

2nd September 2007

By This Correspondent

At the end of Day 1 of the Palma Match, the scores were (out of 7200):

1. Great Britain 7137 (single day record)
2. South Africa 7107
3. Australia 7099
4. USA 7093
5. Canada 7075
6. New Zealand 7047
7. Channel Islands 6947
8. Germany 6868
9. Kenya 6789
10. West Indies 6717

A good position to be in, but there had been some excellent shooting from South Africa, Australia and the USA in particular in amongst all that, so no room for complacency.

After all had arrived at the range and breakfasted on Sunday morning, the call went out that Day 2 was to be treated as if it was a new match. The 30 point lead was to be treated merely as an insurance policy, not to be called upon if we could win Day 2 and become (apparently) the first team to win both days.

At 700m on Sunday, things went our way. The wind was light, from the right, with very readable mirage and the coaches had their firers get shots away quickly before it had a chance to change substantially. Great Britain finished with more than an hour remaining of the 100 minutes allowed, and by the time the team had finished retiring from the firing point, the flags had picked up, indicating a few minutes of left wind. A good sight to see!

The policy had worked, and the team had set a record for the distance for the second time, scoring 9 Xs more than the previous day to record another perfect 2400 out of 2400. Ross McQuillan, David Calvert and Parag Patel excelled with 150.15 (the second time in the match that Parag had achieved this, although on day 1 he had also had a 9 sighter, the only time the team had failed to hit the 10 or X at that range as he is incessantly reminded). No other team went clean but the South Africans only lost one point, the Australians two and, impressively, the Americans were beaten by the oft-underestimated European Long Range Champions, the Channel Islands.

By the time the team got out onto the range for the 800m shoot, the wind had changed substantially. We were now looking at 8-10 minutes left at the start of the shoot, with both angle and strength changing noticeably, if not always calculably.

There were steady periods where we fired as many shots as we could before halting and re-thinking, there were angle changes that did affect the wind needed and others that didn't. All in all, it was quite a stop-start range and a much trickier affair than at 700m or even the previous day, with an eventual wind spread of 10 left down to 5.5 left towards the end of the shoot.

That told in the scores. Australia had finished well before us and had dropped eight points fewer than our 34. South Africa only just finished within the time limit but still took a point off Great Britain, having been over by the left hand end of the range near the berm, just where we expected we might be later on, at 900m, having been centre-right of the range at both the other ranges.

Andy Luckman shot brilliantly, and quickly, to record a 150.10, our only “possible” of the range. There were no scores below 146, so no disasters, but Great Britain had lost a range for the first time in the match. The 30 point insurance policy was still intact but we were bruised. Going into the final 900m range, scores were:

1. Great Britain 11,903.693 (-97)
2. South Africa 11,873.636 (-127)
3. Australia 11,871.665 (-129)
4. USA 11,841.643 (-159)
5. Canada 11,805.570 (-195)
6. New Zealand 11,804.565 (-196)
7. Channel Islands 11,659.513 (-341)
8. Germany 11,552.389 (-448)
9. Kenya 11,466.383 (-534)
10. West Indies 11,346.319 (-654)

What you don't want to see at the start of the last range of the Palma Match, when you have a lead to preserve, is strong, squarish, changeable wind with angle flicks and no upwind flags with which to judge that angle. So that's what we were confronted with, to make it all an even more interesting challenge.

Great Britain waited for a good dozen minutes at the start of the range to see how difficult it was proving for the other teams, whether their initial estimates were upwind or downwind, etc. and it looked like it was proving tricky for most. 8s, 7s and even 6s were commonplace. So the decision was taken that we would gratefully convert 10, 9 sighters if presented with them – only once, as it turned out – and try and pick some steady patches in which to get as many shots down the range as possible without sacrificing too much by way of shot quality. We also hoped that being on the left hand end of the range, closer to the new berm, might favour Great Britain by way of limiting the difference in minutes between square and fine wind at our end of the range.

However, once we got going, that didn't prove to be the way it worked – far from it. And, unlike those further to our right who had all the DCRA-based national flags to use for angle, we had none, and our flag was moved from its original position (and eventually taken down so that other teams could not use it). There was a weather vane though, and we found ourselves having to make use of slightly downwind (i.e. historic) flags for angle,

The GB coaches thought they had it pegged at the start, but the stop-start nature of the early stages was proof that it was very tricky and there were sometimes things occurring that were hard to rationalise. We were still gradually feeling our way, and finding ourselves surprised by where pilot shots would come up, at a point where we could see that Australia, 42 targets to our right, were hitting the 10 and X with regularity. That was a very worrying time. It would have been easy for the coaches to become fearful that they might be about to lose the Palma Match for Great Britain.

But everyone kept their concentration up. Caution reigned. And at the times that it seemed that we had an idea of a wind bracket that might pertain for a few minutes, firers were told to unleash and to get as many shots down the range as quickly as they could. The three years' training told, and the firers let off a lot of very good shots very quickly. And when one, two or sometimes three wide shots came up, there was a stop – sometimes short, sometimes not – followed by a pilot and, if all was well, another burst of fury. One particular pilot shot, from a waiting firer, was followed by 7, 7, 8 on the other targets – not the most successful pilot and eight points lost in one fell swoop! It was that tricky.

Australia, who had shot quickly – a tactic that had enabled them to win the previous range – were finishing while Great Britain's second firers were still on the point. One of those commented afterwards that he was on the firing point for well over an hour, including the time waiting for the prior firer to complete his shoot. That other teams were finishing, and appearing to have dealt well with the difficult conditions, was a concern, but it also meant that Great Britain had an idea of what, by way of scores, they needed to achieve. While the aim is always to score as highly as possible, it was clear that an even mix of 10s and 9s would work, so containment to a 2-3 minute bracket (plus the occasional surprise) ought to be enough. Nick Hincliffe was masterful in charge as Main Coach.

Coaches and firers got on with the job with some urgency, and scores barely dropped. Andy Luckman and Ross excelled with 148 and 147 in very tricky conditions indeed, with Andy's 448.31 being an astonishingly good best score of the day. Jon Underwood's 146 capped a match-best 894.52, but the team's 103 points dropped at 900m were six more than they had lost at the other five ranges combined. Gillian Webb-Enslin (Australia) pipped Jon to the Fulton Trophy with 896.

South Africa won that last 900m range, by 5 points, making it the second range that Great Britain had conceded. Australia, with one point fewer and a very organized looking force, won the day, having taken 10 points off Great Britain and 5 off South Africa. But overall winners of the Palma Match, and World Long Range Rifle Champions, were a relieved and jubilant Great Britain. Well done to Martin Townsend and team for a long, hard slog over three years and a lot of good thinking that went into producing the desired result.

The weather over the weekend had been excellent, and the wind conditions had ranged from negligible at 700m on Sunday to nightmarish at several ranges, so that the whole team had clearly made a strong contribution to an excellent result.

Final scores:

Team	Score so far	Points dropped so far
Great Britain	14,200.766	200
South Africa	14,175.709	225
Australia	14,172.727	228
United States of America	14,115.724	285
Canada	14,055.629	345
New Zealand	14,030.614	370
Channel Islands	13,835.556	565
Germany	13,691.417	709
Kenya	13,592.417	808
West Indies	13,467.355	933

GREAT BRITAIN

Captain: Martin Townsend

Adjutant: Nigel Ball

Main Coach: Nick Hinchliffe

Coaches: Reg Roberts, Matt Charlton, Jeremy Langley, Matt Ensor

Shooter	Day 1 700m	Day 1 800m	Day 1 900m	Day 2 700m	Day 2 800m	Day 2 900m	Total
Underwood JC	150.013	149.007	150.007	150.013	149.006	146.006	894.052
McQuillan RJ	150.012	149.008	150.011	150.015	146.005	147.006	892.057
Luckman AJ	150.011	146.005	148.005	150.013	150.010	148.008	892.052
Patel PM	150.015	150.007	149.005	150.015	148.009	144.006	891.057
Cload J	150.010	150.007	150.006	150.010	149.008	141.002	890.043
Armstrong DR	150.014	150.009	148.009	150.013	149.008	142.006	889.059
Luckman DC	150.014	150.008	149.007	150.013	149.007	141.004	889.053
Holden PJR	150.012	149.009	148.006	150.011	147.006	145.006	889.050
Raincock TJ	150.013	150.005	149.007	150.014	149.007	141.002	889.048
Brasier NRJ	150.011	150.007	146.003	150.011	147.004	146.005	889.041
Watson JA	150.011	150.004	143.004	150.014	149.006	145.006	887.045
Calvert DP	150.010	145.008	148.004	150.015	146.008	146.005	885.050
Messer JH	150.012	150.005	146.008	150.012	147.003	140.003	883.043
Jeens RCT	150.010	146.004	144.003	150.012	148.006	144.002	882.037
Dix RA	150.009	146.004	145.006	150.005	147.009	143.004	881.037
Dyson DC	150.012	149.008	145.006	150.012	146.002	138.002	878.042
TOTALS	2,400.189	2,379.105	2,358.097	2,400.198	2,366.104	2,297.073	14,200.766