

The 2020 Olympics in Tokyo and the “Quota Places System” and Minimum Qualification Scores

The past few months have seen a growing interest by some of our shooters in the Commonwealth Games in 2018, and the XXXII Olympics in Tokyo two years later, and the prospects of participating in these key international sporting events. This has led to further interest in the “quota places system”, and the minimum qualification score (MQS), and what these things mean.

The Olympic “quota places system”

Very simply, the “quota system” is the mechanism that allocates athletes to events, and controls the numbers of athletes (and nationalities) that can participate in the shooting events at the Olympic Games. It covers all shooting events at all the Olympic Games. It does not operate at the CWG level.

For every Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) allows a total of 390 shooting athletes to compete in 15 men’s and women’s events in clay target, rifle and pistol. The 390 Olympic “start positions” are divided up among the 15 men’s and women’s events.

Let’s take women’s Air Pistol as an example to explain how the quota system works.

Of the 390 total start positions (athlete places) at the Olympics, 29 are allocated to women’s Air Pistol, and these 29 start positions are further allocated out to the preceding World Champs (six start positions), the World Cups (three each) and the various continental comps including Oceania. By winning one of these Air Pistol start positions at a preceding international, a woman athlete wins a start position in women’s Air Pistol for her country at the Olympics. The number of start positions for each Olympic event allocated to each international is the “quota” for that international. At the forthcoming Oceania, for example, there is only one (1) women’s Air Pistol quota for one (1) start position at the Rio Olympics.

To win a quota place, the athlete either wins it by winning the event or by finishing in the top ranks, depending on the number of quota places allocated to an event at the international competition concerned.

But frequently, unplaced athletes will win quotas because the winning athletes had already won a quota. This situation arises because the ISSF rules prevent an athlete from winning more than one (1) quota place, or a quota place in second event.

Quota places (and the Olympic start positions they represent) are held by the country, not by the athletes who won them.

It’s too soon for us to know precisely what the quotas will be for the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, but we can use the figures for next year’s Rio Games as a pretty reliable guide, using the women’s Air Pistol event as an example.

For the forthcoming 2016 Rio Olympics the preceding international shooting competitions are:

- World Championships held in Granada, Spain in September 2014. A total of 64 quota places were available in the 15 events and of these 64, six were allocated to women’s Air Pistol; these six were the Granada World Champs women’s Air Pistol “quota”.
- a series of World Cups in 2015 in Changwon, Fort Benning, Munich and Gabala in Azerbaijan. A total of 24 quota places are available at each of these World Cups. Three women’s Air Pistol quota places are available at each of these four World Cups (total 12), and
- a series of exclusive, regionally-based continental championships; for us this will be the Oceania’s, due in Sydney later this year. A total of 18 quota places are available at the Oceania’s for all 15 Olympic events, one quota place for women’s Air Pistol.

An athlete who wins a quota place will still have to qualify for national team selection.

It is a requirement that to win a quota place at an international competition, the athlete must equal or exceed the ISSF MQS in the event in which they won the quota. If the athlete fails to shoot the

ISSF MQS, the ISSF will reallocate that quota place to another country, even if the athlete won the event.

An athlete who wins a quota (one of the 390) is not limited to competing in that one event. The best pistol example of this occurs in men's Air Pistol and Free Pistol because the two events are so similar. The athlete wins a quota place in Air Pistol (which includes the crucial ISSF MQS), and then meets the ISSF MQS in Free Pistol. This is called "double starting" and allows an athlete to compete in two events at the Olympics and on only one quota place! The ISSF also limits the number of start positions any country can have at the Olympics, usually to two (2) athletes per country per event.

At time of writing this, three World Cups (plus the 2014 Granada World Championships) have already been held. Of the 30 or so start positions available at Rio in women's Air Pistol, fifteen quota places have already been won, so fifteen Olympic start positions have already been allocated to the athletes' home countries. Very like some of the women who have won a quota place in one event will have shot an MQS in a second event, thereby allowing them to "double start" in two events at the Olympics.

Sources for this information can be found on the ISSF website, the 3rd Edition of the ISSF rule book, and the ISSF News journal.

The above is a highly generalised outline, a lot of fine detail is excluded. I've not mentioned rifle or clay target, or the Tripartite Commission's invitation places, and host country places. We don't need to worry about the extra detail right now.

One thing we do know about the Tokyo Olympics is that the ISSF World Championships preceding them will be held in Changwon, Korea in September 2018.

Minimum Qualification Scores (MQS)

There are two, separate Minimum Qualification Scores (MQS) that need to be considered by any athlete seeing an international career.

The first MQS is the MQS set by the ISSF. In all the Olympic shooting events, the ISSF assigns an MQS which must be achieved by an athlete at an international competition if that athlete wishes to compete at the Olympics. All Olympic athletes must meet a standard minimum level of performance. Each MQS in each event is set very early in the peace for a particular Olympics, and must be achieved at one or more of the prescribed international competitions. Meeting the ISSF MQS for Rio in 2016 is of no account for Tokyo in 2020; the MQS process begins all over again.

The New Zealand Olympic Committee and the Shooting Federation have little interest in an Olympic-aspiring athlete who has not, or cannot, meet the ISSF MQS in an event.

The second MQS is set by the NZOC and NZSF, also early in the peace, again for the reason that athletes need time to prepare. This MQS is one of the New Zealand Olympic selection criteria that an athlete must meet to be selected (it is not the only criteria).

The NZOC-NZSF MQS is set higher than the ISSF MQS. The simple reason is that New Zealand does not expect New Zealand athletes to finish last, or finish poorly in high status international competitions like the Olympics. This expectation is made clear in the other selection criteria.

For example, the ISSF MQS for women's Air Pistol at the Rio Olympics is 365; the NZOC-NZSF MQS for Rio Olympics national team selection is 381. This score was good enough to reach only 15th at the London Olympics in 2012, but was only four points shy of getting into the Finals, -where the medals are!

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