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Meet National Air Rifle Champion Jenna Compton  
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"Is it true Jenna Compton never picked up a rifle until eight months ago?" the parent of a competitor asked as I manned the table near the banquet entrance Saturday night. Variations of that question seemed to be floating around during the Collegiate Rifle Championships yesterday, ever since the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, native won the Air Rifle finals at 2:15 p.m.

Compton, a first-year microbiology student at the University of Akron who sports a light brown ponytail and small stud above her lip, could pass for a college freshman anywhere in the U.S. Unlike most other college freshmen, however, Compton sometimes finds herself on the rifle range long after the conclusion of a typical 3-hour team practice. "I practice longer," she says. "I keep at it until I can get my scores consistent. I wanted to be up in the high 580s or 590s."

And she was. Firing a personal- and school-best 590 in this weekend's Individual Air Rifle Championships, Compton sailed into Saturday's Finals where she was literally neck-and-neck with her competition. West Virginia's star shooter Bryant Wallizer, who was firing in the lane to Compton's left, held onto first place until the ninth shot.

During the Finals the audience is allowed to cheer and jeer. A collective gasp occurred when, in the ninth and tenth shots, Compton gained and maintained her 6/10 of a point average.

Interviewed by CBS directly after the Finals, Compton was having trouble putting her feelings into words. "My heart feels like it is inside my throat," Compton said. "It's great."

Compton first picked up an air rifle in August of 2008, eight months ago. "I shot Smallbore Rifle beginning my freshman year of high school," Compton says. "I shot pretty well in high school, and when it came to college, I thought, 'shooting is pretty interesting, I should give it a try.'"

Pretty nonchalant for someone who just proved herself as the nation's best collegiate air riflewoman. "I wanted to make the Finals, and I knew that I could, but I didn't know if I would," Compton says of the experience. "I didn't know if I would get my nerves down."



University of Akron Head Rifle Coach Newt Engle was beaming with pride during Saturday night's All-American banquet. "It's true she is new to the sport (of air rifle)," he said. "You may have noticed her shooting jacket said 'Angie Engle.' She used begged and borrowed gear to win the National Championship."

Compton assures us she will return to the Championships next year—"hopefully smallbore, too," she says.

Compton is hesitant to admit it, but NRABlog.com got her on the record: "There's more to life than shooting, I guess," she says, "I'd like to put all of my focus on shooting, but, you know, you can't do that."

If her dream of a full-time competitive riflewoman doesn't come true, Compton has equally ambitious academic plans. She'd like to continue her study of microbiology and land a position at the Center for Disease Control.

Thanks for a great interview, Jenna! Any advice for competitive shooters?

"Just relax and do what you love to do," she says. "I love this sport so much and you just get out there and have fun. Do what you do. It's just you and the target, you know? You and the rifle."