

42 The Martial Gamesman

By Duane Thomas

The conflict between the “martial artists” who approach skill with a handgun solely for the purposes of self-defense, and the “gamesmen” who approach it as a sport to be mastered, has been

with us since the beginning of “combat” pistol matches – possibly before – and it will never go away. But what of the handgun martial artist who is also a gamesman, the man or woman who uses competition shooting as a venue to sharpen skills they might one day have to use for self-defense? I am both a martial artist and a gamesman, thus I’ve given a lot of thought to what motivates both.

It’s common knowledge that gamesmen on average have a much higher skill level than martial artists. On the surface this makes no sense. You’d think those who believe their lives may one day depend on their skill level would work harder and be better than those who don’t. Why is the reverse the actual truth? On the BrianEnos.com message board one of the most articulate, insightful, respected members is screen-named Sam (his real name, actually, not a guy with an unnatural fondness for Dr. Seuss). Sam once commented, “I’ve...known people who became pretty good shooters because they were motivated by fear. But, love always exceeds fear like light exceeds darkness.”

I totally agree. I just never could have said it so beautifully.

Most self-defense-oriented shooters are motivated by fear. Most competition shooters are motivated by love, thus work MUCH harder at it. Fear will never motivate as profoundly as love. We’ve all heard the Jeff Cooper quote that competition shooters will work harder to win a trophy than most people would work to save their own lives. That’s really, literally true. You’re never going to work and practice and think about shooting as much as it takes to be really great at it – to be really great at anything, for that matter – unless you love doing it. Love is the only thing that can motivate a person to put out that much effort.

An old friend of mine had a theory that there are three types of people who will attempt to do anything that requires real effort, and real excel-

lence. Since he was a football player in high school, he analogized it to going out for the high school football team.

Group #1 is composed of the people who aren’t sure whether or not they can make the

team. But they say to themselves, “Wouldn’t it be a great accomplishment if I did?” Basically, they use trying out for the team as a rite of passage.

Group #2 comprises people who know they can make the team, but they’re not doing it because they love the game. They have other reasons. Either they know it’s great for their social standing in school, or their dad was on the same team 20 years before and he’s pressuring them, or they figure it’s a great way to get close to cheerleaders. Whatever.

Group #3 contains those people who, like Group #2, know they can make the team. But more than that, it would be *unnatural* for them to NOT be on the team, because they LOVE the game.

Now, a person from any of those three groups might be able to make a good player. But almost invariably the very best players are going to come from Group #3, those who love the game. You show me anyone who is A class or above in USPSA/IPSC, or Expert or above in IDPA, and I’ll show you someone who purely loves shooting a handgun. Because they work harder at it than can be explained by anything other than love. You don’t have to be in line to win a championship or gunning (pun intended) for Master rank in a particular sport to reap the benefits to your skill level of an absolute love for shooting. You may only care about taking your own skill level as high as it can go. To paraphrase another BE.com member, “You may never be the best at THE game. But you can certainly be the best at YOUR game.”

I became a serious shooter because of a desire for a self-defense capability. I became a competitor because I love shooting. I am well aware that the skill level I build through my competitive shooting will stand me in good stead should I ever need to call on it to save innocent life, my own or another person’s. So if you were to ask me, “Are you a martial artist or a gamesman?” my honest answer would have to be, “Both. I’m a martial gamesman.”



Martial Artist or Gamesman? You tell me, from this angle, is it REALLY going to matter to a bad guy?