Small-bore Rifle Silhouette

The Challenge

In Small-bore Rifle Silhouette the targets are stationary metal silhouettes of animals. They sit on a rail at set distances. You have 2.5 minutes to shoot 5 of them, in order, off of the rail. There is one shot per animal. The chickens are at 40 meters, pigs are at 60 meters, turkeys are at 77 meters, and the rams are at 100 meters.

The ram at 100 meters has the central target area of a tennis ball sitting on a football goal post as viewed from the far goal line. You are shooting from that goal line, standing, with no support (no heavy shooting coat or pants) using a 22 rifle with a hunting style stock. At that distance, a 22 rifle meeting the match rules- *shot off of a bench rest-* will shoot a group the size of a quarter to a ping pong ball- if you have ammunition the gun shoots well and there is no wind. There is not much margin for error in aiming given the size of the target. To clearly see the target and aim precisely rifle scopes of 24x to 36x magnification are used. Shooting offhand with this level of magnification allows you to see every movement you impart to the rifle, intended or not, including heartbeats. The animal is not moving- but they will appear to be in the image you see. The timing of the trigger release is critical, as is a consistent and controlled pull. Your stance, body position, gun mount, and having your natural point of aim on the target are critical, as any excess muscle tension shows up as a tremor. To support the gun in position and on target leads to fatigue, adding to the tremor. To be decisive on your shot is very important. Teamwork is also a part of Silhouette shooting. The shooter typically has someone using a spotting scope to inform the shooter where the hits and the misses are, monitor the wind and suggest corrections as needed, keep track of the current target number, and keep track of the time. This information needs to be presented in a clear, calm and timely manner, anticipating what the shooter will need to know, when they will need to know it, and present it when it will not be a distraction to the shooter. The shooter needs to be focused on the shot, but also listen to their spotter, take the information provided about the results of the last shot, compare this to how they called their shot, consider the wind or mirage, and use all this information while making the next shot. In doing the above, the shooter needs to ignore all the conversations going on around them, as well as how the shooters beside them are doing. The shooter needs to remain calm and focused as any anxiety or anger at self or others increases tremor and degrades timing and concentration,

To advance in rifle silhouette shooting requires a rifle that fits the shooter and is acceptably accurate, consistent ammunition, and a good sense of body control and timing. To be a “top shot” *demands* a high level of concentration, mental discipline and emotional stability. What I have observed over the years is that beginning shooters need the reward of hitting the target, and needs to learn and practice what they did that lead to the hit. This leads to advancement in score and development of skill to an intermediate or lower advanced level- and then usually to a plateau. The shooters that want to continue to improve shift to identifying what they did not do properly or what they did that was “wrong”. For this to be helpful they must use this knowledge and devise or reinforce a positive step in their shooting routine. The best shooters make a shift that they may not be aware of. They accept that every shot can be made- and if it is not, it is their responsibility. This is a standard that is not possible to achieve, and imposes a great mental burden. This is why the better a shooter becomes, the more important the mental and emotional aspects become.