

BRONZE STAR RECIPIENT AND TOP SHOT COMPETITOR ASHLEY SPURLIN an interview by *Cheaper Than Dirt, America's Ultimate Shooting Discounter*

Ft. Worth, Texas - April 15, 2011 – The Season 2 - Top Shot competitor **Ashley Spurlin** is more than just a crack shot with a rifle. He has served in the US Air Force since 2001, the majority of the time as a Combat Controller attached to various Special Forces units overseas. During one of his deployments he coordinated critical air to ground attacks to support an operation; his actions there earned him a Bronze Star.

It took a bit of doing to get a hold of him to do an interview. Ashley is currently serving at an undisclosed location and, due to the nature of his mission and in the interest of national security, wasn't able to tell us anything about what he is doing, but we got a very long distance call through to him earlier this week and were able to talk with Ashley about his background in the military and his experience on Top Shot.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Tell us a little bit about your background and how you first got started with firearms. Did you have any experience hunting or shooting with your family before joining the military?

Ashley Spurlin - My family was not a hunting family per se, not like you might say Chris Reed. We weren't a traditional hunting family who would go hunting on the weekends. I would say, compared to other families, that it was very, very limited, just a .22 here or there or a small caliber pistol as a child, but I never really got serious about shooting until I graduated from Basic Training on January 1st 2001 when I went through basic training for the Air Force at Lackland Air Force Base.

Cheaper Than Dirt - At what point did you make the decision to begin pursuit along that Special Forces route? I know that's a long path in the military and takes a fair amount of determination to achieve.

Ashley Spurlin - I can start from even before that. My father is a retired Army Airborne Artillery Officer, and my mother's father was also a retired Army Infantry Officer who was in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. I came from being a military brat from two military families.

Going into the military was never forced on me, but it was always kind of there. I decided to go through with that, and my father was the one who suggested to me that, if I was going to join, that I look at a few particular services, as opposed to other ones, based off of what he knew from being in for 20+ years, as well as my grandfather who said the same thing. He actually knew about what the Air Force had in their Special Tactics side of the house, which includes Pararescuemen and Combat Controllers.

So, I did the research online and found out what limited info I could, because this was pre-September 11th and a lot of people did not know what Combat Control was whatsoever. I did some research and decided to go at it from there.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Many of our readers may not be aware of what an Combat Controller is and what they do. I know when I first heard about Combat Control I had the vision of an Air Traffic Controller sitting in a control tower or AWACS directing air traffic on the battle field, but that's not really what it is.

Ashley Spurlin - No, that's probably 180 degrees out from what it is actually. However, we are certified Air Traffic Controllers through the United States Air Force, and you do get an FAA certificate and card for a rating as an actual Air Traffic Controller. Because of that, some guys can get a follow-on tower rating, so even though I was a rated Air Traffic Controller, I do not have a tower rating. I could not go to a certain Air Force base or airport near your location and work in the tower, whereas other Combat Controllers who have follow-on training can do that, but all Combat Controllers are certified Air Traffic Controllers.

The reason that is so important is because when we are attached to a Special Operations Team such as a Navy Seal Team or an Army ODA team, which 90% of the time is who you're going to be working with, the reason we're so good at what we do is our understanding of the Air Traffic Control portion of the military and how it works. A lot of guys are trained how to do a call for fire, whether it is with a helicopter, or with artillery, or with a bomber, or fighter, or whatever it might be, but because we've been to Air Traffic Control school it just allows us to understand it better.

A good analogy would be to relate it to a chess game. A master chess player can be four or five moves ahead. If you can do that on the battlefield controlling aircraft, you can pretty much always make sure that you've got complete coverage with rounds impacting the targets, with artillery impacting the target and helicopters being sequenced and bombers being sequenced, and all of that done with everything being safe and no mid-air collisions, no fratricide or anything like that. That's what sets us apart from other guys in the DoD.



Cheaper Than Dirt - As an Air Force Combat Controller, you're actually deployed on the ground with U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) and your job is basically to direct the aircraft supporting their operation?

Ashley Spurlin directing air traffic in Afghanistan (Courtesy photo)

Ashley Spurlin - Yes, that is 100% correct. The more military precise definition would be that we control all air to ground assets, meaning that my priority on an SF team, as an attachment to a Special Forces team, whereas internally they have their own medics, they have their weapons specialists, they have their team leader, and they have their demolitions expert, we get tagged along and our job is to handle anything air related that impacts their job on the ground. They look at us and they go "Hey, I need helos to get us out of here," or "I need bombs on target," or whatever they need, and that's my specialty when I'm attached to that team.

Cheaper Than Dirt - In 2007 through 2008 you were deployed with a Special Forces Detachment, I believe it was Alpha 3313, and you had some interesting things happen during that deployment and were awarded a Bronze Star for your actions during that deployment. Tell us, what happened during that deployment?

Ashley Spurlin - Yes sir. Initially I was actually attached to a 7th Special Forces Group team, and then they rotated out and I was then attached to a 3rd Special Forces team that rotated in that year. In between those two

times I went through two transitional weather cycles where you have a winter, spring, and summer time and so the action picked up a little bit and we were doing a lot of offensive missions.

It's one of those things where you'll hear the same thing a hundred times from a hundred different guys, we were just doing our jobs. If somebody above me pay grade wise decides what I did warranted a certain award of whatever caliber, that's on them. To me, I was just doing my job.

The mission was a very large air assault infiltration on multiple helicopters and we had multiple other air assets in the area going into a village, knowing that it was pretty full of enemy combatants. Once we got on scene and started taking effective enemy fire, my job at that point was, once again using the air assets I had at the time, prosecute and eliminate those enemy threats, thereby allowing some of my teammates who were pinned down in some accurate fire to escape from said area and break contact from those guys and continue on with the mission and nobody ended up getting hurt.

Cheaper Than Dirt - That was the Waturpor Valley operation?

Ashley Spurlin - Yes, the Waturpor Valley, and that area a lot of people might associate that with the one right next to it called the Korengal Valley, which is a really, really bad area. They did a movie; correction, I don't want to call it a movie because it's not. It's 100% a documentary called "Restrepo" and Sebastian Junger wrote book last year about it called "War" and that documents that same area of operation. To this day it is still is really, really heavily guarded by the enemy combatants that reside there.

Cheaper Than Dirt - What type of weapons training does someone attached to a Special Forces unit and an Combat Controller such as yourself receive to be able to go out and perform your job?

Ashley Spurlin - The first weapons training that I received was at what we called Advanced Skills Training or "AST" and that is just for Combat Controllers specifically as we're getting our upgrade training. It would be the equivalent of BUD/S for SEALs or ROBIN SAGE exercises for Special Forces guys where they are pretty much fully qualified but they still need to get the final elements to get them fully mission capable and mission ready.

We do our own in school training with multiple different weapons, and some foreign weapons, AK-47s, L1A1s, FAMAS, things like that. After that though, once you get on the team and once you're fully checked out of training, we get sent to certain schools that a lot of people associate with small unit tactics training such as the DARC Direct Action Response Course. These are schools that a lot of civilians would be familiar with, and we just go to those to get with some of the best pistol shooters in the country or in the world, or the best rifle guys. We'll go to their schools exclusively and get the training.

I was stationed in Okinawa and I was fortunate enough to get attached to the 3rd Recon Marines out there and I went through one of their Special Operations Training Group schools. It's a 5-week CQB school which is M4 and 1911, and that was probably one of the best schools I've ever been to for shooting; hands down.



Ashley Spurlin (center) during training with Deep Recon Marines during a seven-week Dynamic Assault Course while he was a combat controller with the 320th Special Tactics Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Group, Air Force Special Operations Command. Photo Credit: Lance Cpl. Travis V. Easter

Cheaper Than Dirt - You're out there on active duty, deployed to these war zones and I'm wondering just how you heard about Top Shot while you're actually out at the tip of the spear? And on top of that, what prompted you to apply to be on the show?

Ashley Spurlin - I was working at Keesler Air Force Base, in Biloxi Mississippi as a Combat Control Instructor, which is part of our unit progression. Usually midway through your career, they're going to send you to be an instructor somewhere, which is actually really beneficial to all the new guys coming through, because you have all of these instructors who have combat experience from 2001 when they were the first guys in here, all the way up to today. We're able to give our kids all the information we have that we've learned, to give them real world experience.

While I was there I was introduced to USPSA pistol shooting, and I started out as a rookie with a tactical mindset. Every weekend I was trying to shoot with these guys who had been shooting USPSA and IDPA matches and they were just destroying me. I mean, it's ridiculous the disparity between a tactical shooter and a competition shooter. It got me intrigued enough to say *"Well, I think I'm better than you guys, I just have to learn your strategy and learn the game side of it,"* and so I started to get really involved with it.

One weekend I heard some guys talking about the show and, because I was in Biloxi Mississippi, that region right there is the same region that Blake [Miguez] from Season 1 shoots in, and these guys were watching him every week saying *"Hey, Blake's still there, he's doing really well,"* and I didn't really know what these guys were talking about, so they told me about the show.

So, I tuned in and I watched it, and just like every other guy who watches the NFL and says *"Oh, I can do that!"* I was watching Top Shot and thinking to myself that *"Hey, I make that shot! How's he missing that?"* So, I found out that they were doing a casting call for Season 2 and I applied and sent in an application like everybody else. I got an email back asking me to send in a video, and I decided to get a bunch of my teammates who were there with me to make a video.

I haven't been able to post my video online, because I'm not allowed to upload anything on the computers where I am right now. Once I get home, I'll gladly upload it for people to see. Basically I made a 5 minute video of myself at a range with all sorts of weapons from ancient times, all the way up to modern 10-inch short barreled piston operated M4s.

Actually, it was quite a funny video, and I guess the producers liked it and thought “*This guy is just somewhat of a character,*” so they flew me to Los Angeles and we did the qualifications. I went through the qualifications and made it to the final 16, and that was that.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Many people don't realize what kind of sacrifices have to be made by our service men and women, not just when they are deployed, but to be able to take the time off to be on the show. You only have a certain amount of leave that you can take for personal reasons. Was it difficult to be able to get the 5-6 weeks off to be able to stay out in California and be on the show?



Ashley Spurlin (left) on a beach near Biloxi Mississippi with a fellow service member training for a rucksack march to honor a fallen comrade. (Air Force Photo)

Ashley Spurlin - Because I was in an instructor slot, it was easier than it would be if I was on an active team. If you're on an active team, you're either TDY, training, or you're getting ready to deploy overseas or you're getting ready to come back from overseas and go into your training phase. Because I was an instructor, I got the go-ahead from my supervisors to be able to take the leave to be able to go out and do the show.

Also, a lot of guys, not just Special Operations guys, but a lot of people nowadays have a whole lot of leave saved up because it's so hard for us to take leave. You

have what's called “*use or lose*” where if you go over 60 days of leave you start to accrue more, and I had more than 60 days saved up, so it just worked out well timing wise for me personally, and my supervisors allowed me to go.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Did you have any idea of what to expect once you got on the show? Did you do any preparation before heading out there to California and pick up some other weapons and try to practice some shots?

Ashley Spurlin - As far as practicing with any sort of different weapon, like Daryl recreated every shot in his back yard and became proficient with primitive weapons, I didn't do anything of the sort. I just stuck with the fundamentals as far as using a Glock 17, I used a Smith & Wesson M&P 9mm and also the .45, and I just stuck with the standard AR-15, shotguns, and M4s. I also used some bolt action .308 Remington 700 platforms and just anything I could get my hands on, but it was all pretty much standard military issue as far as 9mm, .45, 5.56 or .308

Cheaper Than Dirt - Presumably your training within the Special Forces prepared you to be able to adapt to any situation, pick up a weapon, and be proficient with it. Did you find that to be the case?

Ashley Spurlin - I think that, in my head, I found that to be the case. Meaning that, confidence wise, I was never flustered or in awe of any of the challenges that were presented to me in the competition. The one thing that I thought was the hardest was the lack of knowledge that we have as contestants.

They do such a good job of keeping you in the dark until the very last second. When they spring it on you, you can try to tell yourself that you're not intimidated or surprised. When you go to practice you might see one certain form of the target that you're shooting at, but then when you go to the team challenge or the elimination challenge, such as when Kyle and I and we were hanging upside down shooting revolvers, I said to myself *"OK, I'm not going to get flustered by this. This is no big deal. I can do this."*

Then, when we got to the actual challenge we were spinning around on the wheel repeatedly. So, yeah, they do a really good job of keeping it really, really interesting, and I'm actually worried that they'll run out of scenarios for the next few seasons. But, as far as how they do it, how they manipulate your senses to try to mess you up as best as they can, they do a really good job of that. I think that's the hardest part about Top Shot as opposed to a USPSA competition where you know the rules before you go onto a stage.

For example, they can change the rules on us any time they want. They can say *"Hey, this time, it's based on time,"* or *"This time, it's based on who hits it first,"* and so it's always something different. You have to be very dynamic.

Cheaper Than Dirt - We did see those challenges evolve such that you might not know if you're going up head to head or if it was going to be a blind event where you didn't know what your competitor was doing. One thing that we've seen in Season 2 is that there is quite a bit more drama going on, and there seems to be a bit more of a social aspect to the game. Did you have a strategy going into the show of how you would deal with social aspects of Top Shot?

Ashley Spurlin - I think that another thing that the viewer, or somebody watching the competition misses out on is the fact that they only get one hour to see what we have going on over the course of the three days that it takes to film each episode. What I mean by that, is that you are only allowed to see only a tiny sliver of what actually does go on, and that's the case for any type of reality show that only has a one hour block of television. Unfortunately for the viewer, they miss out on a lot of stuff whether it is comedy, team bonding, or whether it's inter-team fighting no matter what it's over, a lot of people don't get to see that and I think that can sometimes affect how the viewer can judge certain competitors, myself being one of them.

As far as a strategy, the Blue Team initially went with the idea that we were going to base who goes into the elimination based off of their last performance. The Red Team decided to do it based on the overall competition. Looking back on it, I think that the Blue Team should have done that instead of going off of the last performance because we lost a lot of good shooters early on. I think that hurt us when it was team versus team, and I think the Red Team had a better strategy.

I also feel that the Red Team had better overall shooters from day one. Even the rules of being able to pick your team, as opposed to last year, was another rule change that was put on us that we had no idea was coming. We had no idea what was going to happen. We just tried to make the best of it.

Cheaper Than Dirt - We saw that strategy start to change for the Blue Team when Jay was nominated by Daryl. When we spoke with Daryl, he explained that he felt Jay should be sent to the nomination range based on his overall past performance. There had been some friction on the team there, but after that the Blue Team



dynamic changed a bit and nobody left the team meeting without knowing who was going to be voting for who to go to the elimination.

*Ashley Spurlin shown during his tour in Afghanistan.
(Courtesy Photo)*

Ashley Spurlin - Yes, that is 100% correct. We had all promised each other that we were going to vote based on performance only, and there were a few weeks there where there was some

inter-team drama where Jay was rubbing people the wrong way and we had some problems with it. People were trying to be polite because we're all living in the same house together, until finally we just said *"Hey, it is what it is. We've just got to man-up and call each other out."*

We did that and some of it was shown on camera and some of it was not, but afterwards, like you just mentioned you saw on camera a definitive change in everybody where even Jay said *"OK, I got it. I see what I was doing wrong and I'll make sure to correct it,"* and Daryl said *"OK, I was wrong in doing what I did,"* and then everything was good to go from there, except for the fact that we just kept losing team challenges.

Cheaper Than Dirt - It did seem like once you got down a little bit that it was difficult to keep the morale up and keep the team performance up. Two weeks ago we saw everything distill down to the individual portion of the competition and the green jerseys came out. Last season, the nomination range kinda went away when it came to the individual portion of the competition. That was not the case this season. In fact, the nomination range stayed and it seemed to boil down to a popularity contest.

Ashley Spurlin - I guess, yeah, for lack of a better term. If I had to be 100% truthful, it was a popularity contest. Again, going back to the competition being a bit of an experiment with us being the lab rats and the people running the competition being the scientists, they really just dropped that bomb on us.

I remember seeing that competition on TV and they showed Jay's face and then showed Jamie's face, and they were both shocked, just like everybody else was. It was a rule that was put on us as contestants, and once those rules are put into place you have to abide by them or you can quit and walk away. Since it was put in

play, much like other shows that are based on alliances and popularity, I guess I'll say Survivor, it almost becomes a rule, a strategy that you have to have to be able to stay in the house. We saw that.

You saw people say *"Hey, I made good friends with this guy, and I like him more than I like you so I'm going to vote for him. Screw shooting ability."*

Cheaper Than Dirt - Let's talk about those alliances. Early on Jamie seemed to be a bit ostracized by his teammates. This most recent episode we saw you and he get into it for a little bit. Give us some background there, because obviously we only get a brief glimpse into the actual situation on television. What brought about that confrontation?

Ashley Spurlin - Like you said, his team from week two when they sent him and Athena to their first challenge, his team for whatever reason had something that they didn't like about him. I was on the other team, so I wasn't really privy to that information. But, after you live in a house with certain people for so long, obviously that information is going to trickle out.

Kind of like how everyone on the Blue Team was somewhat irked by Jay for some time, I think it was something similar on the Red Team with Jamie. As time went on in the house, I started to develop a perception that some of the information that he was telling people, no matter what team they were on, wasn't 100% accurate, and I had a big problem with that.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Information with regards to what?

Ashley Spurlin - Regarding his background. I remember several episodes ago where George was asking *"Hey, what is it exactly that you do? I'm not quite sure because one day you do EOD stuff, the next day you're a rescue swimmer, the next day you're a comm guy,"* and I've run into several people like that where you run into them in a restaurant or a bar and they say *"Oh yeah, I'm in Special Forces,"* or *"I'm a SEAL,"* or whatever.

He never said any of that, he definitely never said he was Special Forces or a SEAL or anything like that, but he never denied it either. I kind of had some problems with that integrity-wise. Whereas Joe said *"Hey I was in the Marine Corps for 4 years. I drove a fork-lift and moved gear around,"* and Chris Reed would say what he did or George said *"Hey, I teach kids how to shoot at Fort Dix."* I said that I was a Combat Controller.



Maggie said what she did, Jermaine told everyone what he did, and that was cool because that way everyone knew where they stood on everything.

Ashley Spurlin is awarded the Bronze Star for his actions in Afghanistan. (Air Force Photo)

Cheaper Than Dirt - Those without much military experience may not necessarily understand that the integrity with regards to

being honest about what you did and where you served and what ranks and awards you've earned is incredibly important. It can be very polarizing when someone is not upfront about that, especially when they are claiming certain military experience.

Ashley Spurlin – That's correct. I think that I'm extra sensitive to that because I have multiple friends who are in other Special Operations Command units, whether it is in the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines, and we've all had people who tell us that they do something, and it's very detracting or very unnerving when people tell you something and then you find out that it's not 100% true. It's just annoying.

When you're in a house full of 16 people trying to win \$100,000 the tiniest little thing starts to annoy you. Whether it's somebody not telling you the truth, or maybe it's somebody leaving 5 coffee mugs in the bathroom, you could get annoyed at that too. It's just the small things. A lot of military people will understand, if they're living 12 people to a tent like we are over here some times. The smallest little thing can become a huge factor. Because of my Type A aggressive attitude, I'm definitely not afraid to let people know how I think or feel or where I stand on certain issues, but I'll only bring them up if they're warranted, and that's what I did.

Cheaper Than Dirt - I believe Jamie had mentioned online that you were one of his favorite guys on the show and a good friend. Is that accurate?

Ashley Spurlin - Yeah, it's definitely accurate. Like I said, I'll never discredit his shooting ability. Obviously he's proven himself over and over again as a shooter. His own team voted him to elimination two or three times I think, and he's still there. I'll never have a problem with him, it's just that I may have a problem with him in other areas on the operational side of the house. As far as just going to Southern California and meeting up with him, Maggie, and anybody else out there, all 16 people in the house got along great. We talk to each other all the time, everybody is doing well, and I have no bad feelings or bad blood between anybody. It's all just perceived drama on a television show.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Everyone we've spoken to has said the same thing, they all ended up making good lasting friendships with everyone on the show. I think you made a great point about 12 guys being stuck in a tent and what happens when you have people living in close confines like that.

Ashley Spurlin - Yes, definitely, but this is the big difference is that the awesome thing about a competition like this, and I like to refer to it as a competition and not a show because a show makes it seem like it's fake and it's not, but in the competition you have 16 people who are all professionals from different styles of shooting, whether it's cowboy action or military or USPSA. When you put them in a house together everybody tries to be as professional as they can, but at the same time there's a \$100,000 sitting in a pot in the middle of the kitchen table and everybody is thinking about it every day.

It's kinda just like a ticking time bomb where you're thinking "OK, when do I play my cards? Who am I going to side with? Who is trying to shoot me out of here? Who do I need to watch out for?" So there's all of this strategy going on.

When you're with a team in the military, you're just trying to keep everybody safe. Nobody is worried about money. Nobody is worried about side plots or anything like that. It's just mission oriented, making sure that everybody comes home so that then we can talk about our girlfriends or wives, our kids, our cars, our guns, our hobbies, once everybody is safe. There's no competition going on between those guys.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Of course you're right, at the end of the day it is a competition on Top Shot. Some people have speculated online that things are scripted or that there are certain things that the producers have pushed or encouraged a contestant to do something to cause drama in order to create better television. Did you see anything like that?

Ashley Spurlin - No. Absolutely not, and that's probably the most asked question that I get, aside from "What's in your backpacks?" or "What are your tattoos?"

But, absolutely not, there is no scripting, there isn't anything like that. That's one of the things that really made me want apply to try out for this competition, because what people get to view is just a glimpse at a personality. George's personality is loud and boisterous and outgoing, and Jermaine was like the quiet assassin, and Jay was the professional no matter what he does, while I'm cool sometimes and hot-headed other times. At the end of the day all of that doesn't mean a thing. What matters is putting the bullets on the target.

Joe went to elimination with me, and he smoked it. I haven't actually seen the episode yet, but I know what happened because I was there. He crushed it. Even Colby and Iain were over on the sidelines were going "Oh my gosh!" and I was watching them, going "Yup, that's Joe." He's been a solid guy the whole time.

His personality doesn't get a lot of airtime, because he's a really quiet guy, but his performance has allowed him to get this far, and that's what I love about this competition. You can be the most flamboyant arrogant guy, and people can hate you. You can be a villain, you can be a victim, you can be a hero, but at the end of the day if you are shooting better than the next guy, or finishing at least one better than the last guy, then you have a really, really good chance of making it to the end.

That's why I like the theory behind the competition. Your personality doesn't matter at all. Your looks don't matter, the TV side of it doesn't matter at all. It all comes down to your skill set.

Cheaper Than Dirt - We've seen exactly that time and time again. Jay may not have been well liked when he was on the Blue Team, but he kept performing and he kept winning the elimination challenges. Jamie may not have been popular with the Red Team, and yet he performed better than everybody else.

Ashley Spurlin - And that's why I love everything about it. I think it's awesome, and I'm glad I did it.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Would you do it again?

Ashley Spurlin - No, probably not, just because I think other people deserve to get that spot, and I wouldn't want to be a part of taking somebody else's spot.

Cheaper Than Dirt - We've seen a couple of Top Shot competitors such as Iain, Blake, and J.J. return to the show as experts. If invited, would you go back as an expert?

Ashley Spurlin - Well, the first problem would be that I don't consider myself an expert at anything. Maybe an expert in trash talking or running up a hill really fast... maybe. Aside from that, I'm not sure that I have a leg to stand on as far as being an expert where you might see a guy like Iain who really knows this show and the competition, or guys like J.J. and Blake who legitimately are ranked World Champion pistol shooters. I don't have any titles like that or any credentials to be able to call myself an expert in anything.

Cheaper Than Dirt - We've seen a number of past contestants use Top Shot as a springboard to help bring the shooting sports back into the mainstream, to help gain more recognition for the shooting sports they participate in and encourage more people to also compete in sports like USPSA or IPSC. Do you see yourself doing anything to help promote the shooting sports and our 2nd Amendment rights?

Ashley Spurlin - Oh yeah, 100%. We all talked about that and I've seen a lot of talk and feedback from viewers on the internet. I feel that the production of the competition was a really good idea, but I think because they see other TV shows that get good ratings such as Survivor, and other reality shows, I think that they feel that they have to have that same recipe for this show.

However, what people really want to see is the shooting. They want to see people go head to head and we as the contestants don't want there to be a nomination range once we've made it to the Green Team. We didn't want that. We all looked at each other and said *"This is horrible. This is a nightmare!"* We want to see guys going up against guys who deserve to be there, and that's why I've seen several recommendations saying *"Hey, you need to change the format to keep a running tally or running percentage of who stands where, just like baseball. That way we can see that one guy is shooting at this percentage and another guy is shooting at another percentage,"* and various things like that.

That way people know clearly where the competition stands and get rid of the drama with *"Oh, Ashley and Jamie aren't getting along,"* or *"George is going to be next because he's been mean to Jamie."* Nobody cares about that stuff. I think there's a very small percentage of people who shoot guns who also want to see a drama television show at the same time. They want to see one or the other, and I think the people who want to see the shooting are going to be the traditional American families who want to incorporate shooting into their family as a hobby with their kids.

Whether it's plinking .22s or reloading .50 BMG, all of it is super awesome and I hate to see is people watching a show about shooting being turned off of it because they see Jamie and I in a perceived argument, or they see all of this drama going on instead of just watching us perform and seeing that George just outshot somebody or Joe just outshot somebody else and it's that cut and dry.

I think it's a really good platform to promote firearms as an industry as well as a hobby. You can see the depth that it goes, whether it's Chris Reed shooting stuff in his back yard or Brian Zins who is a 10 time champion or Eric who is a cowboy mounted shooter, all the way up to Maggie and her 3-gun stuff, it's a great way to showcase that stuff. By being able to showcase all of those different disciplines the average viewer is going to be able to find a type of shooting that they are interested in.

I think that if the producers would realize this, they'd have a really good thing going.

Cheaper Than Dirt - We saw the producers sit down with all of the contestants and ask them "*Why do you shoot?*" and it seems that part of the Top Shot experience has been largely educational as they learn more and more about the shooting sports.

Ashley Spurlin – Definitely; after talking to some of the guys from Season 1 and being one of the cast members on Season 2, for a professional shooter there were a lot of things that could throw you off that a normal viewer might not get to see. For example, we might practice with one firearm with a certain type of bullet, but then the next day during the team challenge there would be the same weapon, but not the exact same one you practiced with, or there might be a different weight bullet or a different type of ammunition.

It wasn't so much that the producers or the people running the show were trying to throw us for a loop, it's just that there is an honest disconnect between an actual shooter and somebody who is just trying to film it and be on the production side of it. They would look at us sometimes like we were crazy because we would try to tell them things like "*We need more than just 5 rounds each with a Barrett .50 caliber to get a good dope at a thousand yards.*"

They would respond "*Oh? you just can't shoot it and make it work?*" It just makes you kinda laugh, thinking they can't be serious. There honestly is a disconnect. They've tried to bring on several firearms experts to try to alleviate that stress between the shooters and the producers because sometimes we're speaking two different languages, but they want the same result.

Cheaper Than Dirt - It's certainly quite the marriage we've seen there. I think that the results are still coming out positively however, even with the introduction of some additional drama during Season 2. Overall, the show does great things for the shooting sports.

Ashley Spurlin – I just hope that people continue to watch the competition and remember that, no matter who the competitor is, there is a lot that they don't have time to show. I think some people can get a bad rap from that, me being one of them. Certain people can be perceived certain ways, and that's not always necessarily the way it was. From the production side of the house, in order to create a good story, which is what everybody wants; whether it is back in Shakespearean days or modern day Hollywood. No matter what you're going to have to introduce some drama into that competition whether it's Top Shot, the NBA, or the NFL. You're always going to have side stories that escalate the excitement.

I promise, even with what people saw between Jamie and I, they may think that's bad, but we've still got a few weeks left and it's going to get even worse. I highly suggest that they tune in.

Cheaper Than Dirt - Wow, well we can't wait to see what happens next.

Thanks again for taking the time to make this very long distance call from an undisclosed location. Keep your head down, and we all hope you stay safe.

Ashley Spurlin - Definitely, and everyone over there stay safe too and go out and have fun.

ABOUT THE TOP SHOT COMPETITION

Top Shot is an American reality television show that debuted on the History Channel on June 6, 2010. The show features 16 contestants, split into two teams of eight, competing in various types of shooting challenges. One by one, the contestants are eliminated until only one remains. That contestant receives a \$100,000 grand prize and the title of "***Top Shot.***" ***Survivor*** contestant Colby Donaldson is the host.¹



As a 10-year member of the elite Air Force Unit Special Operations Command, Ashley Spurlin has developed his shooting skills in combat--not competitions. "I've had the stress of direct combat as opposed to some people who are just competition shooters." He recently received a Bronze Star on his last deployment in Afghanistan. A graduate of the Special Forces Halo and SCUBA schools, he is used to adapting to any new weapon system with no prior training. A true and tested warrior, Ashley says he's quick to avoid people who don't share his mentality. (Photo from History.com Top Shot website)

SPURLIN BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Age: 34

Hometown: Richmond, VA

Occupation: Air Force Special Operations

Air Force Combat Control member for the last 10 years

Competes USPSA Production Class D

Received a Bronze Star after his last deployment to Afghanistan

Has used mortars and 105mm cannons

Considers himself an excellent shot with rifles and assault weapons

Top Shot competition results: Eliminated week 10

CCT @ The Eye of the Storm

From: GENE ADCOCK [mailto:gene.adcock@embarqmail.com]
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