

# ARCHERY

**USA Archery**

*Editor*



**Human Kinetics**

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### Human Kinetics

Website: [www.HumanKinetics.com](http://www.HumanKinetics.com)

*United States:* Human Kinetics  
P.O. Box 5076  
Champaign, IL 61825-5076  
800-747-4457  
e-mail: [humank@hkusa.com](mailto:humank@hkusa.com)

*Canada:* Human Kinetics  
475 Devonshire Road Unit 100  
Windsor, ON N8Y 2L5  
800-465-7301 (in Canada only)  
e-mail: [info@hkcanada.com](mailto:info@hkcanada.com)

*Europe:* Human Kinetics  
107 Bradford Road  
Stanningley  
Leeds LS28 6AT, United Kingdom  
+44 (0) 113 255 5665  
e-mail: [hk@hkeurope.com](mailto:hk@hkeurope.com)

*Australia:* Human Kinetics  
57A Price Avenue  
Lower Mitcham, South Australia 5062  
08 8372 0999  
e-mail: [info@hkaustralia.com](mailto:info@hkaustralia.com)

*New Zealand:* Human Kinetics  
P.O. Box 80  
Torrens Park, South Australia 5062  
0800 222 062  
e-mail: [info@hknewzealand.com](mailto:info@hknewzealand.com)

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# ARCHERY

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# Foreword

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**I**n my years of competitive shooting, I have been fortunate to have several great mentors and coaches to guide me to two Olympic teams and an Olympic silver medal. However, there was never a comprehensive book that brought together several experts in the field of competitive shooting—including some of my own coaches and mentors—until now.

Whether you are a beginning, intermediate, or even advanced archer, *Archery* will give you something that's almost impossible to find elsewhere: a complete picture of the steps you must take to pursue excellence in the sport, presented by some of the most knowledgeable people in competitive archery. The topics covered in *Archery*—technical form, equipment choices and tuning, mental training, physical training, planning to compete, processing thoughts about winning, putting together a support team, and working with young archers—are critical to the athletes as well as the coaches and family members who support them.

If you are a parent, instructor, or coach, this book will help you to better understand the archer you are working with and learn how to be the best support system possible for the archer. This book is the most comprehensive archery resource I have seen yet, by people who have coached me and whose knowledge and experience I have a deep respect for. I encourage you to read this book, use it as a reference, and take all that you can from it.

—Brady Ellison

Two-time Olympian, Olympic silver medalist, World Cup gold medalist,  
Pan Am Games champion, top-ranked archer worldwide since 2011,  
USA Archery resident athlete

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# Preface

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Archery—a modern sport with ancient roots—has experienced a massive surge in popularity. Thanks to films such as *The Hunger Games*, *Brave*, and *The Avengers* and television shows such as *Respect the Game*, as well as the excitement surrounding the sport at the Olympic and Paralympic Games, USA Archery has seen a significant increase in membership, social media reach, and website visitors.

Archery was the most-watched sport during the first week of NBC's coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games. At one point in the first week of the Olympics, archery had more tweets—30,000-plus—than any other sport. With sequels to *The Hunger Games* expected in 2013, 2014, and 2015 and the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games not far behind, it's our hope that interest in archery will continue to grow, new instructors and club leaders will continue to help develop this wonderful sport, and new archers will find programs, events, and training opportunities fun and exciting.

This book addresses the needs of many kinds of archers. Every athlete's journey is different, and the path that each archer takes in finding fulfillment will be full of rich and diverse experiences. In this book, we talk a lot about learning to become competitive at many levels in the sport, though we also teach great fundamentals for recreational archers who just want to improve in the game.

The goal in becoming an archer is not just to win, though that is certainly something most competitive athletes hope for. Rather, the goal is to experience the thrill of archery found in so many places along the journey—from the moment of drawing the bow for the first time to the moment of releasing the arrow. It's in the first shot at 70 meters, when there's a heartbeat or two before the arrow hits the target. It's in the camaraderie at an archery tournament. It's found when an archer achieves her very first 9-meter award pin in Junior Olympic Archery Development and when a disabled archer has success with a bow and arrow on the international stage. For instructors and coaches, the excitement is in seeing an archer find success and confidence in shooting. For club leaders, it's helping to develop the sport in their communities. For parents, it's the simple joy of seeing their children gain the great life skills that archery teaches—patience, discipline, and focus—or watching children make lifelong friends at tournaments. Whatever your role in archery, this book has something great for you.

Veteran archers and coaches from various paths in the sport have collaborated on this book. Each author offers a personal perspective, so there may be some overlapping of subject matter or even differences in perspective among authors. We hope this contributes to a rich archery experience for you. KiSik Lee and Guy Krueger discuss recurve technique and mental and physical training, Mel Nichols advises on equipment tuning and compound shooting technique, and Butch Johnson advises on deciding to compete and the athlete's perspective on competition. You'll appreciate Sheri Rhodes' advice on preparing for competition, Robby Beyer's advice on building support teams, Diane Watson's instruction on developing youth archers, and Randi Smith's tips on working with para-archers.

We hope that you benefit from the information in *Archery* and that you share our excitement as you begin or continue your journey in this safe, fun, and exciting lifetime sport!

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# Acknowledgments

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USA Archery offers its deep gratitude to each of the authors who have taken the time to share their expertise and personal experiences in this publication.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Human Kinetics and its staff, including acquisitions editor Tom Heine and developmental editor Laura Floch, who played key roles in developing this publication.

The sport of archery is in a wonderful period of growth and transition. We are extremely thankful to all the people who, as the result of seeing archery in books, movies, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, have turned that interest into a new hobby or competitive passion.

USA Archery instructors and coaches, and those who help facilitate Junior Olympic Archery Development and Adult Archery Achievement programs across the country, are responsible for encouraging much of that interest and helping people to make that transition from a passing curiosity into love of a lifelong sport. So many other people give back to the sport by hosting tournaments or serving as tournament officials, and each is giving archery a place to grow in our communities.

Organizations and companies like the U.S. Olympic Committee, Easton Foundations, Hoyt, Easton Technical Products, Nike, United Airlines, Axcel Sights and Scopes, Arizona Archery Enterprises, B-Stinger, Flexor Archery, Mental Management Systems, and the Archery Trade Association have been outstanding sponsors and partners in helping USA Archery to fulfill its mission of providing the resources to foster strong athlete participation, competition, and training.

Perhaps most important, USA Archery thanks all of its members, especially the athletes who have gone a step further by representing the United States in international competition. Each of those dedicated archers has inspired this book, which we hope will serve as a road map for new archers beginning on that path. Thank you for providing an outstanding example of excellence to others.

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# Becoming a Competitive Archer

**Butch Johnson**

**O**nce you decide to become a competitive archer, you need to focus on finding a coach, developing proper shooting technique, developing a solid mental program, and finding and tuning the right equipment. You must also determine your level of seriousness about archery, because a recreational archer will not necessarily have the same goals as an aspiring Olympian.

Many top athletes and coaches would say that the ability to take direction and apply it, combined with a strong sense of determination and self-discipline, predispose a person to succeed in the sport. Natural talent may be a determining factor; some of the best archers became good because they started winning from a very early age, often against adults. But there are really only three traits of top competitors: passion for the sport, a strong work ethic, and a determination to succeed.

Perhaps the greatest moment you can have as a competitive archer is the joy of knowing that you accomplished something you are great at. That knowledge comes from winning a tournament, or losing but setting a new personal best, or learning an important lesson. And it comes from amazing competitive moments, such as receiving your first national team shirt with your name and country on the back, hearing the roar of the crowd at an elite-level event, and knowing that you are representing your country as you shoot your bow. All of these moments are reasons to compete, and all of these moments are reasons that people continue to strive for excellence in this sport, even in the face of losses and challenges.

In this book, we talk about athlete development, shooting techniques, selection and tuning of equipment, and mental and physical training. But the very first step is always determining what you want to do with your shooting. This is a decision that you alone, the athlete, must make. Although you require a support team (especially if you are a minor), the initial decision to compete must be yours. The process is unique for each athlete. Many archers are introduced to the sport in a camp, school, or club setting. Through trying an initial tournament, they find that competing is a fun and friendly way to enjoy the sport. For other archers, who are introduced to the sport later in life by a friend or through bowhunting, competing is the next logical step after practicing

archery at the local range or at home. Some archers are also motivated by the opportunity to compete in the Olympics and are focused on attaining placement on an Olympic or Paralympic team. Whatever the motivation, the important thing is that the dream belongs to you, and you must be focused on the dream for the right reasons. One of the key elements must be a true passion for the sport.

## **MOMENT OF DECISION**

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My first defining moment was when I shot at the National Indoor Championships in Pennsylvania at the age of 16. Though I was young enough to compete in the youth divisions, I won the tournament as an adult. As a former recreational archer, I was shooting at an unfamiliar target face—which is actually the multicolored target shot at events today—that I didn't even know how to keep score on. My championship-winning finish was a new national record—the highest score overall for the men's adult class—and made me realize that perhaps there was a future for me in the sport. The journey for many competitive archers starts with a moment like that. It may take the form of a high score, or, more likely, it may just be the recognition that competing feels fun and natural. Whatever the moment, the idea is to seize it and decide on a plan of action.

Once that moment of decision occurs, questions are often raised about where to go from there. After winning the National Indoor Championships, I continued attending local tournaments and practicing consistently, hoping to improve my technique and ability to compete. Often, that next step is defined not only by the goals of the archer, but by external factors too, such as budget, the need for new equipment, and the ability to train consistently and obtain coaching. The only answer is that if you want to become successful, you have no choice but to try. Having the right attitude in meeting those challenges is an absolute must. If you look at challenges as insurmountable obstacles, questions of doubt are raised that will be difficult to silence. Rather, the focus should always be on getting the most out of every experience, learning a lesson each time you are on the range, and striving to improve.

People who succeed in athletics and in business often share the traits of passion and determination. The desire to have the best technique can mask the stress of events and help you become more focused with a consistent mental program. To continue to be competitive, you will need that sense of tenacity at each level on which you compete, whether local, state, national, or international. The focus must be on achieving something rather than not losing something, and the most important factors that will affect this are the way you train, the coaching you obtain, and your willingness to work as hard as required in order to achieve your goals.

## **FINDING A PROGRAM**

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Imagine that a young person has heard about archery and is interested in getting started. The first step is to find a local archery program that has a certified instructor or coach who is trained to teach proper safety and technique in the archery range. The first program you might encounter is the After School Archery Program (ASAP), which is a joint program of USA Archery, the National Field Archery Association, and the Archery Shooters Association. ASAP is a four- to six-week program that teaches archers safety on the range and basic shooting technique. It is meant as an introduction to archery; frequently, young archers become quickly engaged in the sport and want to learn more and continue to progress in skill and technique.

The other more prevalent program is Junior Olympic Archery Development (JOAD), which is run through archery ranges, sport clubs, pro shops, park and recreation departments, 4-H, YMCAs, and Boys and Girls Clubs. JOAD is a longer-term program that is run year-round, usually in 12-week or longer sessions. The goal of JOAD is to offer beginning, intermediate, or advanced shooters the opportunity to enjoy the sport either recreationally or through competition. Many of the best young archers in the United States are currently members of JOAD clubs, but they join many other students who wish to just enjoy archery during a classroom setting each week. Like many facets of archery, the question of initial age of learning and competing is based on the individual. Some archers may start shooting in a classroom setting as young as eight years of age; some may start even younger with direct assistance from an adult in a backyard. USA Archery recommends that archers begin shooting no earlier than the age of eight, when they can understand and obey safety commands at ranges as well as have enough manual dexterity to shoot with correct technique. For more detailed information on developing young archers, see chapter 13.

Young archers in the United States who have begun competing and are having success can apply to become part of the Junior Dream Team, or JDT. This is a national development program that offers training camps to archers who are using national training system form and wish to enjoy the benefit of an intensive training environment with specialized coaching. Some competitive archers, especially those shooting with a compound bow, choose instead to continue competing alongside their JOAD teammates. In either case, archers can choose to compete in local, state, or national events as soon as they and their support team decide that they are ready. For older recurve archers who are close to or at college age, there is also the opportunity to apply to the Resident Athlete Program at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, which is a full-time training position geared toward archers seeking placement on the Olympic team.

All archers in the United States, depending on their national ranking and competitive progress, may have the opportunity to qualify for the U.S. archery team—there are cadet, junior, senior, and para teams—or qualify for some of the international teams that USA Archery sends to World Cups and other events. Check [www.usarchery.org](http://www.usarchery.org) for details on team selection procedures. For some events, such as the World Archery Championships, there are team trials events; placement on other teams can be based on national ranking or other factors. The beauty of archery is that whether you are 8 or 88, lots of competition opportunities are available for you in this sport. See table 1.1 for a breakdown of the USA Archery age divisions.

**Table 1.1** USA Archery Age Divisions

Division	Ages of competitors
Bowmen	Through calendar year of 12th birthday
Cub	Through calendar year of 14th birthday
Cadet	Through calendar year of 17th birthday
Junior	Through calendar year of 20th birthday
Senior	Technically defined as archers competing during or after the calendar year of their 21st birthday; however, some top younger archers choose to shoot in this division
Masters	Often separated in 10-year increments: masters 50-plus, 60-plus, 70-plus

## DETERMINING EQUIPMENT STYLE

In becoming a competitive archer, you need to decide about whether to shoot the recurve bow or compound bow (see table 1.2 for the characteristics of these bows). In many cases, this decision is made based on the equipment or coaching that is available to you at the time you begin shooting. However, if you have a particular area of focus that you want to pursue, the beginning of the competitive journey is a good time to make that determination. In beginning my own competitive career, I pursued recurve and then compound. When I became successful with the compound bow and won several national titles, I decided to pursue Olympic competition, which made the recurve bow the clear choice at the time.

**Table 1.2** Characteristics of Compound and Recurve Bows

	Compound	Recurve
Uses	Allowed in all competitive events except for Pan Am, Parapan Am and Olympic and Paralympic Games	Allowed in all competitive events, including Olympic and Paralympic and Pan Am and Parapan Am Games
Length	Shorter axle-to-axle (end-to-end) length; uses wheels and cams to conduct energy of bow	Much longer length from limb tip to limb tip; energy of bow is stored in limbs
Limbs	Bow has a more compact appearance, with limbs that are constantly flexed; limbs may be parallel to one another	Bow has an elongated appearance, with limbs that curve out from riser and then curve again out to limb tip
Weight	Has let-off (i.e., the archer pulls back the full weight of the bow but holds only 15 to 35 percent of bow weight while aiming)	Archer pulls and holds the full weight of the bow when aiming
Release	Mechanical release is used to release the string, though a limited number of archers use a finger tab with a compound bow	Archers always use their fingers to release the string, most often protected by a finger tab (a piece of leather that covers the fingers) or, less often, a shooting glove

## CHOOSING A COACH AND COACHING STYLE

If you have decided that you want to become a competitive athlete and are willing to put in the time and effort to train properly and are keeping an open mind about getting the most out of tournament experiences, win or lose, then the next step is to get the best possible technical coaching as early as possible. Finding the right coach for you is a personal process that is unique for each athlete. Generally, the first step is to look for a coach with a solid track record of experience in the area in which you are focused. Beginning archers may work with a certified level 1 or level 2 instructor. They receive training in range safety and shooting technique; more experienced and highly certified coaches have more specialized training in athlete development and shooting technique, including mental management, periodization, fitness for archery, and in-depth technical expertise. Generally, the requirements for completion of a given level of certification

become more comprehensive as the level increases. To become a level 4 coach, a person must complete an intensive four-day course with the national head coach, including skills training with other certified coaches; must pass a comprehensive written exam; and then must pass a strict practical exam with the national head coach in order to demonstrate their ability to teach National Training System technique. Certified level 2 instructors, and coaches of all levels, have completed a background check, and are insured by USA Archery's insurance partner. For more information on certified instructors and coaches, including what is required for each level and help finding an instructor or coach near you, visit [www.usarchery.org](http://www.usarchery.org).

You'll also want to think about the experience you're seeking in a coach. For example, if you are a compound archer, you'll want to find a coach with solid experience in compound bows and technical know-how. The same applies if you're a recurve archer seeking a coach. This process can have positive and negative aspects and will require some balance as an archer, since input from lots of people, no matter how well intentioned, can give you conflicting opinions and cause you to lose focus on what is most important: finding the best fit with a technically strong coach you can believe in. However, once you have made a choice about a coach and think you can have faith in the coach's direction and decisions, it is best to commit to that coach and listen to that person's direction exclusively.

The most important thing is that you have a strong comfort level with the coach and his or her level of experience and coaching style. If you have doubts about your coach's ability to coach you, it will be a difficult road to travel together. One of the first steps in finding a coach is to talk to many people and try to get a sense of which coach or coaching style suits you best. Some archers will respond better to a command-style coach, while other archers will do well with a coach whose style is more cooperative. Whatever the best fit is for you, have conversations with a few people until you have found a coach whose level of experience and personality are in line with what you want to do. Here are other key points to consider:

- How often can I see this coach?
- Does the coach's communication style make sense to me? Do we understand one another?
- What does this coach think of the goals I have set for myself?
- Do I feel inspired and supported by this coach? Or do I feel a sense of expectation?
- Do I want support from this coach during tournaments? If so, is this coach willing to coach at competitions?

## SETTING GOALS AND MANAGING YOUR TIME

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Once you have found your coach, you should have an open and honest conversation about your goals in the sport. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to set and write down the goals you have set for yourself. Goals should be categorized as short term (attainable in 0 to 6 months), midrange (6 to 18 months) and long term (18 months to 3 years). The goals should be process based, performance based, and outcome based, as described here:

- *Process-based goals* include benchmarks that deal with your training, your shooting technique, and mental focus. An example of a process-based goal is to perfect hook and grip or increase arrow count to 120 high-quality shots five days per week.

## Importance of the Support Team

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On a related note, archery is very much a mental sport. As such, you must take care in surrounding yourself with people who will be part of a supportive, cohesive team. For example, a younger archer may have his or her parents, coach, archery club teammates, siblings, and friends on a support team. An adult archer may count a spouse, coach, parents, archery friends, and other encouraging people as support team members. More details on building your support team are covered in chapter 14. Also, whether looking at the external environment, members of a support team, or your own technique for self-talk, you need to determine whether the messages you receive are positive ones. Are you expecting yourself to do well and focusing too heavily on who you are competing against or what your scores are? Or are you passionate about being the best archer on the field regardless of the performances of others? Do the people around you tell you that they want you to reach specific scores? Or do they support you in pushing yourself harder to be the best archer *you* can be? The best athletes take a role in creating an environment in which they push forward because they want to get there rather than because someone else expects them to reach a goal. If you are reading this book as the parent, coach, spouse, or friend of a competitive archer, remember that if you help the athlete by using positive encouragement to set and meet healthy goals, the archer will be more empowered to reach those goals. However, if members of the support team—especially a parent or coach—are focused too heavily on the athlete's outcomes, such as score or event placement, it can impede the athlete's progress and damage the athlete's self-image and your relationship with the athlete.

One top archer who competed on several teams with me noted that a good way to remember this concept is to ask whether your mood changes based on the athlete's performance. If it does, you as a member of a support team have crossed a line that shouldn't be crossed. If you become angry or upset based on how the athlete does competitively, you are too invested to be an objective source of support, and you need to gain a better perspective on the situation. Remember that athletes across the board respond better to positive rewards than negative ones. If you are the athlete, your thought process and affirmations must be positive, and your focus must be on your own process and technique rather than your score or the outcome of the athlete you're competing against. When your focus changes from shooting one good arrow at a time to how your competitors are shooting or where you are in the standings, you have turned your attention to something you can't help or control and have lost a valuable learning opportunity. Always, always keep a positive attitude about what you want to achieve that is within your control: your shot process and your mental game.

- *Performance-based goals* deal with achievements concerning your shooting performance. A good example is to reach a new personal best score of \_\_\_ in an outdoor tournament.
- *Outcome-based goals* are goals for which the result is, to some extent, outside of your control. An example of an outcome-based goal is to earn placement on next year's national archery team. Though you may shoot very high scores in that season, whether you attain this goal will also be affected by the performance of the archers with whom you compete.

Think of your goals as a road map for success. Though we cover the logistics of competing, remember that having reasonable short-term goals of each kind and attaining them will help you to build confidence and assist you in reaching your midrange goals. In turn, those will help you to achieve your long-term goals. Here are a few key points about goal setting: Keep your goals measurable and attainable. Though making the Olympic team might be a great long-term outcome-based goal when you are just starting out, include several midrange and long-term goals of each kind that will help you reach that major long-term goal you have set for yourself. Remember that your goals will help to keep you inspired. So rather than set goals that feel difficult or impossible to achieve, set goals that you can achieve within a reasonable time so that you can set new goals, complete those, and thus make your way toward achieving those long-term objectives.

Once you have created this road map to success, make sure that you have an open dialogue with the people who will support you throughout your journey. Sit down and talk to the people in your life who may be in a position to help you along the road to success. For example, if your parents will be providing your transportation to practice and events, talk to them openly about the goals you have set and why you have set them. If your spouse might want to accompany you to tournaments, have a talk about your feelings on the subject and whether it will be beneficial or detrimental to have them watch you compete. If someone is with you when you practice, let him know if you feel that watching is helpful or not. If training is a priority that will cut into your other commitments, have a frank discussion with those affected about your decision to train instead. Whatever your circumstances, the important thing is to be as honest and open as possible with those who will be affected by your decision and to continue that open dialogue throughout your time as a competitive archer.

Finally, on a very practical level, focus on time management. Look at your schedule and determine what needs to happen in order for you to have the time you need to train. Talk to your coach about realistic goals for practice and what it will take to reach your goals. Then evaluate your schedule to see where you need to make the time you need. This is where the question of prioritization comes in: Perhaps, two nights per week, you play another sport, but you know that you need those two evenings to complete a five-day practice week. Now is the time to determine whether you are passionate enough about archery to move forward with the number of practice days necessary to meet the goal you've set. Remember that not everyone's goal is to make a world, Olympic, or Paralympic team, and that's okay. For some people, the first goal might be to compete in a local indoor tournament for the experience of trying a competition. In that case, an appropriate training regimen might be two or three days per week, and the arrow count (number of arrows shot) might depend on the format of the tournament. For example, the first goal is a 60-arrow indoor tournament. The competition will start with two ends of practice and then 20 ends of three arrows each. Therefore, you would

need to train enough to be able to shoot consistently for approximately 70 arrows. If your goal is more focused on national or international outdoor competitions, which require more arrows and longer hours out in the elements, you should intensify your training regimen accordingly.

If you are still in school, you might need to sit down at the beginning of the week with your academic schedule and plan out homework in advance in order to accommodate your goal. Even if the goal focuses on local, state, or regional competition, remember that the goal still may require that you take more time on the weekends for academics in order to have the time during the week to meet with your coach for a lesson and accommodate two additional practices at the archery range.

If you are fortunate enough to have a place to shoot at home, time management may be slightly less challenging, since you will not need to travel as often to practice. However, if you need to practice at a local range or pro shop, remember to factor in the time necessary to travel to the range, unpack and repack your equipment, and still get in a good practice. When you are making the time to practice, whether at home or at the range, make an effort to set up an environment that is conducive to focusing on the task at hand. Try to make that environment mimic the competitive arena as closely as possible. For example, in a tournament, you wouldn't answer text messages or stop to take phone calls while shooting. Keep yourself honest in practice by doing the same when you are shooting on your own. Remember also that practice needs to be fun and challenging so that you stay with it. Keeping practice fun while still staying focused during that time is a balancing act that every archer must remember to do. For example, many World Cup tournaments play music throughout the competition, though the type of music may vary between cultures represented at the event. Therefore, if music keeps you motivated, you might try using a radio while you practice. But remember to change up the music so that you're not distracted when you hear a different soundtrack at a tournament.

While distraction training (intentionally creating distractions, such as noise, and then teaching yourself to stay focused despite them) can be very helpful, remember that the point of practice is to prepare you for competition. So you must be focused on your shooting technique and your mental routine. See chapter 10 for more on mental training. If the training environment does not allow you to do that, take an honest look at how you are practicing to determine whether you can take steps to make practice more productive. Here are good questions to ask yourself:

- Am I able to focus when I'm practicing?
- Do I find myself easily distracted?
- Is the environment consistent with what I would encounter at a tournament?
- Do I find myself doing things I wouldn't do in a tournament, such as texting?
- Am I practicing at a time of day when I have energy, or am I leaving training to the very end of my day?
- Am I able to create pressure when I practice, or do I find my mind wandering?
- Do I prepare for practice the way I prepare for tournaments, or do I take shortcuts?
- Is my attitude positive during training? Am I feeling inspired, or am I practicing because of expectation?

Asking these questions will help you to have an honest dialogue with yourself and with your coach about whether you are getting the most out of your training time and