

My Junior Olympic Experience

By Deanna Binnie

I have participated in the Junior Olympics for four years, this year I went to Colorado expecting to win. I practiced for four weeks prior to the match. I was at the range five days a week and trained for three to five hours per practice. The week leading up to the big match I focused more on mental preparation and finals, although nothing can really prepare you for the pressure of the Junior Olympics.

I skated through air rifle by performing my average scores. Small-bore is my specialty and I was excited to show off my skills. The night of the first match for small-bore I read a few chapters of "With Winning in Mind" by Lanny Bassham. His book helps me to calm down and mentally prepare for matches. In the book he says to focus on your process and not obsess about winning the match. He advises to let your subconscious do all the work and keep your conscious mind quiet. I kept this information in the front of my mind as I stepped onto the line for the first match. I cleaned prone with a perfect two hundred, followed with two standing scores of a 95 and 97, then finished with 194 in kneeling. That 586 was the top score for the day as well as my personal best in a match.

After a few hours of celebration, the nerves began to set in. That night I couldn't sleep and my stomach was doing backflips. I knew that if I messed up the next day I would lose a gold medal, MY gold medal. In the morning my teammate, Morgan Dressick, had to literally shove food down my throat because I didn't want to eat. I was texting numerous shooting friends and my mom for support and pep talks. Without their support I don't know what would have happened. I talked to my father, who is also my coach, and he helped me to calm down a lot. I was ridiculously nervous, but when I started shooting all of my nerves went away. I focused on my process and managed to shoot a 578, which was surprisingly the top score for the second day as well.

Going into the finals I wasn't as nervous as I had been before. I held a ten point lead against the closest competitor and I knew that all I had to do was shoot nines and tens to win. Rachel Martin who was in second place is actually one of my best shooting friends. We gave each other pep talks and encouraged each other. We hoped to be standing next to each other on the podium when finals were over. My first two shots in the finals were tens then suddenly I couldn't seem to hit the ten rings. I remember thinking thank goodness this competition isn't under the new rules. Looking back on it, I think I was trying too hard. Instead of just letting the shot happen I was trying to pull it into the ten ring. On one of the shots I took two holds and ended up firing the shot with five seconds left! My dad about had a heart attack.

In the end I won the gold medal and earned my spot on the Junior National Team. Rachel Martin ended up earning the silver medal in a fierce battle with Mindy Miles. We stood on the podium together and held hands. At this point, with the medal around my neck, I realized I had actually won the Junior Olympics. This experience taught me so much about myself and how hard work truly pays off. I owe it all to my parents, coaches, and friends who supported me throughout my journey.