouble. It was a 1.5" target at 53 yards, and it's nested about 4 feet off the ground, right on the edge of a vine row. It's a mentally difficult target, because on one hand, you know it's right at the edge of thick brush, so the wind is likely to be swirling. And on the other hand, you watch the brush behind it violently whip around in seemingly consistent directions. Then you have to take into account the fact that you're at an angle across the field, so you try to account for what appears to be happening between you and the target as well. I will speak only for myself (though I watched a number of folks miss this shot at least once), my first shot I was holding about ¾" outside of the kill zone on the left, and watched my pellet land about 1" to the right of the kill zone. I couldn't help but laugh. Then as I prepared my second shot, the wind seemed to calm a bit, so I gave the same ¾" hold off the left edge, only to watch the pellet land right on my crosshairs. Talk about frustrating! But that was the wind for the day, and I assume the same could be said for the day prior as well.

As shooters made their way off the courses, they were treated to more deliciousness from the Cowboy. There was chicken, beef, various sides and salads, all accompanied by a little sunlight poking through the clouds. Bill turned in a 57 in the woods to secure the top spot in Hunter PCP, with a total of 112/120. He was followed by Ryan Parks on 110 and Philip Hepler on 108. Fantastic shooting gents! In Hunter Piston, Dan Putz roared back with a monster 50 in the field to take a commanding win on 94/120. His next closest competitor was Greg Shirhall with a 81 and Paul Manktelow with a 79. In Open PCP, Keith Walters turned in a huge 57 in the field but it wasn't enough to catch Brian VanLiew. Brian finished with 110/120 and Keith finished just one point behind! Artie Claudino was just one point behind both of them. Very tight at the top! WFTF Piston was tied after day one, but Ken Hughes managed to pull away on day two, posting a 51 in the field to secure the victory. His total of 104, was 4 shots better than Leo Gonzales who took second with a 100. In WFTF PCP, Greg Sauve held on for the division win, also shooting a 110/120. Lukas Richter finished in second with a 109, and Lauren Parsons and I tied at 107. That meant a shoot off!

The shootoff lanes were set with a 1" kill zone in the mid 30s distance wise, and a full size kill in the mid 50s. Both Lauren and I missed our first attempts on the close target, transitioning out to the longer target. Lauren struck first, and I was able to follow up with a hit of my own. So we decided to go back to give the close target another try. Lauren was able to take it down on the second attempt, and my pellet landed just about in the same spot as my first, just to the right of the kill zone. So Lauren secured third place in WFTF PCP.

Before we got to the awards ceremony, we gathered everyone who was still there together for a nice group photo. Larry climbed all the way to the top of the water tower on the property and snapped some great group pics. We then headed back to the clubhouse for the awards ceremony. Bill Rabbitt and Tim Baylor collaborated to make some very cool trophies that we hope those who won them will appreciate. After the awards were presented, we said our thank you's and goodbyes. My hope is that everyone who attended enjoyed themselves despite the weather, and that you'll consider coming back and shooting with us at future Grand Prix matches we host. Count on the Burning River 120 to be back next season, and be sure to add it to your calendars when the dates are announced!

For all of us at NOA, thank you to all who attended the 2023 Nationals. It was a privilege and an honor to host it. We will see you on the lanes next season!