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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ SPORTS & RECREATION

Passion, Brilliance, and Athleticism: Purdue University's Clay Target Team's Quest to Be the Best

Charles L. Rhykerd
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Charles L. Rhykerd, faculty advisory and coach of the Purdue Trap and Skeet Club for twenty-one years, has well-warranted pride for his team. The fledging club, founded by a handful of shotgun enthusiasts in 1978, has won 142 national and world championships, and earned seventeen All-Americans.

When Rhykerd, a professor of agronomy at Purdue, agreed to serve as faculty advisor to the new club he admits, “I had never seen a clay target!” However, his passion for guns went back to his childhood days on a farm. He enthusiastically became involved in the sport, and the club quickly began competing in collegiate matches, even though there were no practice facilities on campus. Rhykerd, who was honored in 1985 as “The Best of the Best of the Agriculture Professors,” was named the 1991 National Collegiate Shooting Coach of the Year.

Passion, Brilliance, and Athleticism is less a coherent written history by Rhykerd, than a compilation of recollections and anecdotes from others. It begins, oddly enough, with a series of eulogies for several people involved with the club, and ends with several “where are they now?” lists of players and others, including phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

Contributors recount the struggles of the early years as they made their own ammunition and paid for everything as individual members. Contributor Steve Strakis recalls when team members, soaking wet after competing in the rain, stopped at a laundromat. Strakis says they “stripped down to nothing but a little around our waists” while their clothes were drying, and cleaned their guns on tables provided for folding clothes.

Rhykerd also shares his justifiable pride in his daughter, Linda, who won fourteen national and world skeet championships.

The coach has been inspired through the years by the wisdom and sayings of others, and he sprinkles many of those thoughts throughout the book, and lists even more in a lengthy section of his favorite maxims and poems.

Photographs put faces to myriad names mentioned in the book. This “yearbook” information—memories, lists, and photographs—is valuable for those associated with the trap and skeet club (perhaps at a reunion) or for Purdue alums, but has little public interest. The book’s setup, organization, and lack of editing create a more personal, rather than public, end result.

That, however, should not diminish Coach Rhykerd’s pride in the club’s astonishing record and the people who made it happen, including himself. After all, he notes that in 1997 Purdue won all five collegiate clay target national championships and both the Club and Open Collegiate World Championships at the Grand American World Trapshooting Championships in the same year—a “first” he said, for a college team. Those happy memories are worth recording, especially for those involved.
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