

MILLER TIME AT NATIONALS: Sophomore Geneva Miller shoots at her first national tournament. Miller shot her personal best for the season to finish among the top 10 Mac archers. "I remember staying up late with my friend the night before and thinking 'THIS was nationals and our scores were important,'" said Miller, who scored 259 points for the team with four bullseyes. Photo by Anna McClellan.



Straight shot to nationals

Archery team concludes 2021 season at top scholastic competition

MARLEY ANGLE
staff reporter

The McCallum archery team made history on May 1 when it joined the Lamar and Highland Park archery teams in competing in the National Archery in the Schools Program national tournament. It was the first team appearance at nationals for the McCallum team in its fourth year of existence.

Prior to the state tournament on March 23, McCallum ranked 25th of 40 high school teams in Texas, which was just enough to qualify for state. At state, however, the team gained 13 spots in the state rankings, enough to qualify for nationals. According to head coach Jim DeLine, the new archers were a big part of the team's success.

"The team was supported by returning archers such as Sophie [Leung-Lieu], Garrett [Michulka] and Mariana [Torres-DeLine]," DeLine said. "They didn't shoot personal bests, but they shot really rock solid where they needed to be. The team was bolstered by a lot of new archers that ... had a great day; it was really kind of cool."

DeLine said the development of his less experienced archers was gratifying because of the fragmented nature of the archery season. Earlier in the season the team practiced outdoors at Central Texas Archery to reduce the COVID risk.

"It was really cool because we've been practicing outside while all those other schools have been practicing inside, so we missed practices because of the snowpocalypse, we missed practices because of rain, but yet they kept coming and kept doing it," Coach DeLine said.

Nationals, which was sponsored locally by Ski Shores Cafe, was a virtual competition. Every school across the country competed by shooting in their own gym and submitting their scores electronically. The three McCallum cluster teams gathered its 85 archers and divided them into four flights to maintain social distance inside the Lamar gym.

To compete, each archer shoots from 10 meters and then again from 15 meters. Co-captain Eli Frank further explained the rules.

"So what we'll do is we'll have a practice round at 10 meters, then we'll shoot three rounds, then the

same thing for the 15 meters," Frank said. "We shoot five arrows a round, so 40 arrows total. Shooting from 15 meters tends to be more difficult for most archers because it's a longer distance."

Leung-Lieu agrees that the longer distance presents a great challenge.

"This year at state, I did really well at 10 meters, and I didn't do as well at 15," she said. "A lot of archers really struggle at 15 meters, but I know that Coach and a lot of us work really hard to get better at shooting from that distance. In fifth grade, we actually beat this team by one point at nationals because of the 15 meters. All of the work we put into improving pays off."

The distance varies but not as much as the ages of the archers shooting. Torres-DeLine, senior and co-captain of the Mac archery team, explained that shooting with a variety of age and experience levels makes the experience feel more like an individual event.

"When you're competing, you're competing next to elementary kids, and you're competing next to middle schoolers," she said. "At the end of the day, what makes you good is just your skill."

As a veteran archer, Michulka has been on both ends of the age spectrum. He started archery at Lamar in seventh grade and continued into high school. In ninth grade, he was on the team with Torres-DeLine and just four other people. Since then, the team has grown, thanks to an emphasis on recruiting new archers.

"I want to add more people to the team and make people excited about doing archery," Michulka said. "I've been trying to get more people by going around to friends trying to get them to join. I want to get a team big enough so we can have two teams competing."

Unlike most sports, these teams compete as one team not as separate boys or girls teams, but there are gender rules that affect the scoring. Teams are allowed to have up to 24 archers, and the top 12 scores from the team determine their placement. Of those 12 scores, four have to be female and four have to be male; the other four spots go to the next highest scorers.

"It is one of the only sports, if not the only sport that I know of, where both [genders] have to contribute to the team score, which I find really cool," Torres-DeLine said. "If someone's having a personally bad day, there's

someone that's having a good day and vice versa. So, the goal is just to do as great as you possibly can. If you have a goal of a certain score, try to reach it."

Because of how archery is scored, any member can make the difference.

"We're always aiming for personal bests more than anything because even one point above what your normal average score is still an improvement and still helps our team," Torres-DeLine said.

At nationals, seven Mac archers posted their personal best scores of the season: Geneva Miller, Jaden Mann, Memphis Mikeska-Benfield, Mason Walker, Saylor Barton, Sorcha Wilson and Vivian Boyd. Boyd led the team in scoring with 278 points including 14 bullseyes. Torres-DeLine was next at 270 with eight bullseyes. The team scored 3,156 points and shot 88 bullseyes to place 167th out of 247 high school teams across the nation and tied for eighth among Texas schools competing at nationals.

While archery is essentially an individual sport, Torres-DeLine says the she worked to make it more of a team experience.

"I really try to encourage people and point out when they're doing something really good, or correct something that I know they can do better," she said. "I try to check in with people as much as I possibly can. I've never been on a team for a sport ever so this team is like my child."

But Torres-DeLine is not just a team captain. She is also a fierce competitor. She said the hardest part of competing is staying mentally focused.

"When you're doing an individual sport, you can get in your head so easily," Torres-DeLine said. "You have to learn to let that last round go because you don't have time to dwell on it. It's four minutes per shooting round, two minutes to pull arrows, so you have to move on from the last round."

Torres-DeLine says the keys to develop mental toughness are simple: practice and a short memory.

"If you're in the middle of shooting, and you're shooting several bad arrows in a row, you have to get over that really quickly if you want to shoot your next arrows well," she said. "A big part of archery is just to keep at it."



Jim DeLine surveys the crowd after doing a final cheer with his archers, who surprised him after practice on April 25 with the news that he had been named the 2021 National Archery in the Schools Program Coach of the Year. Photo by Anna McClellan.

COACH JIM DeLINE NAMED NASP COACH OF THE YEAR

His student archers appreciate Coach Jim DeLine so much that they rallied behind the coach's back to nominate him as the 2021 National Archery in the Schools Coach of the Year. And what's more, he won the award.



The nomination was a thank you, not just for this year but for his tireless commitment to building an archery program over the past decade, first at Highland Park and as his archers grew older at Lamar Middle School and most recently McCallum.

To read Sophie Leung-Lieu's feature profile about DeLine's decade-long effort to build a nationally recognized archery program that has earned five consecutive elementary school state titles, please scan the QR code above or visit macshieldonline.com.

A 'SHOOTING' GALLERY OF MAC ARCHERY IMAGES

Here is just one of the 15 archery photos available only at our website, macshieldonline.com. To view the gallery, scan the this QR code right now.



YEARS IN THE MAKING: Coach Jim DeLine and senior Mariana Torres-DeLine embrace after finishing the archery season. "Ten years ago, we had no idea where we would be today," Mariana said. After four years of hard work, the father-daughter duo were finally able to lead the McCallum team to nationals. "Nationals gave us everything to build on and nothing to be ashamed of," Coach DeLine said. Reporting by Sophie Leung-Lieu. Photo by Ellen Fox.