What’s Your Call?

By Dr. King Heiple

Query: We have a group that shoots regularly together for fun and practice. We shoot mostly in the mornings when the weather allows and then have a companionable lunch. There are probably many, many groups like ours in the world of skeet. We are of somewhat disparate levels of skill but do manage to make two-man teams but in different classes.

We pull and score for practice rounds for ourselves, so of course we are our own referee in these rounds. In general we shoot with attention to NSSA rules, and frequently we will put a small wager on a round, perhaps with a handicap for one or more of us.

An oddity occurred last week during one of these rounds and we were a bit puzzled as to the way it should be ruled. Kevin was shooting and the squad recognizes that he has been known to balk on occasion. Our squad had gotten around to Station 6 and Kevin was still straight. He shot both the Station 6 singles just fine and loaded for doubles. He called for his birds and just didn’t fire at all—not at either bird! Wendy was pulling and asked, “What happened?”

“Don’t know” was the answer. “I just couldn’t pull the trigger!”

Wendy said, “Well, that’s a balk so take the double again with the first bird lost.” Kevin opened and closed his gun, remounted and called for the double again. He had the same result. Totally failed to fire.

“Shucks,” he exclaimed. “I did it again. What’s wrong with me today?” He remounted his gun and called for the third time. Wendy threw a third double and Kevin promptly smoked both of them. “Better,” he exclaimed.

But how do we score him now? One lost or two? When should he have taken an option? We got several answers in the clubhouse.

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KH: Kevin and Wendy, your circumstance is certainly unusual, but the answer is straightforward. Kevin’s score at that moment is “lost and lost” and he is still on station to shoot his option! Moreover, even Wendy was distracted a bit as she never should have thrown the third set of doubles! After the second set he should have shot his option. Since the low house was the first bird for which he is charged a loss, he shoots a low 6 option.

The balk rules are: *Rule III-A-10 Balk: Failure to shoot at a regular target or double due to the fault of the shooter.*

And III-C-3: *Scoring: One lost target shall be scored on: a. A balk or failure of the gun to fire due to fault of shooter. Should this include both targets of a regular double, it shall be scored as first target lost, and a proof double shall be thrown to determine the result of the second shot only. If a balk should occur, or his/her gun fail to fire because of the shooter’s fault, when a proof double is thrown and the result of the first shot has already been scored, the second target shall be scored as lost.*

Occasionally someone will assume that when you balk and shoot at neither bird that this should be scored as two losses i.e. “lost and lost,” but skeet does have a few axioms. Some of these are explicit and spelled out in our rules. Several that come to mind are: *No target can be established shooting at a broken bird [III-D-7-c]; The referee shall be the sole judge of decision of fact. i.e. is a bird dead or lost, [IV-D-14] ; If a shooter fires before a no bird call, the result of the shot shall be scored, [IV-D-7-a].*

But we have at least one that is apparent only by considering the rules as a whole. If you read all the rules where there are two birds in the air but only one shooter error, ammo or gun malfunction occurs, then we only charge the shooter with one loss, not two. The penalty is charged only to the first bird unless the first bird of that double is already established as lost, then it is charged to the second bird. Thanks to Lisa Cunningham #234757 wyc? #242

*Queries! If you have a rules question or an interesting or a question about a “call” at your shoot you can reach Dr. Heiple directly via e-mail at kingheiple@ameritech.net He promises a prompt response.*