

ARCHERY

At 13, accomplished Acton archer trains her eye on the next target



“With archery,” says 13-year-old Kira Buckmelter, “I love how you can challenge yourself. You really depend on yourself more than other people. When you work, you get what you put into it.”

By Nate Weitzer

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Inclement weather in the Indianapolis area dramatically affected the field during the Junior Olympic Archery Development Outdoor Nationals last August.

On the second day of qualification rounds, Acton eighth-grader Kira Buckmelter watched as competing archers battled strong winds and rain, struggling so much that some of them missed the 122-centimeter targets entirely.

But when it was her turn, the determined 13-year-old managed to not only produce a high enough score to qualify for the tournament's elimination round, she set a national record for girls 12 to 14 with a score of 600 out of 720.



Acton eighth-grader Kira Buckmelter

Buckmelter went on to set another national record with a score of 1,167 out of 1,440 over two days, earned a silver medal in the individual competition and a gold medal in the team round.

For this young phenom, adversity only increases the appeal of her favorite activity.

“I’m not good at quitting,” Buckmelter said. “I don’t like to quit things in general, it’s my personality. With archery, I love how you can challenge yourself. You really depend on yourself more than other people. When you work, you get what you put into it.”

Her determined attitude soon became evident after Alex and Suzanne Buckmelter adopted her from Guatemala at the age of 4 months.

Kira’s first athletic pursuit, while the family lived in Boulder, Colo., was figure skating. Her mother recalls that the 3-year-old couldn’t stand up on skates, but demanded that they stay after her lesson and practice until she was able to stand.

She took up archery at the age of 8, after the family moved to Acton in 2010.

The sport has represented a way for Buckmelter — who attends lectures at MIT and takes Mandarin lessons through the Acton Chinese Language School — to challenge herself both physically and mentally.

Naturally, she gravitated toward the most difficult style of archery, shooting with a “bare bow,” which affords the archer less control than the Olympic “recurve” style or compound bows.

Bare bow competitions do not allow for any sort of guide or accoutrement on the bow. They replicate the original style of shooting, which consists of just the archer and a wooden bow.

Beginning with an after-school archery class through community education in Acton, Buckmelter progressed to formal competitions and joined the On Site Archery club based in Billerica.

In the fall of 2016, she won her first tournament by a narrow margin of two points, and was hooked.

“I got to the point where if I wanted to go farther with it, I needed to get my own bow and start doing competitions,” she said. “When I saw that I could place highly in these tournaments, it meant a lot. I just wanted to try and do better each time and keep challenging myself.”

On Feb. 23, Buckmelter won the Junior Olympic Archery Development Indoor Championships in Fiskdale.

Over the next two days, she completed a sweep of the competitions in Fiskdale with a first-place finish for her age group in USA Archery nationals, becoming the only athlete in New England to win both events.

Never satisfied, Buckmelter trains weekly with OnSite lead instructor Bob Wait, as well as coach Udo Regensburger at the Riverside Gun Club in Hudson.

“From the very beginning, she was a quick learner who understood the key elements of the shooting process,” Wait said. “She has progressed rapidly and once she started competing in tournaments, there was no turning back and despite her many accomplishments, she remains admirably humble.”

Buckmelter describes her style as intuitive, but not necessarily the correct form. While she listens to her coaches and is willing to make adjustments, she has no immediate plans to change her unconventional form, or put down her beloved bare bow to begin training in the Olympic recurve style.

“In bare bow, you have to draw back manually and know where to aim,” she said. “I kind of just know where to aim, I’m intuitive with it and I’m trying to fix my form, little by little, but it’s working out for me.”

“The best thing with Kira is she knows her own body,” Regensburger said. “She knows how to position her body and keep it in the right position. That’s absolutely the best thing for an archer to have.”

Next up for Buckmelter is the Marchery Madness tournament beginning March 24 in Hooksett, N.H.

She already has her sights set on junior outdoor nationals next July in Raleigh, N.C., where she hopes to break the two national records she set in Indiana last summer.

Buckmelter’s goal is to attend a college with a great engineering program and juggle all challenges by joining the archery team, because — as she’ll often remind you — she simply does not quit.

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