

## TARGET

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Springs Highway, and sends the scores to the Oregon Clay Target League for updated standings. The Bobcats will likely travel to several regional shoots, according to Martens, before competing at the state championship in Hillsboro in late June.

### Stronger together

For Gage Martens, trap shooting has been a hobby of his since he was 8 years old. While the junior is one of the more experienced on the team, the Union clay target team is open to student athletes with minimal experience. He noted that teamwork goes a long way for each individual shooter to improve a variety of skills.

“There’s a great team element, especially when you’re up there on the line with them,” he said.

Sophomore Charleen Pepper was new to the sport upon joining last year, but has quickly found a productive environment with the team.

“This team is very supportive,” she said. “They give you pointers and they tell you ‘good job’ when you hit one. It’s not a toxic team, which is great.”

### Practice makes perfect

After hours of practice at the Union Gun Club, stepping up for the recorded officially scored session can be a mental challenge for members of the team.

Gage Martens stated that gaining the skill necessary to hit the clay targets is only half the battle in scoring highly.

“Trap shooting is about 20% your shooting and the rest is mental. I think I’ve really improved my mental game through this,” he said. “The drills (the coach) puts us through really helps to improve on that mental skill. When you’re out there and get close to that 25 straight, it can really get into your head and you can get nervous.”

For Pepper, the right mindset can go a long way as well. She noted that focusing on the target and not overthinking are elements in recording a strong score.

“Patience is key,” Pepper said. “Waiting and accuracy are things I’ve improved on.”

### Fostering the sport

Still a relatively young program, the team’s organizers and members alike are seeking to grow the sport locally. The Union High School team partners with the Union Gun Club and owner Dave Dahlstrom in providing the space and resources to compete in clay target shooting — the



James Anderson, left, Jackson Davenport, middle, and Gage Martens cycle through a clay target shooting routine at the Union Gun Club on Tuesday, April 26, 2022. The Union High School clay target team records its own scores on a weekly basis and will compete at regional and statewide competitions later in the season.

team previously traveled to La Grande for competitions and practices, making it difficult for some students to find a ride.

On a nationwide scale, the USA State High School Clay Target League is hoping to have 100,000 participating students by 2025. The league was founded in Minnesota in 2001 to increase youth involvement in the sport and has grown into a nationwide competition.

Supporting the team locally in Union is an extensive effort, as Dan Martens works with the National Rifle Association, Oregon Hunter’s Association and local sponsors to provide the resources necessary for the team. In addition, Martens credited Faulk’s Mini Mart in Union for being a strong financial contributor to the program — the store previously raffled off a gun that brought in roughly \$7,000 toward the team. According to Dan Martens, a larger team with about 20 students costs about \$3,500 to put together targets, supplies and rounds.

“Without their help, these guys wouldn’t shoot for free. Shooting is expensive, which is why we have some school guns available.”

In addition to supplies, the program at Union has worked to supply guns at the range for students who do not personally own one or may be using one that does not fit them properly. With the donations and efforts from larger organizations, the Union team is able to allow newcomers

and experienced shooters alike with ample resources to grow in the sport.

Dan Martens noted that the overall goal of the team is teaching high school students a skill that they can take with them in life, emphasizing safe gun usage as the integral part of the program.

“To me, the most important part in my role is teaching these kids gun safety,” Dan Martens said. “If that’s all we ever get done out of that, then I’m happy.”



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

Union High School Clay Target team member James Anderson surveys the shooting range during a team competition at the Union Gun Club on Tuesday, April 26, 2022. The team meets weekly, sending off scores to the Oregon Clay Target League for regular season standings.

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Jackson Davenport aims at a clay target during a Union High School Clay Target team competition on Tuesday, April 26, 2022. The team, which is in its fourth year as a program, includes seven student athletes who compete in the spring.

