

ARMED WITH AMBITION

» Personnel target Olympic place in 2020

» Full-time training furthers international ambitions



REPRESENTING your country at the Olympics is the pinnacle for most athletes as they embark on a career at sport's elite level.

For mainstream pursuits the conveyor belt of talent is seemingly endless but in minority events an innovative approach is often needed to attract people to the cause.

Last year the Army launched an elite programme to identify Servicemen and women who could potentially medal at the 2020 Games.

Working closely with bodies such as the English Institute of Sport and UK Sport, the initiative saw soldiers guided towards disciplines that have a shortage of top-level competitors and that match the attributes needed for life in the military.

Shooting became the first event to profit when a formal partnership was agreed between the Army and the national governing body.

More than 50 athletes

have attended selection and development sessions for the pistol, rifle and shotgun and nine have moved forward to a talent confirmation phase.

Since May, this handful of crack shots have been embroiled in full-time training at ranges in Ash and Bisley and with officials from Team GB closely monitoring their progress hopes of international honours could well become a reality.

A full-time coach oversees proceedings and efforts have been made to recreate the conditions and infrastructure seen at world level. Mental preparation is among the other key elements.

Shooter Sgt Ian Jack (Int Corps, pictured above) had a taste of international action in 2011 and is now determined for more.

"It's all about the Tokyo Olympics in 2020," he told *SoldierSport*. "I've been to World Cups and the World Championships but I didn't



“
My scores have gone up over the last three months and I have just set a personal best
 ”

make any finals. I performed well in training but you need to have a different mindset for the major competitions.

“This is next-level training. We have our own ten-metre range and the Intelligence Corps has helped with the purchase of my pistols.

“It really takes the pressure off. I have all the equipment I need and that means I can focus on the task at hand.

“To have the Army investing in us is a huge benefit. My scores have gone up over the last three months and I have just set a new personal best in the air pistol.”

Royal Air Force Reservist Sqn Ldr Albie Fox, secretary of the Army Rifle Association, has been a driving force behind the project.

As a former Commonwealth Games athlete he knows what is needed to succeed in the upper echelons and he believes Service personnel have a distinct advantage.

“In terms of pistol

shooting, the governing body is desperate for us to get involved,” he explained.

“There are not enough people out there to push for places. Civilians are not allowed to keep a gun at home and they have to use specialist ranges, which makes practice very difficult.

“The Army allows these guys to train full-time and we have the facilities on our doorstep.

“It is open to everyone and soldiers who have never tried this before should come along to one of our basic courses. If the people here do not reach the required standard we will need others to come in.”

SSgt Rebecca Carnell (AGC (RMP)) is another to throw her hat in the ring.

Having excelled in military shooting events – she holds the highest female ranking in the Army 100 – the NCO was keen to test herself in the sporting sphere.

She joined the set-up in June and after rectifying problems

with her sights and grip she is embracing the team ethos.

“It is not easy,” Carnell said. “It is both mentally and physically challenging.

“Psychologically it can be quite draining, especially when you have a bad day, but on the whole I’m enjoying it.

“I’ve always wanted to shoot competitively. I’m hoping to get to the Commonwealth Games in 2018 but the Olympics are my main target.

“We go through test runs and competitions so we can get used to the pressure and international guidelines are followed so we know what to expect. I’m really chuffed to be here. If we continue to train in the same way these goals are totally attainable.”



For more details on upcoming shooting courses and how to get involved visit www.armyshooting.org