'Tradition of Excellence - Legacy of Champions'

Written by Reporter Audrianna Turpin, Cowley County 4-H Shooting Sports, 7/24/26

"There is immense power when a group of people with similar interests gets together to work toward the same goals." — Idowu Koyenikan

For the past 15 years, Cowley County 4-H Shooting Sports has proudly been represented at the National 4-H Shooting Sports Championships. Each year, our competitors along with other Kansas youth from across the state have attained national recognition as National Champions, Reserve Champions, plus many other honors. This sustained achievement not only provides clear evidence of a tradition of excellence rooted in the dedication of our coaches and the commitment of our youth, but it also illustrates how both individual achievements and collective effort are essential in shaping and sustaining the club's legacy.

As we recognize and thank each participant for their hard work and perseverance, we are reminded that these accomplishments reflect our central purpose: developing a strong community built on teamwork, resilience, and mutual support.

What steps are required to qualify for the National 4-H Shooting Sports Championships?

Meet one current member and several alumni from Cowley 4-H Shooting Sports who were willing to share their stories with us. They went to Nationals and come back National Champions.

Kaden Webster - 2026 National Reserve Recurve Archery Champion

17-year-old Kaden Webster, a Cowley County 4-H shooting sports member from Winfield, Kansas, has been part of the club for five years. During that time, he served as vice president in 2025-2026 and competed in both recurve and compound archery. His love for the sport began when he joined his grandfather and father at 3D shoots. Although he felt nervous at the beginning of nationals, he focused on having fun throughout the competition. Earning a place at nationals was a significant accomplishment for him. In preparation for the unpredictable weather in Grand Island, Nebraska, he practiced extensively both at home and during club practices.

Kaden describes nationals as "an absolute blast, with highlights such as teen night and visits to the water park, which made the experience unforgettable." Participating in Cowley County 4-H Shooting Sports, advancing to state, qualifying for National Championship and placing second overall in recurve archery discipline was an experience he will never forget. It provided a valuable opportunity to meet new people and step outside his comfort zone. Overall, he described it as 'an amazing experience'.

In our county, once you've practiced enough and reached at least 80% of a qualifying score, you head to a county qualifier, which for Cowley County is usually held in Sedgwick County or Cowley County. If you shoot a qualifying score there, you move on to state, where practice gets more intense as you double

the targets by adding in 3-D and Trail targets. If you place in the top four at the state match, you're invited to join the Kansas Nationals state team in Grand Island, Nebraska, where it's held every last full week of June.

Everett Green - 2024 National Reserve Small-Bore Rifle Champion.

"You only get better with practice."

Cowley County 4-H alumnus Everett Green grew up in Arkansas City, Kansas, and was 17 years old when he competed at the National 4-H Shooting Sports Championships in 2024; he is now 19. He joined the shooting sports program after his father struck up a conversation with club coordinator Austin Waite and was encouraged by him to give it a try the following season. What began as a simple introduction quickly grew into a five-year commitment to the program.

During his time in 4-H Shooting Sports, Everett competed in BB, muzzleloader, small-bore rifle, and small-bore pistol, ultimately qualifying for the national team in small-bore rifle. He also embraced leadership within the club, serving as treasurer during the 2022-2023 year before being elected club president for the 2023-2024 club year.

One of the greatest lessons Everett gained through shooting sports was the value of discipline and focus. The sport taught him to develop the patience and determination to practice the same skills repeatedly until they became second nature; an approach he said has benefited him far beyond the range. When his placement was announced, it came as a surprise to him. He had performed worse than expected during the silhouette portion of the match and thought it would keep him out of the top three. Still, he chose to give his best and stay composed. Even during the awards ceremony, his mind lingered on silhouettes, convinced he wouldn't place. So when his name was called, he was shocked and deeply honored. His first trip to nationals the year before had also taught him the importance of endurance. He remembers preparing for the long hours of competition, especially in the summer heat which required intentional physical and mental conditioning. Looking back, Everett credits the experience with helping shape not only his success as a competitor but also the mindset he carries into everyday life.

Hunter Mericle - 2018 National Reserve Hunting Skills Champion

Cowley County 4-H alumnus Hunter Mericle grew up in New Salem, Kansas, and was 15 years old when he represented Kansas at the National 4-H Shooting Sports Championships in 2018. Now 23, he looks back on the experience as one of the highlights of his 4-H career.

Hunting and shooting had always been part of Hunter's life, making the 4-H Shooting Sports program a natural fit. He participated in the club for nine years, spending countless hours sharpening his skills through practice at home, time in the woods, and state hunting skills competitions. By the time he qualified for nationals, he had competed in numerous strong performances. Because of that preparation and experience, he said he wasn't especially nervous heading into the competition.

Looking back, Hunter remembers the National 4-H Shooting Sports Championships as an unforgettable experience. In addition to competing against talented shooters from across the country, he enjoyed meeting others who shared his passion for hunting and shooting sports.

For current 4-H members who hope to one day compete at nationals, Hunter offers simple advice: *"Devote as much time as possible to practicing. The dedication you put in beforehand can make all the difference when the opportunity to compete on the national stage arrives."*

Jade Alquest - 2013 National Air Pistol Champion and 2014 Small-Bore Pistol Champion

'When you fail – when, I say - not if. ..You get back up, you take what you've learned, and you go again. 'Cause here's the thing about not knowing where to start - it means you're still in the process."

Cowley County 4-H alumnus Jade Alquest grew up on a farm east of Winfield, Kansas. At 17, he went to Nationals in 2013, his first year competing in Air Pistol. The next year, at 18, in 2014, he took on 22 Small Bore Pistol. Now, at 31, he's a certified pistol and shotgun instructor in the county and has served as a National Kansas Small Bore Pistol team coach. Always passionate about shooting, Jade jumped at the chance to join when Austin Waite continued as the county coordinator of the program in 2010. After a few years, he began competing in qualifiers alongside 4-H friends like Kyle Bliss, Ben Ray, and Billy Wollard—who also attended the National Championships - just a few among many over the years.

During his time in the club, he served as president from 2012-2016 and participated in archery, shotgun, 22 long rifle, 22 pistol, BB, air rifle, air pistol, and hunting skills to include wildlife ID challenge.

At Nationals, he was nervous; with 35-40 states represented then and 360-plus competitors, it was quite the crowd to take in, but extra practice and his coach, Richard Becker, and assistant coach, Brett Bannon, helped him calm down.

He highly recommends that anyone who can should attend Nationals at least once during their 4-H years. From the week-long hotel stay, heading to the range every morning to practice for the next day's competition, to relaxing in the hotel playing games or swimming in the pool—it was all part of the fun. Celebrating his birthday by going out to eat, having his coach announce it, riding a saddle at the local Texas Roadhouse, and shouting 'Yeehaw!' made for great memories. Looking back, he really misses those times; they were some of the good ole' days.

However, the most memorable experience for him was hearing his name announced throughout the entire stadium, running down the row, high-fiving every participant along the pistol row before reaching the stage, and being presented with the overall Pistol award. Reflecting on this moment, he emphasizes how meaningful such recognition was, not only as a personal milestone but also as a culmination of years of dedication to the sport. He believes that the sense of accomplishment and community fostered by such an experience is something every participant should have the opportunity to experience.

His advice for someone wanting to go to nationals in a certain discipline is *"to stick with one discipline and master it all year" to go on to Nationals. "Don't bounce back and forth between three different disciplines. Pick one you like, go in that. Because you can only go one year in that discipline, and once you go, you can't go back to nationals in that same discipline. If you truly, truly want to go to nationals and succeed, you have to practice and dedicate time to practicing."*

This year, 768 youth from across 42 states in the nation came together to see who was the best of the best. The State of Kansas team was tied as the 1st place team in the nation.

Could it be your name called next summer at the 4-H National Championships ?

If you're interested in joining Cowley County 4-H Shooting Sports, email cowley4hshootingsports@gmail.com or stop by the local Extension office to sign up for the next 4-H year starting October 1st!