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**'Young Eagle'
Vikki Gaddie**

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A Young Eagle Aims High



Vikki Gaddie is already a veteran (and champion) shooter.

By Vanessa Warner

Progressing from the thrill of her first BB gun to the exhilaration of a Gold Medal in the South African Rifle Championships, 16-year-old-Vikki Gaddie of Michigan has found her passion. As an accomplished shooter and a member of the USA Young Eagles Under 21 Team, Vikki is now preparing for the biggest challenge in her young career: a chance to win a World title.

"It does take a lot of commitment and time, but it didn't take me long to realize how much I really enjoyed the sport," said Vikki. "Winning the World title would certainly be the ultimate thrill."

Vikki began shooting at the age of seven when her father enrolled her in shooting classes at Michigan State University. Vikki learned quickly and was soon outperforming students twice her age. By the age of 12, Vikki switched from air rifles to highpower shooting with a Bushmaster AR-15. While

competing in her very first long-range match, she began to call the .308 Palma her favorite rifle.

"I enjoy shooting across the range, but I love competing for victory in the Palma Matches," Vikki explained. In Palma shooting, all shooting is done from the prone position, lying upon one's stomach. Shooting at a target from distances of 800, 900 and 1000 yards with open sights, fifteen shots are fired at each distance with a possible total score of 450-45X.

By the age of 14 Vikki was classified by the NRA as a Master in Long Range shooting. Last year during the Sierra Trophy Match at Camp Perry, Vikki shot a score of 435-10x, finishing 29 out of 145 competitors in the Master class. Vikki was awarded a Silver Palma Pin and experienced the glory of achievement. "At first I was more relieved than anything else, but when it hit me later I was overcome with a feeling of, 'I did it!'" Vikki added.

The U.S. National Championships or the National Matches, as they are known to the shooting world, are held once a year at Camp Perry. Thousands of shooters from across the country and around the world migrate to the Ohio National Guard Army base in late July and early August in the hunt for the elusive perfect score. The matches include competition in pistol, smallbore, highpower and long range disciplines.

When shooting from distances of 800, 900 and 1000 yards, shooters have to achieve a high level of concentration in order to combat conditions such as sun, clouds, wind and even rain while shooting through iron sights. The competition goes on unless it is raining hard enough to damage the targets and render them unusable.

"Even on a clear day you can't let your guard down, but shooting in the rain takes even more focus," Vikki said. "Rain is bouncing off the barrel and splashing onto your face. It is also tough to concentrate when you know that the people behind you are putting their raingear on and opening umbrella's to stay dry while you and your gear are getting soaking wet."

Enduring the tough conditions paid its rewards. Last summer, Vikki was informed that she had qualified to try out for the United States Young Eagles Under 21 Rifle Team, chosen by score at the



Vikki Gaddie shows the prone form that wins long range rifle matches.

National Matches. Vikki dug in, gave it all she had, and was thrilled to learn that she had made the cut for the elite group of young athletes.

In 1999, the World Individual Long Range Championships were held at Bloemfontain in South Africa. Ian Cheeseman, a competitor, noticed that the United States was the only major country in attendance without an Under 21 or Under 25 Team.

During the next year, Ian founded, organized, and selected the inaugural Young Eagles team. In July 2000, the Young Eagles traveled to Bisley Camp in England to compete in the Millennium Matches and the Under 21 and 25 World Championships. In their first test, the Young Eagles competed against ten other international junior teams and won the Under 21 Championship Match and brought home the Gold.

Camp Perry, in 2002, saw the selection of the Young Eagles who would attend the 2003 Imperial Meeting and defend their title in the Under 21 and 25 World Championships. The 2003 Young Eagles were composed of eighteen young men and women. Both the Under 21 and Under 25 Teams won Silver medals in the World Championships while the Under 21 Team brought home the Gold in the Under 25 Team Match during the Imperial Meeting, becoming the only American team to bring home the Gold from Bisley in 2003.

"Vikki is a tough competitor and her achievements at such a young age are commendable," said Young Eagles Team Manager, J.J. Jackson. "She has inspired us all and is a great addition to our team."

Another memorable milestone for Vikki was the 2006 South African National Championships. Traveling half-way around the world to compete, she gave an outstanding performance and received two gold and one silver medal as well as a patch for earning a position in the top 100 of the Presidents Match.



Vikki Gaddie prepares to train for the upcoming Camp Perry session and a match for the Young Eagles team in Ottawa, Canada.

Vikki's final competition for 2006 was the Michigan Palma Championships held at Camp Greyling. Vikki finished a very respectable fourth place out of 37 shooters, but at age 17 was not the youngest competitor. Two years younger, Vikki's sister, Hannah, is climbing the ranks quickly, displaying her determination and potential as another tough competitor.

Vikki is now preparing to compete in her first appearance as a qualified member of the USA Young Eagles Under 21 Team. This summer, the team will start at the National Matches in Camp Perry, and then travel to Ottawa, Canada, for the World Championships at Ontario's Connaught Ranges. The Young Eagles will compete in the Canadian Fullbore Rifle Championships followed

by the Under 25/Under 21 World Long Range World Championships. Jackson is confident that the team is up to the challenge and is optimistic about the outcome. "We've set our sights on winning and we're both physically and mentally prepared," he said.

Besides shooting, Vikki enjoys playing volleyball, baseball, and just being with her friends, parents and six siblings. She plans to go to college for Law Enforcement and attributes her shooting accomplishments to God, her dad, her shooting coach and the support she receives from all of her friends and family.

For more information or to make a donation to support the USA Young Eagles, please go to: <http://usaunder25team.org>.
