



NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION
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NEWS RELEASE

Olympic Sharpshooters Meet with FFA Members

INDIANAPOLIS – Michael Phelps wasn't the only U.S. athlete to bring home the gold and break world records at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Two members of the U.S. Army won gold in Beijing, and signed autographs for dozens of FFA members at the FFA National Career Show today. Specialist Vincent Hancock, 19, and Sergeant Walton "Glenn" Eller III, 26, are both members of the Army's marksmanship unit.



Fair-haired and always moving, Hancock hails from Eatonton, Ga., and started shooting at age 10 with his father and brother. A year later, he began his competitive career, and began shooting internationally. Hancock competed for seven years, all the while dreaming to win Olympic gold.

Two and a half years ago, between his junior and senior years of high school, he joined the Army. At age 16, he won his first World Championship in men's skeet shooting. Just shy of his 19th birthday, Hancock landed a spot on the U.S. Olympic shooting team, competing in the skeet shooting division.

Eller, taller with light hair, calls Houston, Texas, home, and has been shooting with his dad since he was 8 years old. He joined the Army two years ago.

Hancock and Eller trained almost daily between the Olympic team trials and leaving for China. Before heading to Beijing, the U.S. shooting team trained for a week in Korea. Hancock and Eller were two of twelve U.S. Army soldiers representing the U.S. on the Olympic shooting team. Eller said their jobs in the Army helped them prepare for the competition.

“Part of our job is to train other soldiers to shoot,” he said. Eller competed at the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games, so the Olympic experience wasn’t new for him.

“It was crazy,” Eller said. “The (Olympic) Village was incredible.”

In 2007, Hancock was named the USA Shooting “Shotgun Shooter of the Year.” In Beijing, he distinguished himself as an international “shooting” star. During competition, Hancock broke two world records, winning the gold in skeet shooting.

“It was a dream come true for me,” Hancock said. “You can’t put it into words. It’s such a range of emotions to have that gold medal placed around your neck and watch them raise the U.S. flag. You can never prepare yourself for that moment.”

Eller competed in his first Olympics at age 18, but credits his experiences in the Army for teaching him discipline, giving him better training and a positive learning environment. He joined the Army between his second and third Olympic Games.

“Being in the Army helped me push myself to achieve my goals,” Eller said.

Eller’s father, who taught him to shoot, and the rest of his family, has attended each Olympics to cheer for him. At his past two Olympics, Eller had placed in the top 20, but never in the top three. He took the gold in double trap shooting.

“You want to laugh and cry all at once,” he said. “You kind of shiver, and then walk around with a permanent grin on your face.”

Since returning home from China, the pair hasn’t slowed down practicing. Right before attending Convention, Hancock had returned from the World Cup Finals in Belarus, where he got the silver in skeet shooting.

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The National FFA Organization, formerly known as the Future Farmers of America, is a national youth organization of 507,763 student members – all preparing for leadership and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture – as part of 7,439 local FFA chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The National FFA Organization changed to its present name in 1988, in recognition of the growth and diversity of agriculture and agricultural education. The FFA mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. Visit www.ffa.org for more information.

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