



Limited Match Winner Todd Jarrett cuts into a corner at the 2006 Florida Open.

Every February sees the big guns of IPSC converge on the sleepy hamlet of Frostproof, Fla. Frank Garcia's Florida Open is USPSA's season opener, a "wake up call" that it's time to get off the couch and start practicing. Every year we face 10 creative, lavishly decorated puzzles of roughly equal size for a total round count of around 300. Traditionally, the top talent from all over the United States and a dozen foreign countries comes to the "gunshine state" for the Open; and in terms of competition, this match falls somewhere between the Area matches and the Nationals. To make the top 10 here in the big divisions, you gotta beat some GMs.

Frank, Wadette, and the crew clearly have "cracked the code" for match administration, as this is one of the smoothest-running big matches you will ever attend.

With at least three world champions in attendance, "turtle" targets, and high-end shooters from all over the world, this is the most international match you can shoot without a visa. It's not uncommon to hear conversations in Spanish, Czech, French, and

Fun In The Sun

The 2006 Florida Open

BY ERIC STANLEY, L-2443

PHOTOS BY DEAN MAKKOS AND NESTOR NAVARRO OF IPSCACTION.COM

Italian at the scoring wall. Listening to Canadian Champ Doni Spencer chat with shooters from South Georgia, Miami, Louisiana and Jamaica is hysterical! Supposedly they all speak English, but you can't prove it by me.

All told 343 competitors shot the match for score this year, including more than 20 classified Grand Masters, and several foreign shooters who should probably wear the "scarlet G." There was

someone you wanted to watch shooting almost all the time. 2006 was actually light on GMs, especially in Limited where we "only" had five this year, compared to more than a dozen in 2005. With all this talent in attendance, one has a hard time keeping up with who to watch.

My suggestion is an adaptation of a "Krispy Kreme" innovation, the "Hot Doughnuts NOW" light. Frank needs to put them up on every bay — big, flashing red ones that say "GM SHOOTING NOW." As Travis, Eric, Saul, TJ, or "one of the boys" start to "Load And Make Ready," the light comes on and the crowds can run over to watch.

The Challenges of The Open

The Florida Open courses have evolved from minimal walk-throughs, all "open statics," and no steel or swingers, to very mainstream — albeit high round count — course design. This year there were

swingers, drop-outs, and steel strung out to ranges beyond 30 yards. Don't fool yourself, open amoebas can look pretty inviting, but they are a speed trap waiting to write you a ticket.

The 2006 courses offered options to mystify and separate out the field, but in general, the courses were pretty straightforward, and seemed simpler to me than in years past. The theme this year followed competitive events or pastimes, ranging from baseball, to sky diving to....stage 9 - competitive eating? "Start both hands on wiener and clear the kitchen." But, seriously, it was a great stage. There were several ways to solve it, working through a large trapezoidal shooting area, and around a sink, kitchen window, refrigerator, and vision barriers. The "supers" really burned on this one, Saul Kirsch, Eric Grauffel, and Todd Jarrett in less than 16 seconds. However, you might be surprised to hear Jarrett did it shooting Limited.

Todd's mastery (or is that Grand Mastery?) of cat-like repositioning coupled with his ability to shoot iron



Morning mist helped keep temperatures down. Weather is one of the big draws for the Florida Open. In February, it's hard to find a more comfortable locale than Frostproof.

sights on the move netted him a smoking run a mere five hundredths of a second slower than the Open division stage win by Kirsch.

Another good example of how solidly Jarrett shot was Stage No. 4, "Hunting." This was essentially a three-port, 28-round, stand-and-shoot with no reloads mandated and shots on mini steel and paper out to about 35 yards. Eric Grauffel won in Open shooting 14.4 seconds, down four points. Todd, who had to make a reload, took only .6 second longer and dropped seven points. His hit factor was 18 percent ahead of the field for Limited.

USPSA's first four-division champion, was hombre en llamas ("a man on fire") the entire match, burning down stage after stage, winning seven of the ten, and only falling as low as third on his "worst" stage. Todd's run-away performance left the field in awe, and it was great to see TJ back in top form. Second place for the match was

the Army Team's phenom Travis Tomasie, a respectful 120 points back. Manny Bragg, Shannon Smith, and Mike Seeklander rounded out a solid GM field and the top five.

But if you look just back from them, in seventh place and holding the first MASTER position you'll see 15-year-old Bronson Collins defending his home turf and topping a field of 11 Master-class shooters. Top Junior at the Limited Nationals has moved up to Top Master. Congratulations Bronson.

Speaking of being in top form, three-time world champion Eric Grauffel made another dominant performance on American soil, and as Max Michel was otherwise engaged, their much-anticipated showdown did not materialize. Eric continues to demonstrate that he has preparation and virtuoso match day performance down to a science. Any time you can top a field that includes eight GMs like former World Champ Matt McClearn, Saul Kirsch, Junior Brown from Ja-



The Army Team's Travis Tomasie displays his famous speed and technique.

maica, Chris Tilley, Matt Burkett, and "Razor" Racaza, by more than nine



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percent, you're doing something right. Eric won seven of 10 stages, only slipping as far as second three times. American shooters couldn't find an answer for Grauffel in Open, where he just ran away from the field, taking a bunch of alphas with him.

Todd and Eric set the trend in the big divisions, "lapping" strong fields, and all the other division winners followed suit, posting clear, dominant victories. Canadian L-10 powerhouse Mike Burrell had the toughest fight of any of the champions, winning "only" four stages, but finishing no lower than fourth on any. Limited Nationals Top 16 finisher Ted Puente shot a solid match and closed within about 40 points, or roughly three percent, of Mike, but couldn't catch him. For a sport that has seen recent national titles decided by a single "delta" this many break-out victories at the first large match of the year was surprising.

While I can't run down an account of every squabble for high, foreign, C-class senior, shooting minor left-handed revolver, there were a couple of hard-fought battles worthy of note. For example, the contest for "Premier Open-atrix" (or Top Lady in Open Division) pitted Sheryl Cruz against Doni Spencer in a nail-biter that saw Doni coming out on top by less than one percent in the final standings. "The Burner" would be proud.

The 2006 Florida Open was the first large match to feature USPSA's provisional single stack division. Diminutive lefty Jeff Gambrell played the 300-pound gorilla here, topping a sparse 5-man field by winning nine of 10 stages and the match by a whopping 20 percent. Jeff's style of smoothly shooting points lends itself well to "skinny-gunning." This division was poorly attended, but I think it was the stage design, not general apathy for the gear. These guns are fun but share a common fault with revolvers and shotguns: as soon as you start shooting them, it's time to reload. We look forward to better participation numbers and crossover from other sports as "SS" matures. At our local matches, we



JJ Racaza powers toward the camera. JJ was one of many Grand Masters who used the Florida Open as their annual debut.

usually see about a dozen true disciples of John Moses Browning, often more than in L-10. L-10 is for downloaded high caps, Single Stack is for skinnies.

Wheelgunners continued to practice the Don Quixote-esque "performance art" of shooting a revolver on 30+ round field courses. Some people just enjoy ice-skating uphill; in fact, they have developed a cult-like following. Eight dedicated "roundy rounds" negotiated the intricacies of the Open. Top among them was favorite Cliff Walsh, who shot a consistent match, winning six stages and finishing a close second on the other four.

In Production, Angus Hobdell shot a really solid match against a tough field that included Chuck Anderson, Limited GM crossover Kevin Insko, Johnny Brister and Tony Phan. Like Todd and Eric, Angus won all but three stages, and ran away with the Production title by almost eight percent. Checking his scores against the L-10 hit factors, it's clear why Angus is one of the top Production shooters on this planet. Even shooting minor with no magwell, half his scores would've made the top five in L-10.

In general the stages showed the maturity of course design that USPSA is becoming known for. Yes, the targets were wide open, but there were hard

cover vision barriers everywhere daring you to take them early as a partial. The walk-throughs were clear but not stifling, and in general you had large free-fire zones instead of boxes to shoot from. It's like a good golf course where shooters are challenged to use their whole game, and shooters of different levels were allowed to cut the courses up differently as their skills allowed them various options.

I liked Stage 1 "Domino." This bay featured several different "houses" of 2x4s and black plastic. At the start signal, you charge down a wide, winding path between the buildings, engaging targets inside and out, from spitting distance to well over 30 yards. It was a fun romp, but not as easy as it sounds and you needed to know how fast you could get your alphas at a variety of ranges. Foremost here, at least for Limited, was visual patience and a snappy, well-timed reload.

We did have a raft of DQ's on stage 2 "Skydiving." This was a pretty standard hunt-the-targets, "plank walk" style field course, decorated with a vintage "H" model Huey helicopter. The dangerous part was the "holster test" start. Loaded and holstered, hands grasping handles above your head, you run along a zip line for about 15 feet before entering the shooting area where you can release the handles and draw your gun. I liked the challenge of the stage, but the start added nothing to it and was pure holster test. My squad even had one guy drop during the walk-through.

Stage 3, "Baseball," was vintage Florida Open. The walk-through says it all "four bases, four plates. Run the bases dropping one plate from each base. Figure the rest out for yourself, you have five minutes." Success required picking and sticking to a plan, and you had options to shoot at distances from about 7 yards to more than 30. Pick your poison, and let me know how you did it, because I went to the line without a clue, still trying to "do the math."

The highlight of stage 5, "Bowl-
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Canadian and U.S. National Champion Doni Spencer shows her skills on the demanding Florida Open courses. She narrowly out-shot Sheryl Cruz for the win.

FLORIDA

OPEN *continued from page 32.*

ing,” was Jim Schoonmaker’s bowling ball activator track from last October’s “Monster Match.” Here it simply activated two drop-out targets. But, how many of those long-range targets would you shoot to time your arrival at the drop-outs so you didn’t wait? How many on the move, and how many from the last position? Where would you reload? It was a good stage, with more than one way to “skin it.” This stage also had some professional photographers set up with remote down-range cameras, ready to catch your best side and make you an IPSC Super Hero. They graciously provided shots for this article. More shots of the match can be viewed at www.ipscaction.com.

Stage 6, “Gambling,” was the first speed shoot I can remember at the Florida Open.

Throw a colored die in the box, color selects your no-shoots, hose the array of 7-yard paper and 10-yard mini poppers. Reset steel, reload off the clock, repeat. Sounds simple, huh? Rrrright. My two runs could serve well as a duality of how to, and how NOT to. I talked to many others who felt the same way. My first run was clean and quick with no extra shots in a little over four seconds, about the same time as good runs in Open Division. Alas, on my second run, my brain slipped into idle and I coasted to the curb in a time somewhat slower than a muzzle-loader’s. I dropped to 50th place just like that.

Stage 7 was called “Soccer” because you started holding a soccer ball. This was a neat kind of field course we don’t see enough of. It could be “solved” from two main positions, but the order of engagement “tactics” were critical if you hoped to optimize shooting on the move and keeping as busy as possible

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with that clock ticking away. There were long shots, mini steel activators and partial pop-ups guarded by hard cover, and a good run took quick, precise movement and trust in your sights.

All told it was a good shooting test and a long grueling weekend. I shot with a great squad of shooters from all over the country and had a blast. Heck, I didn't even minor this year! I've only

missed one Florida Open as a shooter, and I'm already planning to be there next year. Florida is gorgeous that time of year, and if you want an eye opener to start your big match season, this is it.

See you there in 2007.

Final Standings, 2006 Florida

Open:

Open, 112 shooters.

Eric Grauffel	100%
Chris Tilley	90.70%
JJ Racaza	89.89%
Saul Kirsch	89.41%
Ron Brown	84.06%

Limited, 108 shooters.

Todd Jarrett	100%
Travis Tomasic	91.39%
Manny Bragg	89.94%
Shannon Smith	87.63%
Mike Seeklander	82.77%

Production, 68 shooters.

Angus Hobdell	100%
Chuck Anderson	92.97%
Tim Schmit	86.34
Tony Phan	83.53
Robby Johnson	80.85%

Limited 10, 42 shooters.

Mike Burrell	100%
Ted Puente	96.98%
Kert Gaskill	94.06%
Kevin Toothman	84.08%
Mike Wolf	83.39%

High Single Stack; Jeff Gambrell

High Revolver, Cliff Walsh



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