

A Reflection On The 2024 U.S. Palma Team

Although the U.S. Palma Team did not medal in South Africa this year, it did build a solid foundation for success in the future.

by JERRY ILIFF at U.S. PALMA TEAM posted on May 20, 2024

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The U.S. Palma Team at the 2024 Target Rifle World Long-Range Championships in South Africa in March.

Photo courtesy of U.S. National Rifle Team

The 2024 Target Rifle World Long-Range Championships held in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa, concluded on March 23. The U.S. Palma Team finished outside of medal position in fourth place. If that is the only thing that a team member or the reader takes away from these championships that would be a discredit to the entire team and its long journey to South Africa.

Shortly after the conclusion of the 2019 Target Rifle World Long-Range Championships in New Zealand, the NRA High Power Committee selected Bob Mead as captain to lead the Palma Team in the 2023 Championships in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa. However, these championships would end up being delayed a year due to travel

restrictions that were enacted in response to covid. Bob asked Brandon Green from the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit to be his head coach and Stu Mackey as his adjutant. Due to unforeseen life changing events, Stu had to step down and Jeff Miles assumed the adjutant responsibilities in September 2020.



The U.S. Palma Team gathers for a group photo at the 32nd Target Rifle World Long-Range Championships, held at the Genl De Wet Shooting Range in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

As with many events, there is a prior history that the 2024 U.S. Palma Team and its leaders inherited. The U.S. Palma Team has consistently struggled to be a team, especially in how it thinks and performs. One aspect that the U.S. Palma Team struggles with is the size of the United States and the local club nature of competitive shooting in our country. U.S. Palma Team shooters and coaches come from many different regions and team members may, at best, only have an acquaintance level of familiarity with each other.

Furthermore, most competitions last two days and do not place an emphasis on team shooting or multiple squad team shooting. Thus, the U.S. has limited team shooting experience. Shooting on a 16-person team is quite different than any other type of shooting. It takes training, teamwork and understanding. Even seemingly simple things, like how to put your equipment down and pick it up next to your line coach, and quickly and accurately shooting pilot (sighting) shots needs practice. Proficiency takes time. There is no substitute for time dedicated to team practices—time for shooters to get to know their line

coaches, time for shooters and coaches to develop, practice and understand team shooting strategies, time for each team member to know what is expected of them, time to obtain and exceed those expectations and time to form a rapport with team members.

Additionally, with each World Championship cycle, the cycle's Palma team tryouts and team formation processes have been inconsistent, different with each Palma captain. The default team formation process has been to select a group of top performing individuals and make them the Palma team. Thus, on many previous U.S. Palma teams, the shooters met their line coach for the first time at the World Championship.



An aerial view of the Genl De Wet Shooting Range in Bloemfontein, South Africa, the host venue for the 2024 Target Rifle World Long-Range Championships.

Captain Bob Mead hoped to change this. His concept was to pick the team two years before the World Championship, thereby giving the team time to become a team. The U.S. Palma Team selection process was announced in June 2019 and consisted of two formal tryouts for those interested in being team shooters or coaches. The first tryout was at the Bayou Rifles Club near Houston, Texas, in October 2019. A coaches tryout was scheduled at the Palomino Club north of Sparks, Nevada, in June 2020, but had to be cancelled due to travel uncertainties due to covid. The second tryout was held at the Ben Avery shooting facility in Phoenix, Arizona, in October 2021. After all the shots were fired and the scores and statistics tallied, Bob and Brandon made their selections. Phone calls were made to shooters from all over the country with news of their success of making the U.S. Palma Team. Thus, the two-year training process, which turned into a three-year process, began.

Over the course of this World Championship cycle, a total of six Palma team training sessions were held at Camp Atterbury (Edinburgh, Indiana), the NRA Whittington Center (Raton, New Mexico) or the Colorado Rifle Club (Byers, Colorado). Each training session was three days of team shooting and drills under the direction of Head Coach Brandon Green. The team formed around Brandon's leadership, and the time dedicated to team practice events resulted in improved team cohesiveness and supported team performance goals. Team members were not only teammates but friends striving for the same purpose.

In March 2023, a year before the World Long-Range Championships, a few Palma Team members (along with representatives from the Veterans and Goodwill teams) traveled to Bloemfontein to shoot the Free State Provincial Open Championships and the 86th South African Open Bisley (SABU) Target Rifle Championships. Those who had not previously traveled internationally to compete were able to experience the process and deal with the difficulties associated with such an undertaking. Overall, the international travel and competition experience went smoothly. For all, but a handful, this was the U.S. shooters first time in South Africa. Over a week of competitions gave them an opportunity to become familiar with the various aspects of the range where they would shoot the Worlds in 2024. Much was learned: the patterns and the unpredictability of the wind and change indications from the flags, the firing line and alphanumeric format of firing point assignments, the endurance required for and the sequence of shooting three to a mound, the Afrikaans language and accent coupled with a vastly different format (by U.S. standards) of range commands and the environment.



U.S. Palma Team training sessions were conducted at Camp Atterbury in Indiana, the NRA Whittington Center in New Mexico and the Colorado Rifle Club in Colorado.

Being in the southern hemisphere, March was the end of summer, so it was hot with absolutely no shade. Vehicles were positioned to provide some shade and obtain some relief from the direct sun, but it was still hot and dry.

For the team, 2024 would prove to be even more challenging. March finally arrived, and the U.S. Palma Team arrived safely in South Africa and with all equipment in good order. The nearly three weeks of competition consisted of the Free State Provincial Open Championships, the 87th SABU Target Rifle Championships and the 32nd Target Rifle World Long-Range Championships. All these events were shot consecutively. Predictably, the weather was sunny and hot, and many gallons of water were consumed. Some competitors even took days off from the range to recuperate from the heat. First shots usually rang out at 8:00 a.m., and most of the time competitors were not leaving the range until about 4:00 p.m. or so. The days were long and hot, but worth every minute of training and every dollar of expense of the previous years. The final two days of the World Championship Team Match gave the only relief from the heat as there was some cloud cover and temperatures were only a few degrees cooler.

While the U.S. Palma Team did not execute as well as anticipated this year, finishing fourth in both the Protea and the Palma team matches, we performed as a team in its fullest sense thanks to the leadership of both Captain Bob Mead and Head Coach Brandon Green. Many lessons were learned, and several friendships solidified. Some members, both shooters and coaches, rose to the occasion and executed above their previously shown potential. Others had difficulties. Some received congratulations while others needed and received encouragement. What was maintained and sustained was a team. In the end, it was not several individuals shooting together. It was a team with one score. Everyone gave their all whether it was as a shooter, a coach, a register keeper, a plotter or another type of assistant. This is an important fact which should not be overlooked and hats off to everyone involved. You deserve the compliment. What you accomplished as a team is a lesson for the future.

Throughout his tenure, Bob Mead worked tirelessly to formalize the concept of a national team, specifically the U.S. National Rifle Team (USNRT). He formalized tryouts and qualification metrics and created a USNRT identity with uniforms for both range and formal wear. The USNRT is a pool of the top individual long-range target rifle shooters in the United States. It is functioning as a national team. The USNRT actively supports each other through organized training events and deliberately formed teams that compete at

prestigious regional and national level matches throughout the United States. It is also the base from which the U.S. Fullbore Team was selected: the Palma, the Veterans, the Young Eagles and the Goodwill teams.

Additionally, Bob Mead, along with Dennis Flaharty and Bill Otten, also undertook the arduous task in 2019 of forming a 501(c)3 charitable organization, the United States National Rifle Team, Incorporated. The purpose of this nonprofit is to promote and support the fullbore and long-range rifle shooting disciplines, along with the amateur teams representing the U.S. in domestic and international competitions. Both organizations have continued to grow and expand under their successor leaders and are actively working to mentor current and potential target rifle shooters and coaches, especially those under the age of 25. Bob Mead's vision and passion for fullbore and long-range target rifle shooting will be his long-lasting legacy.

Moving forward, the U.S. teams yet to come should take the foundation set by Bob Mead and the 2024 U.S. Palma Team and build on it. The thought that you could pick a team two years before an event was a momentous one. It brought out some good dynamics and got rid of other not so good ones. From the start of training, every individual began to function as a team because the team was the focus. You were not in competition with each other at every practice vying for a spot. Bob Mead proved the point that if you pick talented shooters and coaches with good personalities and a hard work ethic, you can build a team. Over the course of their time together the shooters and coaches got better, and the team solidified. This was the underlying concept, and while the 2024 cycle did not result in a podium finish, we did achieve scores never seen by previous U.S. Palma teams. It is a great honor and a tremendous experience to be one of the few who were a part of this 2024 U.S. Palma Team.

You can see the full results of the 2024 World Long-Range Championships at this [link](#).