

WEDNESDAY – D.ARMSTRONGS RULE (both of them)

Wednesday brings the first stage of the Queen's Prize – a three stage competition, in which the top 300 competitors on Century Range today will progress to the second stage on Friday. The top 100 on Friday then go forward to Saturday's Final on Stickle-down. Wednesday also brings the Conan Doyle at 900 yards, but that was lower in competitors' consciousness today.

The overnight thunderstorms initially appeared to have washed away the wind, as the early details at 300 and 900 yards were largely untroubled by it. Through the day, however, the wind built from the left, so the conditions seemed likely to favour those whose squadding put most of their shoots in the morning rather than in the afternoon. Dash it! Talking of which, two blocks of shooters found themselves dashing all over the ranges for half of the day, with one early (or late) shoot separated by several hours from three other shoots in quick succession in the other half of the day. Dash! And this evening brings the cocktail party given by the rifle clubs of the two ancient universities – a great opportunity for the best blazers to be worn. Dashing!

Scoring at 300 yards in the Queen's this morning was fairly high, reflecting the non-challenging wind conditions, but a point or two here or there were still dropped by a remarkable number of people who should know better. The wind became slightly more interesting at 500 yards either side of lunch, before offering a bit more of a challenge later in the afternoon, even through to the final detail. It was readable, but with values largely in the 3 to 5 range on varying strength and angle, with some quick changes and occasional gusts above 6 as it squared, it paid to be on one's toes, and not to be too gung-ho about an observed change in case it changed back while the firer was on aim. Range officers reported a smattering of 105s and a good number of 103s with fewer 104s, but one suspects that the cut-off score for progression to the Second Stage may be lower than each of those... more on that later.

After a benign start, the wind also kept people interested through the late morning and afternoon details of the Conan Doyle at 900 yards. Your correspondent shot alongside some stars of the Great Britain team, experiencing wind in the 4 to 8 range, with a couple of step-changes, and none managed to score above 48, although a nearby Guernseyman did score a 'possible'. The interesting conditions continued into the evening, with the 6pm detail reporting a bracket of 7 to 13 minutes left, which also entertainingly affected the tie shoot between Chris Watson and Mike Wood for the Corporation. Chris converted a 5 first to count, while Mike discarded a 4. Spectators were then stunned when both scored magpies, before Chris scored another inner, and no further points were dropped, leaving Mike the winner.

Chris, who had been leading the Grand Aggregate, had dropped five points today to be on '6 off', ahead of Parag Patel on V bulls. They were now in 2nd and 3rd place in the Grand, with the new leader, with one more point but fewer V-bulls, being David Armstrong of Old Guildfordians. David has had a fine Meeting and has been selected for the Great Britain team for the Kolapore on Friday, but today was a real triumph for him; he went 'clean' on the day to come from four points behind to lead the Grand.

Meanwhile, on Century Range, two tie-shoots were taking place. The Wimbledon was won by Glyn Barnett in a sudden death shoot-off with Parag Patel after scoring 25.3s; Richard Jeens had dropped a point to finish third. The contenders for the Alexandra were an inter-generational trio... Jon Underwood of Old Guildfordians had started shooting a few years before Matt Millar of Old Epsomians was born, while Matt had also started shooting before the third contender, Daisy Armstrong of Sedbergh School, was born. Given that Jon is comfortably still in his forties, the reader may be able to work out that Daisy is a mere 14 – one of the youngest competitors in the Imperial Meeting – and she approached the firing point with all the insouciance of youth and a huge grin on her face. Matt started with a magpie sighter before gradually scoring bullseyes, but dropped one for a 24.1. Jon started with a V and carried on with all Vs... apart from one inner for a 24.4. Daisy, meanwhile, converted a V and then scored all bulls for a 25.1, to win the Alexandra. Points win prizes – well done Daisy!

What a day for the (unrelated) Armstrongs! What a day, too, for Emma Nuttall (BM?), who scored 105.20 in Queen's I, which your correspondent believes to be the only such score. The main remaining business of the day is the "Umbrella Tent" meeting (now in the Pavilion), at the end of which the cut-off for progress to the Second Stage will be announced. Your correspondent's tentative prediction, based on today's wind conditions and the size of the field, is for 102.8s to be in and out. We'll find out for sure, later on...