

The CFDA Bracket Match

By: Quick Cal

To understand why the CFDA Bracket Match Format it is a good idea to first understand some basic history of the sport of Fast Draw dating all the way back to the 1950's. The whole concept of knowing history is so that we can better avoid repeating past mistakes.

A Brief History of Fast Draw Contest Formats

In Bob Arganbright's a.k.a. "Jayhawker's" notable book, "The Fastest Guns Alive", which was published in 1978, he accurately credited Dee Woolem as being the "Father of Fast Draw". We are not sure what exactly the first contest format was, except that it was "self start". This required the contestant to hold down a button with their trigger finger, when the draw began it would start Dee's timer, upon the report of a fired blank, the timer would stop and record the time it took to draw and fire a six-gun.

Soon Fast Draw caught the eye of Hollywood and stars began using it to promote their movies, TV shows and careers. By 1959, the Colt-Sahara National Championship was held with actual elimination timers, in a format that was called Walk & Draw, officially "Walk and Draw Level". The competitors would face one another beginning at over 100 feet with safety blanks in their six-guns. Upon the "Shooters on the Line, Shooters Walk" command, they would begin their showdown walk towards one another. Shooters had to keep their gun hand at least 6" away from their six-guns. There was one light in the middle and two sound pickups, one pointing in the direction of each shooter. The first shot would stop the timer and illuminate one of the two winner's indicator light atop the timer. The losing shot would not be recorded. But here's the point, within the context of this article... **It was only a 2 out of 3 / 1-X Format.** This means 50% of the shooters were eliminated in the first round and each succeeding round. While there were undoubtedly other reasons why this event lasted only 4 years, I believe that such a one-dimensional format lacked the substance to sustain an entire sport. Can you imagine driving over a thousand miles, firing two shots, and it's over?

Index formats soon dominated the sport. These contests featured a series of events at various targets and distances, usually with 5 shots, resulting in a Total Time, which would establish the overall winner. With a one-second miss penalty, this gave average shooters a chance to win based upon consistency. For years the sport would alternate between Index and Elimination, the shooters were clearly divided on which format was better. However, the history of the early associations clearly indicate that membership totals and contest entries would expand under Index Formats and decline under Elimination Formats.

In the early 70's, Bob Munden created what he called "Classified Elimination", and promoted it in his newly formed International Fast Gun League. Bob felt, that this type of contest would allow shooters a chance to compete against competitors on their own level. For the first time, he succeeded in making the Elimination Format popular among average shooters. This format is still popular today in the World Fast Draw Association. There are however, in my opinion, problems with Classified Elimination. I could go into many details concerning the years of trials and errors, but that would take many pages beyond the context of this article. I will simply say that it led to some rather unseemly political lobbying concerning how to set time limits for each class, how to deal with shooters who exceeded the time limit, accusations of sandbagging, and finally the uneven recognition between the classes.

In 1975, I introduced "Progressive Elimination" to the sport. It was intended to bring together both Index and Elimination into one format. We would "Qualify with Index" and "Finalize with Elimination". We would shoot several events in an Index contest, and then have a Single Progressive Elimination Format amongst however many places were recognized. So, if the top 15 Men got awards, we would then start with 14th vs 15th, the winner would face 13th, and so on. There were two main problems with this format as well. First, since it was Single Progressive Elimination the higher seed was always facing someone who was already "warmed up", which was seen as a disadvantage. Secondly, who got to pick the final event? Faster shooters always lobbied for the fastest events (Blanks at Balloons); and the more consistent shooters always lobbied for event that required more accuracy (Wax Events). So, in the end, no one was really happy.

Basic CFDA Elimination Format

CFDA is All Elimination Format. When CFDA was created it was thought that a 24" round target at 21' would be a self-regulating factor between speed and accuracy. For the most part that concept has held true. Anything can still happen in CFDA. You can be a World Champion or a World Record Holder and a brand new shooter can put an X on you, if you're missing. With few exceptions, shooters of all abilities have enjoyed shooting against all comers in CFDA. You must hit a difficult target in order to win no matter who you are, it's a challenging target to hit while hip shooting against a timer for anyone. As Wyatt Earp said, "Fast is Fine, but Accuracy is Final."

In 2007, we began implementing the current CFDA Championship Shootoff Format, in large matches, it is known as, "The Magnificent 7."

Why the CFDA Bracket Format?

Cowboy Fast Draw has grown considerably and has gotten more competitive over the years. It used to be, the competitors shooting in the 4's consistently was rare, now it's common place. It used to be, there was only a hand full of shooters that could hit the target with any consistency in the 3's, now there are 30 or more. In 2007, we instituted Category Matches, the thought was that we would spread out shooters in age-based categories to give more competitive and recognition opportunities. While we still love Category Matches, we found out that Cowboy Fast Draw is almost an ageless sport, and that nationally ranked Top Guns exist in all categories.

In 2007, at the California State Championship the Sundowner came up with an event he called "Still Alive at 65." It was purely for shooters who could not shoot under .65 and there were quite a few back then. It was fun and very popular, not only for those participating, but for those of us watching.

In 2008, we created "Blast for Cash" at the FGA. We made a report that tracked the fastest time for each shooter, it was before our computer program so we had to do it by hand. It was only for shooters who had not fired a shoot under .55 in the contest. It was very popular, except some of the fast shooters were a little jealous that the slower shooters had an extra event to win cash at, and they didn't.

The point of this section is to point out that a new concept was needed for CFDA to give it more substance and to not repeat the mistakes of the past which strongly limited participation in "Old" Fast Draw. We feel so strongly about this, that a new bullet point was added in the 8th Edition of the Gunslinger Guidelines in our "Goals Section" on page 4. **"To provide an atmosphere where members can win at every level, through sportsmanship, encouragement, fair rules, and bracket matches wherever possible."** The CFDA Bracket Match Format, clearly gives our shooters a chance to win at every levels.

How to Run a Bracket Match

Many members and clubs are beginning to institute Bracket Matches into major tournaments and club level contests as well. Members have been requesting that CFDA formalize a standard Bracket Match Format. While I'm hesitant to set such formats to stone quite yet, I can certainly share with you how this event is held at the FGA, and to provide an example of how we have instituted Bracket Matches at our local club, the Great Basin Gun Hawks.

Blast for Cash at Fastest Gun Alive

The CFDA Scoring Program has a "Bracket Report". It's similar to a "Fast Time Report", except that it ranks everyone from fastest to slowest with their second fastest time entered into the program. The reason for doing this is that almost all of us from time to time second guess a light. In other words, someone who normally shoots in the high 4's, suddenly fires a shot in the high 3's. Therefore, such an anomaly does not show up in a Bracket Report. If you do it twice in the same match, then you earned it. We run 4 brackets at the Fastest Gun Alive, the standard names of these brackets are from fastest to slowest are Master Gunfighter, Gunfighter, Sheriff and Deputy. Therefore, we simply take the Bracket Report and divide it as evenly as possible into the 4 brackets. For instance, if we had 200 shooters, we put the fastest 50 in Master Gunfighter, second fastest 50 in Gunfighter, and so on. With the Bracket Report it's very easy to do the math and draw lines separating the groups on the page. Everyone falls where they fall.

The new version of the CFDA Basic Scoring System is capable of running multiple side matches like bracket matches all on one computer, which is great for clubs and matches under 100 shooters, but at FGA

“Blast for Cash” we've been using four separate computers, since there are so many scores to enter and rounds to draw.

We used to run a 1-X, 2 out of 3 Format, which admittedly did not have enough substance, so in recent years we went to a 2-X Format. We still use the 2 out of 3, because sometimes one 3 out of 5 round that goes 10+ shots can hold up an entire firing line. At the 2015 FGA, we plan on using a 2-X, but with using a hybrid of the "5 Shot Option Format" (Pg 20. Guidelines), called the Quick 57 (See Below). **Note:** It's not a good idea to recognize more than 3 places in a bracket match, unless you have a lot of time to shoot off all of the ties for recognized places.

At the 2014 FGA, we awarded \$2,000 in cash divided equally into the top 3 places in each bracket, plus a new Pietta Six-gun for 1st place in each bracket. We believe in recognizing all brackets equally, and we all include this within your basic main match entry fee. But whether shooters placed or not, we believe that everyone was satisfied in that they were competing with their fellow competitors who were in the same general speed range that they were.

Club Bracket Shoot Format

The Great Basin Gun Hawks, are probably the most experimented upon club in CFDA, since they shoot at our home range. They are great sports and enjoy trying new things.....I think :). We have been experimenting with some different versions of bracket matches for the past year or so. Here is our most popular format for a Saturday Club Match:

Preliminary Early Rounds (No X Out Format)

We start at 9:30 a.m. and shoot as many No X Out Format rounds as we can until High Noon. We are now using the Quick 57, just to keep rounds moving quickly. We run all shooters together in the early rounds so Men, Ladies and Youth all compete against each other. We have a 6 lane range, our last match with 31 shooters, we easily got through each round in just under 30 minutes. We had 5 rounds completed easily by noon.

Lunch Break & Bracket Match Setup

We first generate a Match Standing Report and conduct an "X-Count" roll call. It's interesting how everyone always knows exactly how many X's they have, kind of like speeding tickets in the last few years... After verifying the X-Count, we then determine and announce the Top 7 Men and Top 5 Ladies based upon the early rounds. This is important since we run a Championship Shootoff Format at end of the day, which determines our overall Men & Ladies Overall Champions.

We then run a Bracket Report divide the shooters into the 3 brackets we run at our local matches. We avoid bye rounds in the initial rounds in the two slower brackets. We weight the Master Gunfighters with initial bye-rounds if needed since they tend to be a little more efficient in loading and unloading.

We then run a 2-X, Quick 57 Format in an alternating fashion for all 3 brackets. It moves pretty quickly into the 2nd round, where shooters begin to be eliminated. We are generally done with the bracket match in well under two hours.

Championship Shoot-off Finals

We simply run the standard Double Progressive Elimination Shoot-off Format that are used in almost all CFDA Titled Championships. We can also add a Youth Shoot-off, if desired.

Results of Our Club Format with Bracket Matches

- Provides a lot of shooting for everyone.
- No one goes home after being eliminated after Round 3, like you would see in a 3-X club match.
- All shooters get a taste of competing with all levels of shooters in the morning rounds.
- All shooters get a chance to win at every level as they compete against shooters in their own time range.
- The Championship Shoot-off Format defines the clear overall winners for the day and provides even more shooting. Plus, it prepares our members with experience for when they end up in a championship shoot-off at a major match.

Since we have been using this Club Bracket Match Format, our attendance at our Saturday matches have steadily increased. It has also helped attendance at our Monday night matches and practices sessions. Our members feel more connected and excited about shooting.

Introducing the Quick 57 Format

This hybrid way of determining a round winner is called the Quick 57. It is initially run the same way as a 5 Shot Format, in which 3 winning shots immediately wins a round, but if the round is not concluded after 5 shots, whoever is ahead is declared the winner. In the old 5 Shot Format, if both shooters are tied after the 5th shot, then they would shoot until the tie is broken. In the Quick 57, they have only 2 additional shots to break the tie. If neither shooter records a winning shot by the 7th shot, they both receive an X, unless it immediately affects recognized places. In other words, "If you don't get it done in seven, you both go to heaven!" We have been testing the Quick 57 in our club, it keeps matches moving and has become quite popular with our members.