By John Holsey

Today’s youth are not only the future of our shooting sports; they’re the future of our gun rights. Without youth we have no future. Therefore, it’s our responsibility as shooters, sportsmen and collectors to nurture our young people and spotlight excellence.

The shooter I would like to talk about is one that I know quite well. In fact he is my son. He’s been shooting literally all his life. He was the youngest in the world to start shooting in Cowboy Action competitions. He started at the tender age of five years old. His name is Dylan Holsey aka “Rattlesnake Wrangler.” The first thing I taught Dylan about guns was safety. I knew that if he was going to be a successful shooter, he first had to be a safe shooter. So, with patience and determination, I taught him all about gun safety and what they were capable of doing. He learned that guns are not toys, but when used correctly they can be lots of fun. I appointed him our home “gun safety officer” and he made sure that all the rules were followed to the letter!

Around age 10, Dylan started winning in his age group, acquiring multiple State, Regional, Annual, National and World titles. In 2012 – at just 13 years old – he really exploded on the scene in a big way. At Winter Range, the National Championship of Cowboy Action Shooting, he not only won his category but also became the National Champion in Speed Pistol overall. To top that, he was third OVERALL in the entire country! This made him the youngest ever to place that high and win a Speed Pistol event at the Nationals. After that, Dylan became the youngest to win the overall Texas State Championship title.

Dylan’s practice regimen is nothing short of inspiring. In fact, it’s almost exhausting for me to watch him do it. He dry-fire practices at least three hours a day, and that is an underestimate I’m sure. When he doesn’t have a gun in his hand, his mind is always at work thinking of new ways of shooting scenarios and different gun techniques, etc. It’s an ongoing cycle at our house. During live-fire practice sessions, he will go through around 4000 rounds of .38 Special and four cases of shotgun shells in a weekend. It’s this dedication driven to an obsession that enables his success.

Being successful in a match is one thing, but being successful in life is another. We started home school last year and Dylan has already moved ahead two grade levels. He is precocious, smart, intuitive and a bit stubborn at times and it’s served him well thus far.

Dylan shares his vast experience with anyone who may need help. He, at such a young age, is one of the most “out of the box” shooters I have ever seen. Always thinking of better ways of doing things, from reducing time on a stage to a safer, more-effective way of shooting. This is just part of the knowledge he freely shares. He doesn’t act like a “know it all” and is always eager to listen to what others say. He will then process that information and take what he can use.

He really likes helping young shooters. In fact, in 2010 he started The Rattlesnake Wrangler Youth Sponsorship Program. It’s a program where we give away, free of charge, complete leather gun rigs and other shooting-related items to young shooters. He came up with the idea so that more young people would be able to enter our sport, given the expense is more than many families can afford. He said he also did it in hopes that this sport would be around for his kids some day. I thought that was pretty good insight for an 11 year old, so I backed him 100 percent on this project. We’re always looking for more sponsors of the program so more kids can benefit from this.

Dylan’s success did not go unnoticed. In fact, the Discovery Channel found out about him and wanted him for an episode of the TV show “American Guns.” This show features Rich Wyatt and his family who own a gun store in Wheatridge, Colorado. They not only sell guns, they also build custom guns. They’re all really nice people and we enjoyed getting to know them. The biggest challenge Dylan faced was the sweet distraction of Rich and Renee’s daughter Paige. I’m so glad Dylan wasn’t older because Rich is pretty dang handy with a gun himself!

All joking aside, Rich was very impressed with Dylan and we all became fast friends. Rich, and everyone at Gunsmoke, was great to work with. The show did a fantastic job of showcasing our sport and Dylan’s talent. At one point in the show