

Archery club on target for Roses

Determined to preserve their enviable winning record against Lancaster, *Nouse* investigates why this team are so certain of victory this May as preparations get underway

GEORGE LOWTHER

Adam Shergold
SPORTS EDITOR

BEFORE STEPPING inside the vacuous sports hall on Thursday afternoon, my impressions of archery were skewed by a few, pretty groundless and rather different, preconceptions. Firstly, archery as synonym for hunting – primitive and pre-civilisation – and, secondly, archery as a stiffly toffish, upper-class ‘pursuit’.

Two minutes in the company of the University Archery Club blew these assumptions clean out the water. All-embracing, friendly and welcoming; I quickly discover there’s a great deal more to the sport than its puny mainstream media coverage suggests. There was also a third preconception of men in tights, but I’m politely warned not to go there.

Brightly-coloured paper targets, mounted on foam, stand sentinel, pounded by arrows which fizz through the twenty metre ‘no man’s land’ in the blink of an eye. Equipment Officer Tom Walton sits in his element surrounded by a jumble of archery bric-a-brac. His role is crucial; a broken string can mean broken dreams.

Few can imagine just how demanding archery is, both in terms of physical exertion and intense mental concentration. This reporter’s pathetic attempts shooting at a rather emasculating beginner’s target certainly hammered home that point. Over the course of a competition, normally comprising of pre-qualifying followed by

knockout rounds, the strain can be genuinely debilitating.

Team Captain Ed Russell-Johnson tells me how the archery year shapes up: regular meets with northern-based universities in the North England University Archery League (NEUAL) – one weekend travelling to Bradford, the next welcoming Leeds and Liverpool, always holding their own – interspersed with BUCS qualifiers, a gateway to national recognition.

The club are also rightfully proud of their Roses record. At a time of year where the annual slugfest with Lancaster starts to lurk on the sporting horizon, archery surely falls into the ‘nailed-on three points’ category.

The history books show a 90% winning record, but they came unstuck in the Lancashire drizzle last time out, with various conspiracy theories doing the rounds even now, according to club coach Charlotte Boatman. A few ill-advised, erroneous scores and some rather lewd behaviour from the opposing captain, apparently.

Thursday’s session is reserved for non-beginners, preparing for the business of competition. They make a fine sight; glistening, metallic compound bows, adorned with any number of futuristic accoutrements, line up alongside recurves, and the simplistic and wonderfully archaic longbows.

Compounds make light work of the twenty-metre distance on this indoor range, a stop-gap solution until the weather improves, but can achieve deadly accuracy at over one hundred metres. In com-



York’s archers aim to exact revenge on Lancaster for the defeat suffered in Roses 2008, shown here

petition, hitting just one arrow outside the centre might as well mean pack up and head home. The margin of error is, literally, paper thin.

However, training on Tuesdays and Saturday mornings are open to everyone, with plenty of club equipment to go round and first-class coaching on offer. The cost of buying your own equipment, which is encouraged, can appear prohibitive – an entry-level bow will probably set you back over £100 – but remember that archery is a sport

without upper limits.

Russell-Johnson has no doubts that the only real competition is with yourself. Such is the nature of the sport, structured on ranking ladders into which the multitude of tournaments feed, meaning consistency and holding your nerve in the environment of competition is everything. And, yes, there is the occasional needle between competitors.

Returning to the scene of my first flirtation with the sport two

days later finds a buzz of activity. York are welcoming Leeds and Liverpool universities in a league fixture. The buffed floor is barely visible for a sea of equipment – most miniscule, all critical – as the competition enters its detente.

Only one task remains; the laborious calculations – it transpires that York have won the female novice recurve and female experienced recurve – which, it seems, must be done in a public house.

Max Hardy leads sport motions at UGM

Leigh Clarke
SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

TWO KEY motions designed to improve York University’s nurturing of sporting talent were proposed at this week’s UGM meeting.

The first related to York elite sportsman Max Hardy and the amount of financial assistance he receives from the University. The skier, who last year received the University Sportsman of the Year award, has suffered as a result of the reduction of York Sport’s elite performer’s budget from £500 to £250. The motion, presented by York Sport Ordinary Member Emily Scott on Hardy’s behalf, highlighted that other institutions such as Durham and Manchester often give £1000-£3000 to their elite sportsmen in order to encourage them to study as they train.

Hardy’s achievements in the past few years have been impressive. Since he joined the York snowsports team he has helped take them from being unranked to

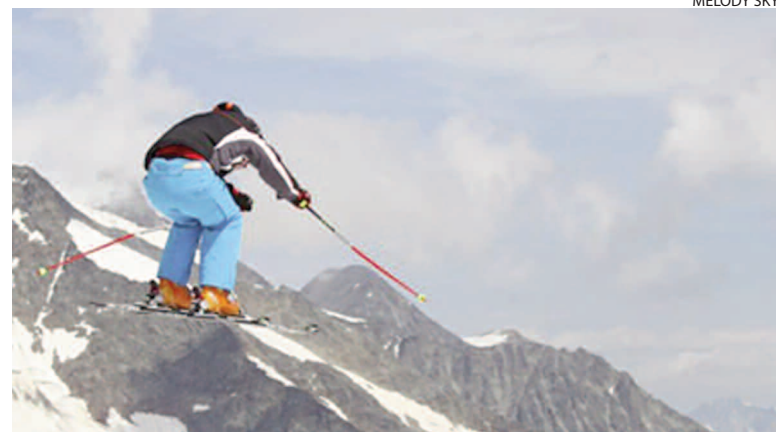
BUCS Championships bronze medallists last year. In the summer, he won the overall senior title at the British Indoor Ski Cross Championships to become British champion. At this event he was scouted by GB coaches and subsequently given a license to compete in the second tier of international competition: the Europa cup. His overall goal is to compete at the World Championships and the

2014 Winter Olympics.

On Thursday, Hardy travelled to Davos, in Switzerland, for the third leg of the Europa Cup.

Hardy states that the slashing of the elite performer’s budget and a recent ruling that it can not given to an individual has meant that he receives “no support from the University of any kind.” He says that “competing abroad this year will cost me in excess of £8000”

MELODY SKY



Hardy is hoping to gain university funding to compete in Europe

and he therefore wants the University to allocate £6000 to an “elite athlete development fund” so that he can continue to compete and study.

At present, Hardy has been forced to take a leave of absence from his studies until October and received no assistance from the University in balancing skiing and studying, despite contacting the Vice-Chancellor at the start of the academic year.

Alex Lacy, whom Hardy describes as having been “very supportive”, says “York is a bizarre institution in that it attracts excellent students but tends to only nurture their minds, neglecting their physical advancement.” Hardy echoes this sentiment, adding “the public relations and marketing benefit York would receive from supporting one of its students all the way to the Olympics could be massive.”

Alex Lacy also put forward a motion for a Sports Department on Heslington East. The York Sport President stated that this will

improve funding for sport, therefore allowing an improvement in facilities including the “dilapidated running track.” This in turn, according to Lacy, would improve participation and help the sports performance of York in relation to other Universities.

Lacy called this second motion a “slow burner”, saying that he “strongly doubted” that there would be one any time soon. However, if the motion is voted for then he says it “would give both YUSU and University staff the best start in creating a positive change in sport at York”. Max Hardy said he was “fully in support” of this motion.

A third motion, proposing that term dates be brought forward in order to benefit sports teams, was also approved.

Students have the opportunity next week to vote for or against these motions at www.yusu.org. The real question however will be whether, if they are passed, the University acts to improve the nurturing of talent at York.