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State sporting clay event brings shooters to Maceo

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The sound of shotguns firing is not uncommon along Kentucky 2830 in Maceo -- after all, the sprawling Daviess County Gun Club range is there and draws shooting enthusiasts year-round.

But Sunday afternoon, shotgun reports echoed along the road, as more than 200 competitors from across the country participated in the Kentucky Sporting Clays Association's state championship tournament.

Although the main purpose of the event was to crown a state champion, competitors came from as far away as Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas and Arizona, hoping to take home part of the \$20,000 in cash and prizes.



Chris Redner of Coxs Creek takes aim at a clay while warming up with Mitch Shewmaker of Jeffersontown at the make-a-break shooting station Sunday during the Kentucky State Sporting Clays championship at the Daviess County Gun Club in Maceo. "I've done well here," Redner said. Photo by John Dunham, M-I

Steve Scott, one of the founders of the gun club, said the organization last hosted a large tournament in 2005, when there were 66 competitors.

"It's grown from 66 shooters to 215 today," Scott said. "It's triple in size, and we expect it to keep getting bigger each year."

Sporting clays are small orange clay discs that are launched into the air. The competitor who shoots the most clays wins.

If it sounds easy, it's not. Hitting a fast moving clay 30 yards away with a shell requires fast reflexes, a sharp gauge of speed and concentration.

"You would be surprised how much training it takes to become a master," Scott said.

The tournament brought out men and women from their teens to senior citizens. The sport has broad appeal, Scott said.

"This is one sport where you can be young or old, it makes no difference," he said. "We have one guy that is 91 years old and he comes out and shoots a round of sporting clays every week."

Thomas Edwards, head coach of the Bethel University shooting team, brought several of his shooters from McKenzie, Tenn. -- about one hour, forty-five minutes south of Paducah -- to Maceo.

"It's one of the fastest-growing collegiate events," Edwards said. The university gave 15 scholarships to the team, he said.

"They believe in it enough that they're supplying shells and scholarships.

"It's a great sport for kids that don't play 'normal' sports. You don't have to be athletic to be a shooter.

"The lowest GPA here is 3.5," Edwards said of the team.

The Bethel team came to Maceo mostly for practice. Next April, the team will go to Texas for the national collegiate sporting clay tournament.

The students are learning through the sport.

"They just enjoy shooting and hunting, but ... it takes great responsibility to handle firearms, and it takes respect to handle a firearm."

Away from the shooting stations, Jim Williams was visiting with other competitors. Williams, who is from Elizabethtown, is used to traveling to shoot sporting clays.

"My shortest drive is 70 miles to the nearest practice range," Williams said. Shooting competitions have taken Williams far from Kentucky.

"Last year, I was fortunate to shoot for Team USA in England," Williams said. Competing in England was a challenge because the British use a black-and-yellow clay instead of the orange ones being used at Sunday's event.

"To an American, it looks like a bumblebee going across the sky," Williams said.

At the end of the day's shooting, Beech Grove resident Tim Jewell was named state champion. Jewell hit 99 out of 100 clays during the day.

Williams, who has been shooting sporting clays for 12 years, finds the competitions always enjoyable.

"(I like) the competition and the fellowship," he said. "You make an awful lot of friends."

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