

FROM SHEEP PUP TO SHEEPDOG:

THE STORY OF THE IDPA SHEEPDOG CCP CHAMPIONSHIP

Every dog has its day but you won't find one better than at the Sheepdog Championship.

WORDS + PHOTOS RICK DENNY, A905838

It takes vision and dedication to build a good match.

EVERY YEAR I LOVE TO SHOOT IN AS MANY IDPA MATCHES AS I CAN IN AS MANY STATES AS I CAN AND I LOVE meeting the people that make up IDPA. One thing that almost always comes up as I talk to new friends, no matter when or where, is our Sheepdog all CCP match that we host every December.

I have been told things like, "I wish we could do something like that here" or "I hope someone around here will do something like that!" They are often shocked when my response is this: "Mobilize your IDPA friends and make it happen!" Seriously, that is all it takes!

About four years ago, I got this idea of a sanctioned match format that I just could not get out of my head. Over one hundred competitors, all in one division competing for a single division championship trophy. And since my favorite division was CCP, that had to be the division. Oh, and the proceeds would go to charity.

First, I told some friends. Most thought it was a cool idea, but a few looked at me like I just committed a flagrant penalty. After all, I was only a Chief Safety Officer and had only filled in as a match director at a couple of local matches when official match directors could not be there.

Second, I told my IDPA leadership in Florida and they provided very encouraging input about the concept. "Give it a shot. If the CCP registrations do not fill up, you can always open it up to other divisions," my Area Coordinator at the time, Rick Lund, told me.

Of course, that is how the Florida IDPA CCP Sheepdog Trials was born and the rest was history. Now, I write this in amazement as we prepare to host our third annual match as a tier 4 under our new name: The IDPA Sheepdog CCP Championship. Every year since our inception, we have hosted shooters from 12 or more states, have provided dozens of CCP division/class

promotions from Master to Marksman and raised over \$10,000 for charity each year!

That fact is, if my IDPA friends and I can build an incredible match experience like the Sheepdog, you can too! The basics are simple: organization, time, commitment and a host range. IDPA has great match administration resources to help get that far. When you have that down, then all you need are the little touches that make a match a great experience. To encourage you with ideas, here is a list of suggestions that have made the Sheepdog a wildly popular match:

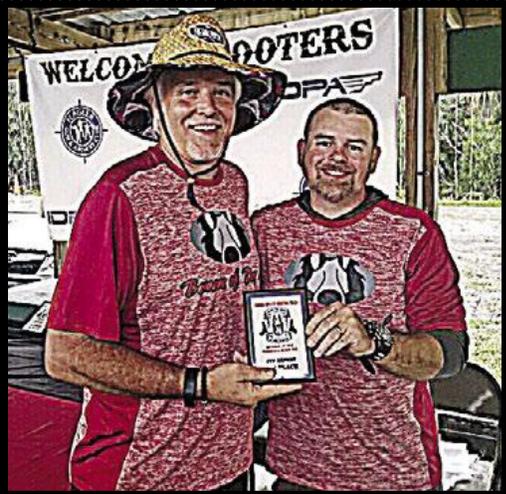
Have a Match Brand and Identity

The Sheepdog match was born with a theme that centers around the conceal carry lifestyle and thus the CCP Division. The theme comes from the often used quote attributed to Marine LTC David Grossman which basically says: There are



The one thing that a match cannot live without is a Safety Officer willing to give their time and effort for others.





The Sheepdog has grown to be one of the "must attend" matches in the county.



three types of people in this world: the sheep who go about their business, the wolf who feeds on the sheep, and the sheepdog who protects the flock.

Our goal for the Sheepdog match experience is to allow the competitor to identify as the Sheepdog in protecting the flock from the wolves. Our match logo prominently features our match mascot, Gadsden the Sheepdog. It is on our signage, on our challenge coins and on our shirts. I have seen a Sheepdog match shirt at every single IDPA sanctioned match I have attended, from coast to coast, since our first match in 2017. Many of our competitors buy extra shirts! Create a brand people love identify with!

Let Your IDPA Friends Co-Own the Event

You have to have a great network of IDPA friends to make any sanctioned match work, and most of them will bring great ideas as to how to make the match more fun and memorable. The Sheepdog is not just known for our cool Sheepdog theme. It is known for the crazy socks that people started wearing to shoot and work matches. It is known for the "Most Outstanding Safety Officer Team" awards that competitors themselves vote for with poker chips. It is known for SOs setting up a snack station for the competitors. All of these special experience touches never would have happened if we were determined to only

set up targets, shoot them and tally the scores. All of these ideas were from the minds of IDPA friends who said, "Let's do this!" My advice to you is that if it is legal and conforms to the spirit of IDPA, then just say, "YES!"

Social Media is Your Friend

Social media is a platform that allows friends to communicate. It is exceptionally convenient for friends who live in different states. In fact, I have dozens of IDPA friends in other states that I connect with daily just by checking Facebook. A huge factor in the rapid growth of the Sheepdog is social media exposure.

Also, having a respectful social media following also gives your match sponsors

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more value. Traditional match sponsorships are only being exposed to the shooters at the match in person and just 2 or 3 times on the day of the event. With an established social media platform, your sponsors can give you video commercials, pictures and sales brochures that can run all year, not just on match day. This allows you to give the sponsors more value for what they donate and can increase both the amount of what they give and frequency in which they come back in future match years.

I cannot overstate the principle that any sanctioned match looking to grow and

sustain itself in the future should have a dedicated, branded Facebook page that communicates with shooters and interested persons throughout the year so that they do not forget you and a yearly match Facebook event page where shooters can state interest, commit to registering and follow match news up to the kickoff of the current match this year. I would also highly recommend connecting with as many shooters as possible through Instagram too.

Now, I know that some do not like social media and that is ok. But you likely

have someone in your IDPA network of friends who can take this on as a staff role and it is well worth comping them a shooting spot just as you would for a safety officer, scoring official or stage tech.

Be Generous

There is no doubt in my mind that part of the success of our Sheepdog match is due to our commitment to raise money for a great cause while we shoot, compete and have fun. I understand that not every match is in a situation where this is possible, but when it is possible it adds a sense of comradery and "feel good" to the experience. This is not to say that you should execute the match on the cheap. Raffle guns, extra shirt sales, challenge coins, side matches and donation jars are all easy ways to support a good cause! At the 2018 Sheepdog, we gave away a challenge coin (featuring our popular mascot) to every competitor that spent \$20 or more on our Glock 45 raffle. We raised around \$8,000 for a \$685 raffle gun!

Again, these are just ideas but they are things that have made the IDPA

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MATCH REVIEW



Besides a match full of great stages, you will find a match full of great laughs.



Sheepdog CCP Championship not just a great match, but an experience that people love and talk about all year long. By using these tips and some new ideas of your own, you can build one of those matches where people are asking, “when can we sign up for next year?” before you get through the awards ceremony! Good luck!

Not too long after Compact Carry Pistol was created I was approached by Rick Denny in north Florida about his idea for a specialty match that would benefit a charity. To make this a unique event, it was his idea to have a single division event with CCP pistols since this division has been considered to be very close to the origins of IDPA. I instantly loved the idea and jumped in lending my full support to both have the match approved by HQ, and to help work with him since even though I knew Rick to be a conscientious safety officer, this was his first attempt at directing a sanctioned match.

I have been saying to people for a few years that there are two very different components to running a successful match.

The first part is operations. This consists of finding dates, designing the stages, handling approval and getting the match

online, procuring props and match supplies which are consumables, recruiting and managing the staff, managing set up and getting it right, managing the registration and stats and officiating.

The second part, and in many ways the most important part is the ‘event planner’. I call them the Wedding planner actually.

This person or crew organize the graphic designs, markets the match, finds event sponsors, orders awards, finds a place (or tents) to host the awards ceremony, finds a sound system, organizes a photographer and media, organizes food and beverages, finds signs, banners & prizes, decorates, runs raffles, and sells next years match.

What I discovered with Rick Denny is a person that put together a good team for all of these tasks, and successfully executed the plan for his first major match. I remember feeling that this single division match had a different feel to it from the other larger matches I had been around because of the simplicity of the event. As a tier 2 event with a single division, it brought about other elements that simplified running shooters and officiating which was nice since this was a one-day event.

The results of this and the efforts he

described in his article, were that this match has been branded now with a national reputation and has outgrown the range facility where it was first held.

The next Sheepdog match will be a Tier 4 and hosted with Little River Sportsmans Association in Valdosta, GA. Having seen the stages, I can say the next match will be a well-balanced match for compact guns and has a few different stage ideas that I thought were innovative. I respect the way Rick has gone about building this brand and sharing his lessons with the membership. He represents the best of everything IDPA represents and is a great friend and mentor to many of our members.

-Rick Lund, A27521
Eastern Region AC Lead, IDPA

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Rick Denny, A905838

Rick has been the Match Director for the Sheepdog CCP Championship since 2017. The 2018 match sold out in 21 hours after registration opened and match raised money for Trinity Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter in 2017 and 2018. The 2019 edition of the match will be a three day event at LRSA IDPA in Valdosta, Georgia on December 6, 7 and 8 of 2019.