



NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY

Virgil Morris points with pride to the National Championship Trophy won by his Junior Rifle Club team in 1953. Morris has been associated with the team since its beginning as an outgrowth of a Hobby Club project in 1948. (Observer Photo)

Virgil Morris Devotes Time, Energy To Junior Rifle Club

By NEIL ANDERSEN
Observer Staff Writer

"I like to work with kids, like the way they make you think. Sometimes I wonder how I can rig up an answer for them."

This is the way Virgil Morris explains his 11 years of training children in the use of small bore rifles. It is also the history of the La Grande Junior Rifle Club.

During those 11 years Morris has turned out a national championship team, state championship teams and several individual champions to add to his outstanding record.

The Junior Rifle club first came into being back in 1948 as an outgrowth of a Hobby Club activity. Morris, then president of the senior group, was asked to give instructions in a course on marksmanship for Hobby Club members. From there the project, like Topsy, just grew.

Guides Club

Morris won't take the responsibility for the growth of the Junior Club, although he has guided the club's fortunes since it was founded.

"The entire membership of the La Grande Rifle Club has been responsible for the success of the Junior Club," Morris said.

And a success it has been. In 1953, the La Grande team won the National Championship for juniors (12-18 years). Morris was responsible for three state championships in 1952-53 and 54. In 1954, Margaret Blizard was the national girl's champion. Deanne Morris' eldest daughter, tied for the championship in 1955 but lost in a shoot off. For two years, 1955-56 Deanne was the girl's state champion.

For nine years, from 1950 to 1959, the La Grande team has won the state title six times. The last two years haven't produced a winner but Morris isn't worried about it. He figures he will come up with a winner again soon.

500 Participants

Over the years Morris estimates that more than 500 children have taken part in the program. The club's biggest year was in 1951 when 87 members were en-

rolled. The program was so big that it was held two nights a week so that all the members could finish shooting before midnight.

There are 32 members enrolled this year but Morris expects to have a turnout of more than 50 before the season is through. The club's main aim is to instruct children in the safe handling of fire arms, particularly 22's.

"If they don't learn anything else except the safe handling of fire arms the program would be beneficial. If you take a kid and pound it into him he won't forget," emphasized Morris.

Program Teaches Responsibility

The program actually teaches more than that. Over the years the team members have developed a sense of responsibility toward each other that has provided them with a good basic background for life.

Morris' fondest memory of his years with the Junior Club is not provided, oddly enough, by his national championship team. Instead it comes from an example of the cooperation that is found among team members.

Years ago two teams from La Grande entered a tournament in Hood River. Both teams won first place in their respective classes. But the B team outshot the A team by 11 points. Morris credited the winning effort to the cooperation and teaching the B team members did among themselves.

Morris has been active in shooting sports for many years but his first love is baseball. He was manager of a semi-pro team in Nebraska for three years before he moved to La Grande in 1937. He tried to get a baseball program going in this area but gave it up and played a little softball before becoming active in the senior rifle club.

Enjoys Television

He still enjoys baseball and watches the games on television. Basketball is another favorite game and he attends as many games as possible through the winter. An old baseball knee injury makes walking on the ice to

he remembers the entire team. The list includes Edmund Brown, Phil Cochran, who has been an assistant instructor since his first year, Jim Evers and Martin Blizard.

"If the Hobby Club hadn't started the idea when they did, who knows how long it might have taken to get this club started," Morris concluded.

A wonderful page in the La Grande sports book might never have been written if it hadn't been for Hobby Club—and Virgil Morris.

get to the games a little difficult and handicaps his shooting a little.

"My knee gives me a little trouble but I still make it bend to shoot in the kneeling position," Morris said.

The veteran instructor lives with his wife, Dorothy, and has two daughters at 2010 Cove Avenue. Deanne, 29, is presently taking nurses training in Portland. Ruth, 16, lives at home with the folks.

Morris is the owner of the La Grande Auto Salvage Co. He celebrated his 20th anniversary with the business Aug. 15.

The 58-year-old Morris (he was born in Nebraska, Oct. 24, 1901) claims not to be much of a hunter. Despite the wonderful hunting available in the area, he claims never to have shot a deer or elk since he has been in this country.

When the first club began in 1948 it had 10 charter members. The kids each put up a dollar to get the charter with the National Rifle Association. Morris tried to name the 10 original members but could remember only five. The club's records didn't have an accurate list either. The five members Morris could remember were Glen Steele, Lester Chandler, Vernon Stewart, Gerry Melinger and Lonnie Carroll.

As for his national champions,

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he remembers the entire team. The list includes Edmund Brown, Phil Cochran, who has been an assistant instructor since his first year, Jim Evers and Martin Blizard.

Top Quints Clash In Week End Action

United Press International

After a week of preliminary sparring, seventh-ranked St. Louis entertained fourth-ranked Ohio State Thursday night in college basketball's first collision between top-rated teams this season.

The game also will feature a duel between two strong All-America candidates — Big Bob Nordmann of St. Louis and Ohio State's Jerry Lucas.

Although only a sophomore, Lucas already has lived up to his press notices as the most publicized court star since Wilt Chamberlain left Philadelphia for Kansas. The 6-9 center averaged 25 points a game as the Buckeyes trampled Wake Forest, Memphis State, Pittsburgh and Butler in their first four outings.

Nordmann, a ponderous, 6-10 junior center, captivated New York fans last week when he led St. Louis to an upset victory over St. John's, the 1959 National Invitation Tournament champion. The Illinois also shipped Abilene Christian and Kansas State in recording a 3-0 early season record.

Maryland, Louisiana Tech, Notre Dame and Texas Christian scored the most notable triumphs on Wednesday night's slim schedule.

Al Bunge, Maryland's 6-8 sen-

ior center, enjoyed the greatest night of his collegiate career in leading the Terrapins to a 70-62 victory over Virginia. He scored 10 of Maryland's first 12 points and wound up with 34. Little Tony Laquintano paced Virginia with 18.

Louisiana Tech snapped Mississippi State's 18-game winning streak, 71-62, as center Jackie Moreland led the way with 16 points.

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