

Al Wills

Special Feature

Archery in Canada



At a recent FITA Star tournament at my local club, in Victoria, here on the west coast of Canada, the conversation turned to whether any of us would be attending the Canada Cup tournament in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Winnipeg is known as the geographic centre of Canada, so a non-Canadian wouldn't think it was that far away. We talked of driving and how long it would take—four days said one, three said another; if you didn't stop to sleep! So, what does that have to do with an article on Canadian Archery? Any discussion of it would have to include geography. Canada is some 4700 miles wide by highway, making travelling to tournaments out of town near impossible unless you're a pilot. Trying to plan any type of national event such as a trials or championships becomes a fast lesson in travel. This leaves Canada with many diverse archery regions, each with its own distinct characteristics. It would be hard to point to any one of these as a '3-D area' or a 'FITTA area'. Rather, each has its own purveyors of different disciplines. This diversity makes competition for teams and face-to-face competition very difficult. If anything is characteristic of Canadian archery, it is the difficulties archers face to travel to Canadian and International events to become competitive. The enormous challenges and costs trying to get to world class competition in Europe is a nemesis we deal with daily.

Travel isn't the only difficulty Canadian archers face. The other is, of course, winter! Most clubs in Canada cannot get any quality outdoor shooting until May and are usually driven indoors by the weather by October. This makes for a very short shooting season for international calibre shooters, necessitating again, travel! Most clubs use school or recreation organization gymnasiums, as very few cities have indoor lanes. Our close proximity to the U.S. means few



pro shops and even fewer indoor lanes—probably less than six in the entire country.

Canada cannot boast of a long history in archery. While the Plains Indians used the bow for hunting, there is no recorded history of organized archery until about 1867—pretty recent by comparison with our European friends! The first clubs were incorporated in the late 1920s and our first 'National' Championships were in 1931. These so called 'Canadian Championships' were held for many years in the Toronto area in association with the Canadian National Exhibition, with only the odd 'westerner' attending. In the 1950s the Canadian Archery Association (later renamed the Federation of Canadian Archers (FCA)) was formed and organized archery for all of Canada began. This started the tradition of clubs throughout the country submitting bids to host the national championships, a great tradition that continues to this day. The concept of "mail matches" was first used in the early 50s and continues to this day with as many as 200 individuals participating in any given year. This initiative spawned our National Indoor Championship that is shot regionally with as many as 700 archers competing. Our National Target Championships (usually referred to as 'The Canadian') have been held every year for generations. Since the 1950s we have held the Field and Target Championships together. In addition to Field Champions and Target Champions, for many years we also crowned Aggregate Champions in all categories. We have evolved away from this to now having separate Target and Field Champions with an added event, the double elimination FCA Open, which can be won by domestic archers or international guests.

Canada's international involve-

ment in archery goes back to 1963 when fund raising and organization to send a team to the World Championships in Helsinki began. Canada fielded just two archers, but from there a tradition of competing at the World Championships began and we have been at them all since. An interesting historical note is it was in Holland in 1967 that an archery team became the first sports team that marched behind the newly adopted red maple leaf Canadian flag. Canada has been a contributing member of FITA since then, with input on judging, coaching, equipment, and competition. Our first teams relied on self funding and fund-raising, a trend that, unfortunately, is back today.

In 1969, Dorothy Lidstone won the World Championships in Valley Forge, USA, with our Women's teams also making the podium in second place, a definite highlight in our short history. Wayne Pullen placed third and our men's team was second in 1971 with many fine showings by Canadian archers. We were also honoured in 1976 when Lucille Lessard became FITA World Field Champion and in 1984 when Lisa Buscombe repeated this feat.

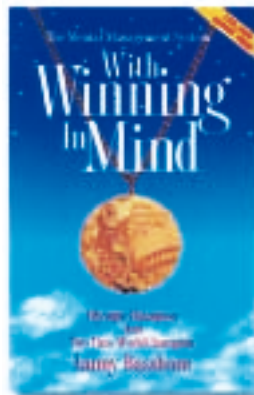
Archery, along with most sports in Canada, received a real boost in the mid 60s with the introduction of a National Sport program, whereby the government assisted sports with grants for national championships and eventually for office and staff support. This support, coupled with incentives to promote the 1976 Olympics and various other Games, gave much needed assistance to Canadian Archers. This allowed for more complete teams to travel and support for coaching programs and for national championships. Unfortunately, most of these programs were terminated when various governments tried unsuccessfully to restructure Canadian sport in the late 1990s, the fall out from which we are still suffering today. Canadian Archery went from a sport with three full time and some part time staff in a permanent office in a sport office complex, to one full time employee in a sublet office. The fact we have been able to continue all our programs is a credit to the fantastic volunteer base Canadian Archery can boast across the country. These incredible volunteers have been able to keep the archery community running despite dwindling government support for all these years. That we have been able (barely) to come up with Olympic qualified athletes in these turbulent times attests to the hard work being done by more and more volunteers and by the archers themselves.

When the compound bow (and release) arrived on the scene in the early '70s, Canada allowed them to compete in all championships. This decision was not without controversy, but the will to have everyone shoot together won out. The 'Unlimited' division was added to all national events with national champions being crowned in the division. This worked so well that it was Canada that introduced the motion to FITA to include the compound bow in FITA World competition in 1989. We then worked very hard with the various FITA committees for the eventual acceptance of it by FITA. Our compound teams have been strong internationally. Our Senior Men Compound team has won bronze twice, and this year our Junior Men team came home with Gold, while the Junior Women won Silver.

Soon after the compound bow was gaining a following in competition, field archery began to wane, but we soon saw more and more 3-D targets and the boom began. With target tournaments getting 10 or 20 participants, 3-D shoots were drawing three or four hundred! This type of participation could not be ignored, so FCA incorporated 3-D into its programs just as we did with the compound bow and a new facet of nationally organized archery was born. FCA now hosts Target, Field, and 3-D Championships every year. We are in the process of trying to have them hosted together in one area every year. That

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would truly be a 'Nationals', or as we call it a 'Canadian!' There is also a strong representation of long bow archers, which we call 'Traditional,' participating under the 3-D umbrella.

Canada also competes in IFAA field, although almost exclusively in southern Ontario. The CFAA was organised many years ago to assist archers competing in field archery, however this organisation is now suffering. It is a hope to expand the scope of the FCA to integrate these archers so they can continue competing. The opportunities provided by IFAA competitions have gained Canada many World

Champions and many more would be possible with continued support.

Organised archery in Canada follows more or less a local, regional, provincial and national model. Most all clubs get FCA membership with their provincial membership, which includes liability insurance. Each provincial Archery Association belongs to the FCA and has one vote on the FCA Board. Due to the vast differences in Provincial needs, each province negotiates agreements with FCA for periods from two to five years. Provinces receive benefits such as travel assis-

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tance for Board meetings and some member travel to the Canadian Championships and the benefit of FCA's truly national organisation. The FCA board is therefore a true representative of Canadian archery, as demonstrated by its ability to react nationally in such areas as judging, coaching, and rules. Our rule book is based on FITA's, but it also accounts for Canadian rounds and idiosyncrasies. This allows archers to compete knowing they are following international rules where required and nationally standardized rules in competitions that are uniquely Canadian.

Canada has a very efficient and effective judging and coaching system. Judges and Coaches take courses that are nationally administered and by passing become nationally certified at levels from basic to international. These courses are administered by FCA and taught by the Provincial Sport Governing Bodies. Both systems follow a national pan sport model funded by governments with some funds coming specifically to archery coaching and judging. These programs have been very successful.

As you have probably surmised by now, the average Canadian archer is resourceful to a fault. They can make or find almost anything required on their own. Where something isn't available they take it upon themselves to make it available. They coach, judge, compete, teach, travel, administer, procure, research, manufacture as required. Few do just one thing. Most are masters of many skills and contribute to their local club and to their provincial and national organisa-

tions - true 'tinkers'!

So, what does the future hold? I guess if I knew the answer to that, I would have waited to put the answers in this article! We can only hope that the 'can do' attitude of our volunteers and athletes will continue, that our full range of coaching and judging programs will gain more support and that the great people who make up Canadian archery, just continue to 'be themselves!' That in itself, would be great! Oh, and a medal or two would also be very nice!

Al Wills states: "I started shooting in 1971 with my wife Mary. Fell in love with releases in 1973. One of the first people to shoot a compound in Canada. Shot my first Canadian Championship in 1974 (came in 2nd). Started working as a volunteer in 1981 with the Canadian Coaching Committee, was the Olympic Coach in 1984, Team Captain and Team Coach many times since. Been on the FCA Executive since 1988 and President for 13 years. Chaired the 1997 World Archery Championships here in Victoria, BC, Canada."