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North Hills man helps Olympic shooters in Beijing

By [Chris Buckley](#)

Many athletes dream of Olympic glory.

California native and 1978 California Area High School graduate Dan Vitchoff helped three shooters visualize that goal, prepare mentally and then watched them "go for the gold."

Vitchoff, who owns Pennsylvania Hypnosis Center in the North Hills, is a sports psychologist. His recent first Olympic experience turned out golden.

In Beijing, he used his own "33 Method," which he kept under wraps until after the competition was complete. An all-encompassing program, it includes a combination of programs used in performance coaching, including hypnosis, NLP, visualization, breathing exercises and nutrition. Brain wave activity was monitored. The athletes also listen to music that manipulates and calms down the brain

Sports psychology is nothing new, but Vitchoff has taken it to the edge.

At Beijing, Vitchoff worked with three shooters. Vince Hancock won the gold in the men's skeet shoot while Walton "Glenn" Eller won the gold medal in the men's double trap. Both set Olympic record scores in the process. Jeff Holguin finished fourth in the men's double trap.

"Shooting is very mental," Vitchoff said. "Everybody who makes the Olympics could win on any given day. The winners are ones who are able to perform under pressure."

Vitchoff was introduced to shooters during an event at Ligonier in 2005. His involvement with the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit and U.S. Shooting began shortly after that.

This was Vitchoff's first Olympic experience.

"It was one of the most incredible experiences I've ever seen," Vitchoff said. "It was one of the most incredible displays of poise and talent I've seen."

The experience opened other possible doors for Vitchoff. He received inquiries from other countries.

"But I'm committed to these guys and to our country," Vitchoff said. "Seeing our flag go up that pole was truly inspiring."

Within the next couple weeks, Vitchoff will switch gears and seasons.

Vitchoff also works with golfers, hockey and football players, wrestlers and gymnasts. He is also working on a program to help basketball players improve their free throw shooting.

Because there is a certain amount of confidentiality with athletes, Vitchoff declined to identify other clients.

Vitchoff said he saw parallels between Beijing and the Mid-Mon Valley.

"One morning I got up to jog at 6 a.m.," Vitchoff said. "I thought, 'Hey, this looks a lot like the Mon Valley with people going to the steel mills.'"

"It reminded me of the Mon Valley. The people were very friendly and so accommodating. When I grew up, the people did not make excuses; they just got things done."