An Alarming Trend

With the shooting season in full swing, and a level II or III match every weekend it seems, naturally questions arise. First off, this is not intended to be an indictment of any single person, club or match, it’s simply some observations from questions and reports I’ve received in the past several weeks, many of which are similar, but from different areas of the country. Sometimes people run matches as USPSA matches but do some personal “interpretation” of the rules to suit their own philosophy about what should be done at matches. This doesn’t agree with the club affiliation policy or USPSA rules, and can create issues at other matches. Here are some examples:

- Requesting calibration on a popper gets you a trip to chrono, where if you make your declared power factor and have a hit or two on the popper, the popper is scored as hit. No calibration procedure followed, no inspection of the popper to look for mechanical defects or incorrect setting of the popper. And, this applies even if the match officials aren’t pulling ammo for every competitor.
  - While this may fall under the rules for random sampling for chronograph (App C2, #29) it does not comply with the popper calibration procedure outlined in Appendix C1, which is quite clear and defines the correct procedure for calibrating poppers.
- Allowing competitors to move more than one step away from the start location during the procedures outlined under 8.3.1.
  - Referencing 8.3.1.1, unless the WSB specifies some make ready location other than the start location, such as placing a gun on a barrel or table or in a drawer, the make ready location is the same as the start location. Writing permission to take a few steps away into the WSB violates 8.3.1.1 and is not allowed. It’s incumbent upon all RO’s to be aware of and enforce this rule.
- Issuing a blanket statement assessing procedural penalties for pre-taping targets.
  - This violates 8.7.4, which calls for the RM to be called in all cases of suspected “interference”. The RM must then evaluate whether the interference was accidental (which is the case most of the time when targets get taped before they are scored), or warrants a penalty or a DQ. It’s not intended to be an automatic penalty, nor should it be spelled out as such. In some cases, the pre-taping is due to the inability of the scoring RO to follow a pattern in scoring targets, causing some targets that most would logically assume to be scored already to be taped. While this call can be subjective in nature, most times the circumstances will dictate the call.
- Banning all other competitors from the area inside the fault lines.
  - While this can be necessary on some courses of fire, that’s not always the case. Competitors using a phone or camera to video other competitor’s attempts should ask
for permission to enter the shooting area, and RO’s should control where they are for safety reasons. The RO’s need to control their stage, but within reason, and good judgment should be used in all cases—both on the part of the videographer and the range officers. 7.1.1, 7.1.2

- Ignoring bad behavior.
  - Practical shooting is a competition, and competition sometimes gets intense and can lead to confrontation. While most of us have a personal threshold as to what constitutes unsportsmanlike behavior, the tendency to ignore acts that should at least be addressed by a range officer is increasing. 7.1.1 and 7.1.2 come into play here, as does 10.6. If in doubt, call the RM and have a talk. Allowing rude confrontational behavior at the match does nothing to improve the situation, and after the match is over there is very little that NROI or USPSA can do about it. It’s always better to address issues when they arise.

- Arbitration committees not following the rules.
  - Arbitration is allowed in a variety of instances, as spelled out in 9.6.6 and 11.1.2. There is a defined procedure to follow, spelled out in chapter 11. While the rules say the committee “may” interview witnesses and the appellant, it’s a best practice to consider that a “must”. Arbitrations are never fun, but it pays to take the time to do them right.
  - 11.1.9 binds the committee to the rulebook. There is some recourse for the MD (11.6.1) if the decision doesn’t fit the rules. Every effort should be made to comply with the rules and come to a decision within that framework.

- Random disqualifications due to misunderstanding/misreading the rules.
  - There have been a couple of questions about this lately. One in particular concerned holstoring a handgun during a stage. The rules (8.2.5, 8.5.2, 10.5.11, 8.1) cover this situation. As long as the handgun isn’t required to be re-holstered, the competitor is free to holster it during a course of fire, provided the gun is in one of the ready conditions spelled out in 8.1.1. That doesn’t have to match the start condition for the gun as spelled out in the WSB, it simply has to be in one of the acceptable ready conditions in 8.1.1. Example: holstering a loaded, 1911 (single action) pistol with the hammer back and no safety applied is a DQ. Applying the safety and then holstering is perfectly legal.
  - Sometimes there are more than one or two rules that apply to a particular situation. Take the time to review all the applicable rules before making a decision.

As the shooting season continues into the summer and fall, let’s all pay attention to the basics of safe gun handling and the fair and consistent application of the rules. Hopefully, clearing up some of these misconceptions in advance will create a more enjoyable experience for everyone. Have a great July shooting USPSA and Steel Challenge!

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