

Tactical Precision Rifle Shooting: A "New" Sport?

Tactical precision rifle shooting has been called the fastest growing "new" shooting sport in recent months, but competitions have been around since the mid-1990's. Competitive tactical rifle matches back then usually had less than 40 competitors, focused on fundamentals of marksmanship, most competitors ran bolt-action rifles in .223, .308, or .300WM, and if there was a prize table, it was very small by today's standards.

Rifle matches have definitely grown with current events hosting upwards of 150 competitors. The calibers have also adapted over time as ballistic coefficients improve. Nowadays most shooters participating in competitions around the country are using either 6.5mm (for example: 6.5x47 or 6.5 Creedmoor) or 6mm (6x47, 6XC, 6mm Creedmoor) variants. A majority of the top names in the sport reload their own ammunition to ensure they have the most accurate rounds possible. Depending on the caliber, you'll find Sierra Bullets, Nosler, Berger Bullets, Barnes Bullets, and a variety of others on their reloading benches.

Originally, many of the stages or evolutions in early competitions took their lead from actual law enforcement and military sniper events. Tactical rifle matches were one of those outlaw shooting sports, like 3 Gun, that grew organically in the days before social media. As people gained interest, the match directors became more and more creative. We began to see a variety of props from boat platforms, simulated rooftops, barricades and shoot houses; basically any prop a match director could hammer together with left over 2x4's in their garage over the course of a weekend. It's not unusual to see targets anywhere from 7 yards out past 1,760 yards. Targets inside 100 yards are predominantly paper and could be a ¼" dot all the way up to a 5" shoot-n-c.

There are currently two national point series: the [Precision Rifle Series \(PRS\)](#) and the [National Rifle League \(NRL\)](#). Both points races have Finales at the end of the year to reward and recognize the best of the best. The Precision Rifle Series was created in 2012 by Rich Emmons and Kevin Elpers with the help of a group of their friends who all had the same goal in mind: making this style of precision rifle shooting more popular. Since then the PRS has continued to evolve and gain momentum each year. The Series changed ownership in 2015 and with that came many changes that have actually helped make that original goal attainable.

With [CORE Shooting Solutions](#) and [K&M Precision Rifle Training Center](#) both based out of the Southeast, the growth of the PRS in that part of the country has been fast and noticeable. Almost half of the bolt gun matches currently listed on the PRS website can be found in this part of the country as well as a very competitive field participating in local one day matches. The other half of the PRS matches are scattered around the country with several in Texas, Washington, and the Midwest.

Starting with the 2016 season, the Precision Rifle Series added several different divisions. Some of those have continued into the 2017 season. Open division covers all competitors shooting a variety of calibers with no limit to their gear or optics. Basically, Open is a run-what-ya-brung division. The tactical division was created with military and law enforcement shooters in mind. That division is limited to .223 and .308 calibers only and has strict limits on bullet weight and muzzle velocity. The production division was designed with newer shooters in mind and has limitations on the cost of the factory rifle and optic. This year is the inaugural year of the [PRS Gas Gun Series](#) as well. It will be run in conjunction with the [Bolt Gun Series](#), but scores are kept separate.

The season opener at CORE was dominated by [Tyler Payne](#), who has shown to be quite a force behind both a bolt gun (he was the 2016 Overall Season and Finale winner) and a gas gun with his background shooting 3 Gun competitions and as a member of the [United States Army Marksmanship Unit](#).

The Precision Rifle Series Gas Gun Series will have several divisions: Open, Heavy Tactical, and Light Tactical. Each division has rules governing what is allowed. The Precision Rifle Series has rulebooks for both the Bolt Gun and the Gas Gun series available on their [website](#). Both the PRS Gas Gun and PRS Bolt Gun series have season rankings based on a shooter's best three match scores. In the 2015 PRS Bolt Gun series season, a new tradition was started of reserving spots to recognize the top shooters in additional categories. For 2017 those categories are Military/Law Enforcement, Ladies, Seniors, Juniors, and International Competitor Class. Essentially, it reserves a spot for the top three in each of those categories should they fail to qualify by points. Trophies are given at matches to the top finishers by points, the top military/law enforcement competitor, and occasionally to the top female competitor.

This is the first year of the National Rifle League and is the brainchild of Travis Ishida, Ian Kelbly (of Kelbly's Rifles) and Tyler Frehner. The NRL has six matches, scheduled predominately in the Southwest, with a Finale at the conclusion of the season. The NRL Finale will be held the weekend prior to the 2018 SHOT Show in Las Vegas. The NRL is a 501c3 non-profit that has stated education and continued growth of the sport are their main goals. This series uses a shooter's best two scores for final ranking going into their Finale. One NRL specific award that deserves mention is the League's Sportsmanship Award. Special recognition is made to one person at each of the events throughout the season for displaying exceptional sportsmanship throughout the course of the weekend-long competition.

To participate in a one-day or two-day event, the minimum required equipment would be a rifle chambered in any caliber up to .30 caliber that is capable of consistently impacting a 1" dot at 100 yards, a scope with at least 10 power magnification, and ammunition. Many rifle manufacturers have taken notice of the tactical rifle community and have started making rifles specifically for the PRS/NRL crowd. Ruger Firearms has done a stellar job of making an affordable, accurate, right out of the box rifle with the Ruger Precision Rifle. They offer four different calibers. Last year they

introduced the RPR in 6.5 Creedmoor and .308Win. New for 2017, Ruger added .223Rem and 6mm Creedmoor to their caliber choices. This was the rifle maker of choice for a majority of the PRS Production Division in 2016. At any competition around the country, you're likely to see a variety of rifle manufacturers represented from Surgeon Scalpels to Accuracy International. If you have patience and some extra money, you could follow a lot of the bigger names in the sport and have a custom rifle built on the action of your choice. Surgeon Rifles, Defiance Machine, Stiller Precision Firearms, and Kelbly's Inc. are just a few of the custom actions available for purchase. There are lots of options when considering a custom build. A quality gunsmith can help guide a new shooter through the myriad of choices to fine tune what will work best for the shooter.

Having a scope with a reticle and turrets that match (either Mils or MOA adjustments) is highly beneficial. What the shooter dials on their scope to compensate for elevation and wind should match what can be held using the lines in the reticle. Other long range shooting sports like F-Class and Palma may utilize minute of angle (MOA) adjustments, however a majority of the shooters in the both the PRS and the NRL use Mil's (milliradians) because we need to make rapid adjustments under tight time frames. Unlike the BDC (bullet drop compensation) reticle predominately used in 3 Gun and hunting, precision rifle shooters benefit more from tactical style reticles like the Horus H59 or similar. Basically, the reticles used in tactical precision rifle shooting have a lot more information contained in them with the ability to confidently hold for both elevation and wind to make first round impacts at great distances. Each scope manufacturer has a variety of reticles to choose from in both MOA and Mil. In the end, it comes down to what the shooter will be more comfortable using because that will be the key to successful target engagements.

Quality ammunition is available for purchase, but most of the precision rifle crowd chooses to reload their own for competitions. There are two main beliefs behind reloading your own ammunition; it is cheaper to reload than to buy commercially available ammunition and the belief in greater accuracy with hand loads. Reloading allows the precision rifle shooter to fine tune their loads with higher BC (ballistic coefficient) projectiles with the rifle powder of their choosing which can lead to much more accurate rounds down range. When checked over a chronograph, hand loads tend to shoot much more consistent speeds that result in much smaller standard deviations (SD) and extreme spreads (ES) from round to round.

The next big question that comes up multiple times on every forum and group is what caliber to choose. For training, the folks you see on the top of the leaderboard are probably using .223Rem's or .308Win's so they don't have to worry about shortened barrel life in their competition rifle. Because both of those calibers have extremely long barrel lives, they are perfect rifles to use for practice. Most 6mm and 6.5mm

barrels last between 2000-3500 rounds before they need to be replaced compared to over 10,000 rounds through a typical .308Win. The preferred cartridges in the sport tend to lean more towards

6mm or 6.5mm variants. The higher BC's available combined with the velocity of these rounds make them softer recoiling options that buck wind better allowing for more consistent and accurate follow up shots than can be made with a .308Win or .300WM.

That's the lowdown behind competitive tactical precision rifle shooting. The sport is still heavily grassroots, but as it gains popularity more and more local ranges will start holding club level matches. As previously stated, many of these matches borrow from law enforcement and military engagements, but also could be helpful for hunters looking to fine tune their long range skills. You'd be hard pressed to find a more helpful group of shooters as all are more than willing to loan gear, help with questions, and walk a new competitor through stages.

About the author



[Regina Milkovich](#) is a competitive rifle shooter, trainer, writer and blogger. She picked up her first rifle in 2009 and started shooting competitively the next day. Regina's held the title of top lady in the Precision Rifle Series since the creation of the PRS in 2012. Regina has won many state-level precision rifle competitions in the Southwest and is the only female to win a national-level Precision Rifle Series competition when she took 1st place overall at the NorCal Tactical Bolt Rifle Challenge in April 2016. She has worked in police communications for almost 20 years and is currently the Communications Supervisor of a police department in a suburb of Phoenix, AZ. When she's not practicing, competing or working, she's mentoring newer shooters who've taken an interest in long range shooting.