

# George Barton

## *misses out on medal dream*

by senior correspondent Jennifer Martens



Australian Olympic Skeet Shooter George Barton, right, with his dad Col.

Entering the Men's Skeet event in Beijing, everything was looking good for Australian George Barton. His shooting in training had been spot-on. His family was in the stands and shooting conditions were just about perfect - "the best they had been in two weeks", said the turf farmer from Tamworth. After the first day of qualifications, George was sitting in fourth position - just where he wanted to be. Unfortunately, in less time than it takes to hit a clay target, George's dream of winning an Olympic medal fell to pieces. "I lost concentration for half a second and dropped a full pair," recalled George.

"It is something that should never happen."

This is where George says he struggles the most. Prior to the Games he said, "I hit the hard ones and then when it becomes a little easier, I have been known to relax a little and lose concentration." And that is exactly what happened in Beijing.

While that lapse of concentration kept him out of the finals, his shooting before and after that was enough to see him finish in a respectable 17th place, which is much better than his 29th place finish in Athens.

"Athens was a major failure for me,"

said George. "If I hadn't improved on that in Beijing, I probably would have called it quits."

The father of three said that while he was extremely happy with his shooting before he missed the pair, he is disappointed with the end result because he was in such good form leading up to the Games. At the Olympic test event at the same venue a few months earlier, he finished in 5th place out of 200 shooters. "To go below my world ranking of 13 is pretty disappointing. I'm not happy. I didn't go to Beijing to be 17th."

Despite his frustration, George's maturity and experience will allow him

to head back to the range with something positive. He says, "You have to come away from every competition you go to with something that you need to work on to make yourself a better person and competitor. If you don't, I think you have wasted your time. Even if you do everything perfect, you can come away knowing what you did to prepare for that event." This is the attitude shared by world-class athletes and one which will see George continue to improve in the sport and in the world rankings.

With a lesson learned and more experience gained, George will now shift his focus to the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India. He's had success in previous Games, winning bronze in Melbourne in 2006 with his brother Clive. "I've potentially got another two Olympics in me...but I'll consider London after the Commonwealth Games."

His performance may have left a bad taste in his mouth, but that didn't stop George from savouring all that the Olympics had to offer. "I was fortunate enough to be at the Bird's Nest when Usain Bolt won the Men's 100m and broke the world record," beamed George. Other memorable moments

included seeing Warren Potent win a bronze medal in the Men's 50m Rifle Prone event, celebrating with his friends who won a bronze medal in the hockey, and having his family in the stands cheering him on.

Due to financial constraints, his father, Col, nearly wasn't able to watch his son compete in his second Olympic Games. But thanks to a \$5000 grant George received from the Johnson and Johnson Athlete Family Support Program, Col was there, heading up his son's fan club. George applied for the grant to thank his father for the role he has played in

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his shooting journey. "Dad has been an inspiration to me throughout my career. He's been my long-term mentor, friend and coach," said George.

Because he didn't think he would win the grant, George didn't tell his dad that he had applied. "Once I found out that I had won, I immediately called my dad. He was on a tractor doing farm work and he thought I was pulling his leg. It actually took a second phone call to convince him," he recalled with a laugh.

George said that aside from the nerves his father experienced while watching him compete, the trip was very enjoyable for his parents. "He and my mum went on a few tours and met a lot of people. It definitely opened his eyes to this part of the world."

Running a turf business during a severe drought while trying to maintain his position as a world-class shooter has given George a unique perspective on life. "Shooting a clay target is not hard compared to all the other things you have to do in your life," he said.

While the drought has not released its grip on New South Wales, George is hopeful that his Olympic medal drought will break in London in 2012. ●

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