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Tribunal upholds appeal over winner of national shooting championship

The Sports Tribunal allowed an appeal by Martin Hunt against a decision of Target Shooting New Zealand (TSNZ) over who won the 2015 New Zealand International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Men's 50m prone championship.

On 27 February 2015 Martin Hunt had the top score in the final of the national ISSF men's 50m prone championship and anticipated receiving the winner's medal.

The final involved the top eight shooters from the qualifying rounds. The eight shooters then all went through a number of rounds with the lowest scoring shooter in each round eliminated until there were only two shooters left. Those two shooters then fired two shots each. Mr Hunt had a higher score than the other shooter (R) in that final round.

The ISSF rules stated that "*Qualification scores entitle an athlete to a place in the Finals, but do not carry forward. Finals scoring starts from zero in accordance with these rules*".

However, the winner's medal was not awarded to Mr Hunt but to the other shooter R on the basis that the TSNZ Trophy Steward Guidelines provided for qualifying round scores to be added to the final score. When R's qualification scores were added to the final scores he had a higher score than Mr Hunt. TSNZ said this approach had been used for a number of years and prevailed over the ISSF Rules on determining a winner.

After an unsuccessful protest and internal appeal to TSNZ, Mr Hunt appealed to the Sports Tribunal. There was a challenge to the processes by TSNZ. The parties accepted the advice of the Chairman of the Tribunal that there had been breaches of the principles of natural justice and then requested the Tribunal to interpret the Rules.

The Tribunal noted in 2013 the ISSF introduced a new approach to the running of some events and the manner in which the winner was determined and this applied to the 50m Men's prone championships. While it hadn't been possible to run 2013 and 2014 events under the new regime, the 2015 championships were operated substantially in conformity with the new ISSF approach.

The Tribunal stated: "*In our judgment it makes no sense to adopt a new different and quite radical approach to the running of a competition but to continue to award medals on the basis of the discarded approach...We consider that it was a natural and necessary corollary of the new approach to the event that the award of medals would reflect the change.*"

Mr Hunt was told the scores had been aggregated because it was in the Constitution and was a TRNZ Rule. The Tribunal found nothing in the Constitution or Guidelines to support this and noted that the Guidelines were not rules but guidelines about the running of a championship and did not proclaim how a determination of a medal winner was to be made.

The Tribunal said: “We find nothing which was an impediment to the winner’s medal being awarded to the winner of the contest as it was conducted in the real world. Common sense, fairness and transparency require no less...Having been requested to do so by TSNZ, we find that the 2015 National ISSF Men’s 50m prone champion was Martin Hunt and he is the recipient of the Winner’s medal.”

The decision in this case is available from the website of the Sports Tribunal (www.sportstribunal.org.nz). See *Martin Hunt v Target Shooting New Zealand* (ST 09/15). Copies can also be obtained directly from Brent Ellis, Registrar, Sports Tribunal of New Zealand (telephone: 0800 55 66 80; e-mail: info@sportstribunal.org.nz).