



Rockensock Pursues Passion for Trap Shooting in Minnesota Crookston Team's Inaugural Season

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Beth Rockensock (Second from Right) with some of her teammates on 2019-20 Minnesota Crookston Trap Shooting team

CROOKSTON, Minn. - Trap shooting is one of the fastest growing sports both nationally and in Minnesota. It was reported that in 2010 there were under 400 students competing in the sport across the state of Minnesota. Those numbers have taken off, as in 2019 it was reported that there were 362 teams in Minnesota with over 12,275 participants. Over 8,000 of those competitors flock to the Alexandria Shooting Park every June to compete in the Minnesota Trap Shooting Championship.

It is due to these numbers that colleges across Minnesota, and the nation are jumping on board and launching trap shooting teams. In 2019, the USA College Clay Target League launched with nine teams competing in two conferences. The sport has already grown at a collegiate level with 31 teams representing 21 states now in the USA College Clay Target League.

The University of Minnesota Crookston is one of those schools that joined the USA College Clay Target league and launched a competitive team. The Golden Eagles had a very successful first season in 2019, finishing second in the USA College Clay Target League IA-Conference 2 with 1,888 points.

Beth Rockensock, a native of Menahga, Minn., was one of the inaugural members of the first Trap Shooting team for the Golden Eagles. She has been no stranger to helping start Trap Shooting teams, as she helped get her high school team at Menahga off the ground. Rockensock had come from a family where her father was a firearm safety instructor. She had heard about the growth of trap shooting at the high school level and did what she could to help Menahga get a team off the ground.

"I heard about trap shooting, somebody was talking about it in school," Rockensock said. "They said that it has been becoming a sport in high school. I was in eighth grade, and I said you know what we need to get this going. So I was talking to some people and we ended up getting a trap team going my eighth grade year. Our team was the Menahga Bird Busters. Our first year that is what we came up with as a team and it has stuck ever since. We never changed the name. Every year I placed in the top three for female shooters. My first year I got third place, the second year I was in it I got first place, and then I got second place."

Rockensock's trap shooting career really took off as a senior when she met the Girtz family from Park Rapids, Minn., and was offered the chance to shoot at their shooting range on their property. They have a son, Cole Girtz that has placed in the Top 15 nationally twice in his career.

"I met some people from the Park Rapids Clay Dusters team and they have a shooting range at their house," Rockensock recalled of a chance meeting with the Girtz family. "They said, if you really want to improve and if you really want to move on in trap shooting and see where it takes you, why don't you come to our house and get some extra practice in. I took them up on their offer and I shot there pretty much every day between 50 and 100 rounds. I have enjoyed it ever since. That really sparked my interest even more."

Rockensock wasn't able to continue her passion of trap shooting competitively until Minnesota Crookston started up their team in the USA College Clay Target League during her junior year in 2019. Rockensock had thought it would be a great idea to have a college team with the great rise of interest in the sport in the state of Minnesota, and was happy to have the opportunity to continue to pursue her passion at Minnesota Crookston.

"My senior year of high school I said that this would be so fun to do in college," Rockensock stated. "It was becoming so big in Minnesota. My first year of college we didn't have it. I knew we just needed to get a trap team to Minnesota Crookston. There are other colleges that are doing this, so we need to get this going. Once I heard that the college was thinking about it, I was like okay we need to get moving on this and try to find a coach and get some interest in this. I know there is interest out there because look at how big it is growing in the high schools. They are going to want to keep this going in college."

The Golden Eagles had a great first season as they had six shooters finish in the top 30 in their USA College Clay Target League and finished second in their conference. Rockensock finished tied for 30th in the conference and was Minnesota Crookston's top female shooter during their inaugural season. Rockensock's best performance came hitting 46-of-50 targets in week two and week four. Though Minnesota Crookston wasn't sure exactly how the first year of competitive trap shooting would go, it has been an absolutely perfect fit for the University. Rockensock is excited for the future and the potential the program has for the Golden Eagles.

"I am so excited," Rockensock said regarding the potential of Minnesota Crookston's trap shooting team. "I didn't really know what to expect going into this because I wasn't sure who we had for shooters and how much interest we actually had on campus. Going through the season, as we got further into the season I realized we have a really good team. I think we have a really bright future. I honestly think we can do great things and really make the University of Minnesota Crookston proud."

Part of Minnesota Crookston's success is due to Head Coach **Andy Gjerwold**. Gjerwold, an alumnus of Minnesota Crookston and native of Crookston, was part of launching the Crookston High School team with his father Darren Gjerwold and has been integral in starting out trap for the Golden Eagles.

"He is a great guy," Rockensock said regarding her coach. "It is nice because he graduated from Minnesota Crookston only a couple of years ago. He is our same age and he can connect with us. He understands what we are all going through school-wise. He knows how busy college life can be. He makes it easy and fun for us to do this. He is not super strict on coaching. He likes to have fun but he likes to be serious too. He makes the sport fun. I am actually a coach for the high school trap team. I took the assistant coach position when I graduated. When I come home on weekends I coach. I kind of know what he goes through from a coach's perspective. There is a lot of stress with that, trying to get everything organized. I give him a lot of credit for taking this up in the first year of the college doing this. It is a lot to take in. He has been doing really well!"

For Rockensock, Minnesota Crookston has been a perfect fit. Not only does she get to pursue her love of shooting clay target, but Rockensock also gets to pursue a major she loves with equine management.

"Minnesota Crookston is perfect for what I want to do," Rockensock said. "They have all of the resources. It is very hands-on learning. All of the classes I have taken we have gotten all of the hands-on experience that we need."

Minnesota Crookston has allowed Rockensock the opportunity to chase her dream. She hopes to either open up a therapy ranch where people with disabilities can have therapeutic horse rides, or work at a ranch bible camp. Rockensock will get to pursue the latter through an internship this summer as she will work at YMCA Camp Classen, located in the Arbuckle Mountains of southern Oklahoma.

"This summer I have an internship in Davis, Okla.," Rockensock said regarding her summer internship. "I am going to be working at Camp Classen. I am going to be leading trail rides and working with kids. That is right up my alley. This internship will be great to see if this is something that I really want to do. That is another thing that I like about Minnesota Crookston is that they really want you to get an internship to see if that is what you really want to do. I love that they give you the opportunity and try to get you to think about what you really want to do. The professors and everyone is so easy to work with and so easy to talk to. The student-faculty ratio is really nice, as well!"

Rockensock has one year remaining at Minnesota Crookston. It is bittersweet that she only has one year left to shoot trap for the Golden Eagles, but she can't wait for one final opportunity to bond with her teammates and put together a great second season of trap shooting for Minnesota Crookston.

"I am kind of sad that trap shooting will be over for me," Rockensock said. "I wish that we had a program when I started school. It has been nice to be a part of it right when it started up. To see where the team can go in the next year and see how much more interest we can spark. It is not about the team size, it is about the quality of the team and how well we can do together. It makes it nice when you have a team that shoots well together, that gets along. You don't have to have a big team to be successful. I think that this trap shooting sport will skyrocket in the next few years with all of the interest in it. It will be a great sport for Minnesota Crookston to have."

So while Rockensock's time with the Golden Eagles will end next year, she will be an integral part in continuing the ascent of Minnesota Crookston in the sport of trap shooting. What was once just a vision of what the program could be for the Golden Eagles has started to come to fruition. Student-athletes like Rockensock are the reason for the program's success and are sure to be the key to the growth of the sport at the collegiate level. We can't wait to see what Rockensock and future Golden Eagle trap shooters are years to come do to make Minnesota Crookston a destination for high school trap shooters who want to continue to chase their dream and compete for a top-notch program.



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