



RISE — OF THE — RANGERS

THE NORTH RIDGEVILLE, OHIO, TEAM HAS
FOUND BIG GROWTH IN SIZE AND SUCCESS

by **MATT KRUMRIE**

WHEN VANESSA DONATO CAME HOME with a flyer recruiting students for the North Ridgeville High School Trap Team in Ohio, her father, Tom Donato, wasn't surprised.

After all, his daughter is a softball pitcher, plays basketball, shoots a compound bow, and is in the marching band. She's busy, active, and involved.

The thing was though, his daughter had never shot a gun. So Tom and Vanessa sat down and watched a YouTube video to learn more about clay target shooting.

Within minutes, she was hooked and wanted to give it a try. Four months later, at age 14 and in eighth grade, Donato finished as the top girl at the 2019 Ohio State High School Clay Target League State Tournament (with teammate Ruby Neimojewski finishing second).

The North Ridgeville High School Trap team, founded in 2017, has had a long list of both team and individual success in its short history. It finished third in the state in 2017, second in 2018, and second in 2019 (spring). Other top individual performances include Cameron Wensing (first place, 2017 Novice Division); Isaiah Connick (first place, 2018 Boys Varsity Division, High Gun Overall); and Graicen Riley (first place, 2018 Girls' Novice Division).

The Rangers won their conference last fall, with Daniel Konesky finishing first, Owen Walls second, and Nick Markovic third. Konesky also won High Overall Average. For the girls, Rhiannon Vance finished first, Donato second, and Lilly West third.

The team was founded under head coach Grant Connick (now an assistant coach), with 19 members. It now





IN JUST FOUR MONTHS, VANESSA DONATO WENT FROM BEGINNER TO 2019 OHIO STATE HIGH SCHOOL CLAY TARGET LEAGUE STATE TOURNAMENT FEMALE CHAMPION.

has 50 team members (39 boys, 11 girls) in grades 8–12 competing at the Sportsmen’s Gun and Reel Club in Lorain, Ohio.

“I am amazed at how mature the athletes are and how they respect each other, how eager they are to try something new, and strive to do well,” says head coach Terry Rogers. “We pull from a wide range of kids joining the team each year. Some play other sports, some are in the band, some are in the national honor society, some are online gamers, but for all of them this is a way of connecting with their peers. A select few have shot before joining but for most of them this is the first time that they have handled a gun.”

As a coach, Rogers enjoys the challenge of molding students with no experience into athletes averaging scores of 17–23 out of 25. He also enjoys the camaraderie between coaches, athletes and parents, many also new to the sport.

“We have a tremendous parental backing,” Rogers says. “I believe it is because we promote having fun and parents can and do get involved at several levels. We are a big family.”

Rogers heads into the 2020 spring season looking for big things from Konesky, Walls, and Markovic, along with Alex Jutte, Nathan Jutte, David Hoag and Drew Inceze. Vance, Donato, and West lead the girls’ team. All have the potential to take home medals in the 2020 Spring Conference, and State, Rogers says.



The best part of shooting sports has to be the even playing field. It doesn’t matter if a student is a boy or a girl, big or small, young or old, everyone has the same opportunity.” –VANESSA DONATO

He is quick to credit his coaching staff and the support of those at the Sportsmen Gun and Reel Club.

“The staff and club members support our team without reservation,” Rogers says. “Some of them are highly qualified and experienced shooters and have taken an interest in our team. They provide high level technical coaching; they also understand that the future of the sport resides with the youth.”

Donato is having a blast supporting his daughter and her teammates. In July of 2019, he watched Vanessa compete at Nationals in Mason, Michigan, where she

shot 186 of 200, earning three 25-straight patches and placing 295th overall out of 2,000 participants.

“This past year for our family has been a truly amazing experience, filled with memories that will last forever,” Donato says. “The team focuses on safety first, of course, but also competition and fun with a family type of atmosphere. “Watching kids from grades 8–12 interact with each other as one team is really cool. The best part of shooting sports has to be the even playing field. It doesn’t matter if a student is a boy or a girl, big or small, young or old, everyone has the same opportunity.”



NORTH RIDGEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL TRAP TEAM

WHERE:
NORTH RIDGEVILLE,
OHIO

TEAM SIZE:
50 (39 BOYS/
11 GIRLS)

MASCOT:
RANGERS

HEAD COACH:
TERRY ROGERS

GRADES PARTICIPATING:
8–12