STANDARDS IN SPORT: ARCHERY

The ancient art of archery, rooted in hunting and war, is a more peaceful sporting pursuit now. Even the regulations surrounding what competitors can and cannot wear are quite relaxed.

Target market

At first glance, Olympic event archery looks like another in a string of examples of sport taking a simple, ancient activity and turning it into something much more complicated. Of course, this is a small price to pay for turning weapons into instruments of athletic competition, as has happened in fencing and javelin too. And in any case, the complications are not too hard to explain.

At the Olympics, archery, first introduced at Paris in 1900 and ever-present since Munich in 1972, consists solely of recurve archery, whereas in the Archery World Cup, a second competition takes place for archers using compound bows. Bows, therefore, represent the big difference between disciplines.

The recurve bow has survived the centuries. Its tips curve away from the archer towards the target, which inspires the name. In ancient times, archers from Asia and the Mediterranean world used bows of this kind, while those in wetter climates appear to have preferred longbows, which usually look like a giant letter D, with little or no recurve at the tips. The compound bow is much more modern, with a system of cables and pulleys, often with wheels at the end of each limb, all of which helps the competitor to fire faster arrows at the target.

Let battle commence

In Olympic competition, there are four gold medals up for grabs: one each for individual women's and men's competitions and one each for women's and men's team competitions. Archers stand 70 metres from the target and, initially, shoot six rounds of 12 arrows each. Each

Chinese athlete Fang Yuting demonstrates the strength, skill and grace required to excel at competitive archery.

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competitor's score gives a ranking for pairings for the elimination stage. The individual match system changed for the 2012 Olympics in London, with each archer shooting three arrows in a set. The archer with the best score in the set receives two points or one point each if the scores for that set are equal. The match continues until one archer reaches six points, but if the scores are tied after five sets, an exciting single arrow shoot-off takes place and the person whose arrow hits the target closest to its middle point is the winner.

The team competition involves three archers from each country, but no changes in personnel are permitted between the individual and the team competitions. Just as for the elimination stages of the individual competition, the performance of each individual is combined to determine each team's ranking, and then the team elimination takes place, comprising four ends of six arrows per team (so that each archer will shoot eight arrows in the course of the match).

The Archery World Cup is a much more recent competition, starting in 2006, with archers competing in four different stages in four different countries before the best eight archers in each category advance to an additional stage to contest the Archery World Cup Final. It's an annual competition, with stages one, two, three and four often in the same place each year (Shanghai, Medellín, Antalya in Turkey have been recent favourites), while the final is always in a different venue (Lausanne is the choice for 2014, with the final taking place from September 5-7). There are six competitions in all: women's and men's individual events with each of the two types of bow followed, interestingly, by a mixed national team event, with one woman and one man in each country's team event. In 2013, South Korea recorded a clean sweep in the three recurve events, whereas a Danish archer won the men's compound competition, a Colombian competitor the women's and France the team event. The sport is now widely televised and, unlike at the Olympics, prize money is available to the winners at the World Cup.

Material concerns

The 2014 version of the federation's rules makes it clear what bow-makers can and cannot incorporate into the equipment they supply for official events: for example, logos and trademarks on bow risers (the rigid central section) are allowed, as are sights, on one each bow. But these sights must not incorporate any magnifying device or anything electronic. For arrows, too, the norms are wide. The official rules state: "Arrows of any type may be used provided they subscribe to the accepted principle and meaning of the word 'arrow' as used in target archery, and that these arrows do not cause undue damage to the targets." This covers a multitude, but it is necessary for all of the arrows an archer uses in a particular round of a competition to match.



Chilean archer Denisse Astrid Van Lamoen. Shorts must be longer on the leg than the archer's fingertips with the arms held straight by the side.

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Dress code

Of greater interest to this magazine is what athletes wear to compete in archery championships. "During the Olympic Games and World Cup Events, athletes and team officials shall dress in sports clothing on the field of play," says governing body, the World Archery Federation, in its latest rules, poetically describing these events as "majestic occasions", with "many dignitaries" in attendance. It wants its athletes to be of smart appearance, but once again, the World Archery Federation refrains from being too prescriptive.

In team competitions, team members have to wear the same uniform when taking part in a particular category, but the design itself can vary from category to category. In other words, a country's mixed team for recurve at the World Cup can wear a different design from the team for the compound competition. Big sports brands are involved: for example, competitors from South Korea, one of the sport's top countries, have official kit from adidas while rivals China are a Nike team. Team officials may wear a different style but should wear the same colours and should be easily identified as officials of the countries they represent. Putting the

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Nike uniforms worn at the London 2012 Olympics by the Chinese archery team.

Nike

competitors name and the three-letter acronym for the country they come from on the back of the uniform is optional at the World Cup and obligatory at the Olympics.

For women archers, the choice of what to wear includes dresses, skirts, divided skirts, full-length trousers or shorts. If she opts for shorts, the shorts must be longer on the leg than the competitor's fingertips when her arms are stretched by her sides. On top, she can wear a blouse or a more sporty top as long as it covers back and front and has at least a strap on both shoulders.

Men wear trousers or shorts, with a similar stipulation on the length of shorts as women competitors have, plus a shirt with either long or short sleeves. Oversize or baggy-style trousers or shorts are not permitted and the sport also says a big no to denim. If the weather is cool or wet, sweater, track suits and protective rainwear may be worn, but competition officials have to give their approval of these garments. Headwear is optional, and the only regulations that apply to shoes are that they must be sports shoes and must cover the whole of the foot.

Archery is, therefore, a lot simpler to cater for than may at first meet the eye. It's a test of skill, strength and accuracy and people like it; they always have, as the enduring popularity of the stories of characters such as William Tell and Robin Hood show. In France, in the course of 2014, the French Archery Federation, the FFTA, arranged demonstrations of the sport when a new musical based on Robin Hood, Robin des Bois, went on tour following a successful Paris premiere. Its estimate is that setting up a small booth in 17 places that the show travelled to allowed more than 12,000 people to try their hands at shooting arrows like Robin.

Helping those who want to participate more seriously to look the part will present the sports clothing industry with few problems.



Archery Top from Team GB suppliers adidas.

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