"A Virtual Bomb by the Name of Opelka"
599 out 600 possible points with the air rifle.
An analysis by Vladislav Sanak, Czech Trainer

At the international competition for air guns in Munich at the end of January, the 27-year-old rifle shooter, Lubos Opelka, from the Czech Republic achieved an incredible score of 599 out of 600 possible points in the second of three competitions with the air rifle. I have known Lubos Opelka since his early youth and know his special approach to training and competition. I also had the opportunity to watch him in this competition and to talk to him afterwards. His training methods, mentality and shooting philosophy are so interesting, that I would like to reveal some of their aspects here with his approval.

At the age of 12, Lubos started with rifle shooting. It fascinated him, and at the age of 15, he became a member of his shooting club in the Bohemian Region of Leipar where he then started to train with the smallbore a year later. He made rapid progress and was therefore accepted into the Training Academy in Plzen. This also opened the door for his acceptance into military service at the Police Training Academy. One day during a manual job, he suffered a severe injury to his left hand with multiple fractures and thought that his shooting career had come to an end. The healing and rehabilitating process lasted one year, during which he also had to struggle against psychological consequences. This unfortunate situation even haunted him in his sleep. He became nervous and had little self-confidence. He finally sought help in physical and mental exercises and began to practice yoga. He then successfully applied this experience to sport shooting, returned to the sport and completed his military service within the Sports Department in Plzen. But he was still not able to hold his own against Kurka Bakes who was far more successful than he was on the international sport shooting scene. He has worked in an office for two years now, where he is given a lot of free time for training from his boss. However, he still has to attend to his studies and his family. Lubos Opelka is not a beginner. He competed in the European championship in Zagreb as early as 1989 and in the world cup in Zurich in 1990, where he achieved downright commendable scores. Of greater interest to us here though is how he trained in recent years and how he managed to leap into the elite class of air rifle shooters. I personally think that there are two reasons for his tremendous improvement. The first is that he already has the appropriate training, and the second is the methods and philosophy with which he approaches the preparation for a competition and its execution. Lubos belongs to a class of "workoholics". He is a fanatic and acquires an itch for training by the mere mention of the word shooting. Even as a junior, he trained in two phases with his brother, getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning and continuing his training after school. During his 22 month military service in Plzen, he trained up to eight hours each day. And since the shooters practically lived at the shooting range, he was also able to train at night, if he suddenly came up with a new idea. In Plzen, under the guidance of his trainer, Baroch, he even completed a program, in which the required stability for all three positions were developed during the winter months thanks to dry training.

Especially remarkable is his aiming position while standing. The distance between his feet is approximately equivalent to the width of his shoulders, but the tips of his feet are turned slightly inwards, and his heels slightly outwards. He said that this helps him to keep his hips in a fixed position. He rests his left hand on his chest without touching his hip bone. His lower arm almost forms a right angle, and his left hand in his glove supports the shaft. (see photo).

His body is tilted somewhat to the back, his head slightly leveled and the lower half of his right arm and elbow are exposed. Lubos has the feeling that his body is merely a support on which the rifle hangs. He assumes that his exposed body will not affect his shooting and could possibly not even react to the shot. This idea forms the basis of his shooting position. His approach to finding the correct balance of his gun is also extraordinary - by training in the dark. For example, when he changed over from the FB 602 air rifle to the new FB 603, he tried to balance the position of his rifle with weights by acquiring a mere feeling for it in the darkness. He had to feel the rifle forming a balanced system with his body. Equally curious is his training with the air rifle in the dark without seeing the target. His goal at the beginning was to fire the shots within a diameter of one meter. But now he hits the 10 m target without a sighting possibility, that is without light. This also proves his extraordinary muscular sensitivity and ability to control his muscles. We had the opportunity to objectively examine his extraordinary abilities with the help of a device used to measure stability. This device records the movements of the gun before the shot, the hit, and the reaction after the shot. We adjusted the device to indicate the point, at which the gun is aimed two tenths of a second before the shot is fired. On the graphs of several shooters, these points were dispersed over the entire target. However by Opelka, the rifle reacted exactly the same after each shot.

The method he uses for his shooting position is directly related to the way he fires a shot and to the way he thinks. The goal of the shooter is to merely per-
receive the picture of the front ring sight and the central point of the target within it and to perceive when his finger pulls the trigger and fires the shot without a conscious command. Absolute stillness, stability and relaxation of the body are required for this. And you can see the processes here that have been partially taken from yoga. The technique of breathing is used to acquire a steady pulse, the relaxation of muscles and the transfer to the subconscious which takes over control of the finger. However, this coordinated work with the subconscious does not simply hap-