

AIMING FOR KENTUCKY

By Ron Wilson



While the National Archery in the Schools Program has come a long way in North Dakota in four years, some students could take it about 975 miles farther this month.

Seventy-one archers participated in North Dakota's first NASP state tournament in February, with the first-place team and the top five girls and boys in each division – high school, middle school and elementary – automatically qualifying for the national tournament in Louisville, Kentucky.

Elementary and middle school teams from Griggs County Central and a high school team from Dunseith took top honors in the virtual state tournament conducted in schools by local coaches and physical education teachers.

Jeff Long, North Dakota Game and Fish Department education coordinator, said in April it was uncertain how many qualifying archers in total would make the nearly 1,000-mile trek to Louisville. Yet, he did receive word the team from Dunseith was going, along with shooters from Griggs County Central, and from Mandaree Public School.

To help with travel costs, Long said the North Dakota Bowhunters Association donated \$50 to each student – roughly 20 kids, he figures – going to Kentucky. “I think this is awesome,” Long said. “It’s great to see NDBA getting behind the NASP movement.”

For those who go, this is what national tournament organizers are promising: More than 4,000 NASP student archers and nearly as many spectators. The 2008 NASP Nationals was hailed as the largest archery event in North America, featuring 2,865 participants.

According to NASP officials, the program was started in 21 Kentucky middle schools in 2002. Since its start, 4.6 million students have participated, and more than 5,000 schools in 46 states and four other countries have joined. Long said in four years in North Dakota, NASP has put bows in the eager hands of more than 10,000 students in 75-plus schools. “I knew this program would work in North Dakota because I knew the kids would like it,” he said. “I’m getting more and more interest from school officials about training staff to start the program in their schools.”

Exposing North Dakota archers to the NASP Nationals – the carrot at the end of the stick, Long calls it – will likely help build this archery in schools program around the state. Long said the Game and Fish Department goal is to have the program in 50 percent of the state’s schools. “It takes some time for it to gain momentum, and one of the keys is exposure, which is what the national tournament will bring,” he said.

What Long likes about the archery in schools program is that you don’t have to be able to dunk, hit a softball to the warning track, catch a screen pass or bend it like Beckham on the soccer field to participate. “You can be a fifth-grader from name-your-small-town in North Dakota



JEFF LONG

This young archer, one of more than 10,000 North Dakota students participating in the National Archery in the Schools Program, demonstrates the proper release.



Archery instills a competitive spirit, teaches participants to accept new challenges, and builds self confidence.

and go to the NASP Nationals and stand next to an all-American linebacker from Texas and have a chance at beating him," he said. "When kids pull back their bows, they all are on a level playing field, no matter their physical ability."

That's not to say that target archery isn't a physical sport, Long said, because to a degree it is. "I would say that about 95 percent of it is mental, though," he said. "While I can't really describe it very well, there is something organic about the sport because you're taking your energy and transferring it to the bow and sending an arrow down range to hit a spot on the target you are aiming at."

The act of pulling a bow string back to the corner of your mouth and releasing prepares students for other activities in life, Long believes, as it teaches focus, patience and discipline. "These are things that will help students succeed in the classroom and later in life," he said.

According to NASP studies, many students introduced to target archery in their schools want to become target archers or try bowhunting. Long believes that exposing thousands of kids to a shooting sport such as target archery will add to the recruitment of the next generation of hunters.

"The bottom line is that kids love it," Long said. "I knew they would."

For more on the National Archery in Schools Program call Jeff Long, education coordinator, ND Game and Fish Department, 701-328-6322.

NASP Tournament Notes

- Team division results – first-place elementary division, Griggs County Central; first-place middle school division, Griggs County Central; first-place high school division, Dunseith High School.
- 71 archers participated in the tournament.
- This year's contest was a virtual tournament, meaning teams held mini-tournaments at their own schools in February.

NASP Nationals

Turnout for the national tournament in Kentucky is bigger than expected, according to NASP.

Some notes on NASP Nationals from tournament officials:

- In mid-April, 4,942 archers had registered. That's 1,102 more than anticipated and 2,086 more than 2008.
- There is room for 4,860 shooters, which means four teams will be on stand-by waiting for a team to drop out.

New in 2009

- North American record for an archery tournament – 33 states and Canada represented.
- Saskatchewan, Wyoming, Oregon, Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, Arkansas and New York are sending archers.
- Flags from all NASP states, provinces and countries will fly at the event.

NASP Tournament Rules

- Each archer shoots one practice end of five arrows at 10 meters and then three scoring ends of five arrows (15 arrows total) at 10 meters.
- Each archer shoots one practice end of five arrows at 15 meters and then three scoring ends of five arrows (15 arrows total) at 15 meters.
- Archers have two minutes to shoot each five-arrow end.
- Beginning in the center of the target, scoring rings are 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1. An arrow touching the line is awarded the higher ring value. An arrow that isn't in a scoring ring is zero points. The X ring in the center of the 10 ring is scored only as part of the 10 ring.
- Highest possible individual score is 300 points.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota **OUTDOORS**.