

Three Summer Essentials

Everyone gets bored or frustrated sometimes. Luckily, **John Dudley** knows a couple of things that can re-ignite your passion for archery

Archery is a very fun sport and can be so rewarding. However, it can also get a little stale at times. There are several things that add up to take some of the fun out of what used to be such basic excitement. If you are a competition archer, then sometimes you will start to feel like it's more of a job than a hobby. There's so much focus on scores and medals. Every week on the tournament trail is like preparing for a final exam at university. You know that you have to be at your best, and that bleeds the fun out of things sometimes. If you are currently struggling with your archery, then there is a long list of frustrations you could be dealing with. That's why in this article I'll be introducing three things that you should do this year to bring the fun back into archery again – things that dig us out of the ruts that so many of us serious archers get into. These are the things that I think will not only help the sport, but also help rekindle the passion for archery within each of us.

1 – Inspire someone

There is nothing more refreshing to me than seeing the sparkle in a child's eyes when they release that first arrow to hit the mark. It's a feeling that is more rewarding than any medal I have ever won in this sport. If you want to ignite your passion for archery again, then set aside some time and teach a kid that would never have tried archery without you showing them how to shoot. If you really want to feel good about yourself, then buy them a beginner's kit and be the one to start their way in the sport. Set aside one evening at the range to teach them and pull their arrows while they shoot. You will be rejuvenated by how they react to this.

I have found that if you want to keep children enjoying archery, you really only



Seeing a child fall in love with archery is one of the most rewarding aspects of the sport

Technique

need two things: first is gear that is the right size for them, and second is a target that is close enough for them to not “miss” all the time. Each year, I try to set up a local child or two with some gear and some free lessons. It always brings me back to the beginnings and lets me see the basics of the sport again. When it comes to gear, there are a number of brilliant packages that hit the market this year that can fit perfectly into anyone’s budget. One that I got was the Easton Beginners kit. It’s a total package that I got for less than \$100 here in the USA. I gave it to a little girl and I’ll let the pictures in this article be the judge of whether or not it was worth it for me! I know not everyone is able to invest in gear for random people, but for those of you out there reading this that can, believe me when I say its one of the best things I do in archery all year.

The second part of making it fun for kids is choosing “what to shoot at”. Archery started out for me as a very basic activity



John got his start winning 3D shoots, but then moved into target



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that we did in the back yard. I didn’t have high tech equipment or brand new target faces (although the new zombie targets are very popular with young shooters now). In fact, we didn’t even have target faces. We had paper plates and a couple of markers. Part of the fun would be drawing up what it was we wanted to shoot at. Imagination is limitless and most likely you will get a kick out of what kids come up with. Like I said, we didn’t have target faces back then, so shooting a drawing I’d made myself was perfectly all right for me. To really add to the excitement, we would throw a few GI Joe figures in the mix. Shooting at the GI Joe figures may have been a little bit on the disturbing side and was probably a “guy thing” – but you get the idea. It was fun. Invest some time into a kid this year and you will learn to enjoy the roots of this sport and not to sweat the small stuff.

2 – Try something new

The toughest part about any sport is the constant repetition. Trust me, I know how demoralising it can be. It happens to a lot of archers who start to get competitive in their clubs or at national shoots. When I started shooting professionally in 1997, it was on a 3D range. For years and years, the only thing I shot was a foam target at unknown distances. As each year rolled on, I had less and less desire to see the same targets and same ranges over and over again. Each year the same club had the same shoot on the same weekend. Honestly, with 26 pro events each year, it started to feel like Groundhog Day.

Then one day I decided to shoot a FITA event at the Arizona Cup. It had only happened by chance that another archer challenged me out of my own native area of the sport into “their world”. Well, needless to say I went there, saw new targets, new people, was at a new place and felt a new desire to shoot well again. I had focus, I won that event and it started me on this path in target archery that brought me to where I am now. A similar thing happened years later when I was challenged to try field archery. It was a fresh start: new faces, new rules, new angles and new fun. I focused and improved my archery enough to shoot well in a new format. The bottom line is that shooting something new was all it took to create a new goal and find new motivation in training.

If you feel like you need a nudge to get yourself kick-started again, then try a new format. Shoot at a target you have never shot before. Learn a new game. If you have never shot a 3D range, then you are missing out. If you have never learned the technical aspects of field archery, then you are missing out. Make it a point this year to step onto a new range, or book a trip to a shoot you have always wanted to try. Take a step towards a fresh start and you will be stepping in the right direction.

3 – Be happy with one

The last thing that I think every archer should start to do is be happy with one thing at a time. This statement is in relation to shooting form. I see many archers get frustrated with their shooting because they

are trying to think about too many different things at once. Instead of learning to do one thing perfectly right, you can end up doing the entire thing wrong.

This really boils down to building a goal. For me, each year I try to see what the one thing I am doing the worst at in my archery and then focus on that one thing throughout the year until it is the best thing I do. Make your weakest part of archery your strongest part.

To understand what I mean by this, think back to when you first learned how to shoot. I bet that for your first few arrows, you just pulled back and let go. It seemed so simple. You probably then got a long list of what to do when you shoot from an instructor. Stand like this, keep your fingers like this, draw like this, anchor here but not here, straighten your head, your arm's too bent – wait! you can't lean back, your grip is too tight, don't pinch the arrow, okay, now shoot. Whoa, it was much easier when you just pulled back and shot! In a way, this is what we still do to ourselves even after years and years of shooting. Hopefully now you can understand what I mean by "be happy with one".

Choose one thing that you would like to work on, then focus on being really good at that. Don't overwhelm yourself by trying too much at once: try not to think about multiple things every time you practise or stand on a shooting line. Be brilliant at one thing at a time, instead of learning

everything only halfway. "Ones" that I have picked in the past include keeping my front shoulder down, learning to always follow through after the shot, and shooting indoor archery. Believe or not, I used to hate shooting indoors and was really bad at it. Then I made it my focus and kept my practice inside until it was my strong point. I shot a 597 that year. I made my weakness my strength.

These were all the things I had as a weakness and focused on them for an entire season until I finally was able to build it as a habit and ultimately each became second nature. They're now things that I don't have to worry about any more.

Reap the rewards

I am fortunate to call this sport my career and my profession. Like anything in life, it has highs and lows. These three things that I have talked about here are all things that breathe fresh air into what I do. They can open your eyes to the passion within archery and blind you to the times that get repetitive and stale. Seeing a young person get his or her own bow and learn to shoot is something that never, ever gets old. It's like hearing a baby break out in laughter: it's contagious and it makes you smile and have a good day. That's really what it all about, isn't it?

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