

Bolt-Action or Semi-Auto Rifle for League Shooting?

When you're thinking about what rifle to use for our 22 rifle leagues, let me give you some points to consider that may not be apparent until you compete for awhile.

Our competition is 25 rounds at 5 different targets, with a sighter target you can shoot at as much as you want. Now the important thing about this fact is attrition to the shooter. Twenty-five rounds are a lot of rounds to shoot very precisely. When you consider the elements of the perfect shot...

1. Taking the right stance.
2. Locking the arms in where they need to be with support arm against the body (setting your elbow on the belly shelf if you have one ☺).
3. Finger position on the trigger, and face position and eye relief on the stock.
4. Breathing control and timing.

All these things should be in place before you even think of breaking a shot consistently and correctly. This is a lot of work, especially if you have to rebuild your stance after each shot. You will be wearing out your "micro-muscles", the small fast twitch muscles that cause you to wave your cross hairs all over; it's the movement you can't seem to calm down. Once you get fatigued you start using larger muscle groups and that's why you lose the fine control.

So, in my opinion, one of the most important considerations is to cut the time down to rebuild the stance, and the best way to do that is with a semi-automatic rifle.

Now, for our shooting, we shoot close with the farthest out to 25 yards in the summer. That's not far at all, and there is no practical advantage of a bolt-action at these distances concerning accuracy. Normally a bolt-action is more accurate, but at our distances that's not an issue. On the contrary a bolt-action gun has a big disadvantage in the fact it breaks your stand down after every shot. Consider that, with a semi-auto, if I fire 2 shots between breaking my stand down I'm only rebuilding my stand 12 times compared to your 25! If I shoot 3 rounds per stance I'm rebuilding my stand less than 9 times. This allows me to concentrate on taking a better stance and locking down tighter. When I start shooting, so long as I'm hitting the X I'm not going to break down my stand, so I can shoot until I need to break it down to breathe, change magazines, or because my movement requires a rest and that could be from 2 shots on upwards. It does require the shooter to have the discipline to know when he needs to set the gun down and rest, and from day-to-day that may change.

Now, at the distances we shoot, almost any semi-auto will be accurate enough, and with most semi-autos you can improve the accuracy, especially with some better-quality ammo. I will not delve into the optics and the influence they can have right now; maybe later in a different article. Does that mean a semi-auto will get you into the 230 scores? Not yet. Let's look at some problems that most all guns have off the shelf. The greatest weakness most all guns have is the trigger. This is why many go for the Savage with the accu-trigger because, out of the box it is probably the best there is, but it's on a bolt-action gun, and that disadvantage outweighs the advantage, in my opinion, **IF YOU FIX THE SEMI-AUTO'S TRIGGER**. You have many options of triggers when you go with a gun like the Ruger 10/22. There are many aftermarket triggers that are amazing, or you

can get someone to work the factory trigger, but it's limited what you can do with it at best.

Because of the distance, and attrition problems with a 25 round precision shoot, I have chosen to lighten my gun as much as possible, I have an aluminum Tactical Solutions barrel, a skeletonized stock just for weight considerations — nothing was done for accuracy. I made a good trigger, and selected the best optics I could find with adjustable aperture for our distances (like I said, maybe I will write on optics later) both indoors and outside. For my son, I simply took the stock barrel and cut it down (1/2" over legal length) and recrowned the end, and then we shaved and skeletonized the stock as well, all just for weight considerations.

If your scores are not gradually improving, then maybe you should consider making some changes in your hardware; your problems may be exasperated by your rifle. Buy the cheapest and lightest 10/22 you can find; don't worry about the gun's accuracy. Also, a bull barrel is the worst way to go. Spend the money on a trigger and optics if you're going to spend it anywhere and you will have an advantage over what you were shooting by a great deal.

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