

On target

Local archer heads to global competition

by Chris Traphagan

sports editor

For most 8-year-old girls, a birthday means new dolls, pretty dresses and anything else their little hearts desire.

For April Witt's eighth birthday, however, she got a bow and arrow set.

What began as a loving gift from father to daughter seven years ago has evolved into a window of opportunity for Witt, who will be one of only a handful of American archers competing against the best archers in the world in the Global Games this March in Paris.

Now 15 years old, Witt is ranked in the top three in her age group in the United States, although in archery circles she is the consensus No. 1 archer in the country.

Daddy's girl

Doug Witt likes to hunt. He always has. In fact, the entire Witt family likes to hunt.

So it seemed natural that when his oldest daughter, April, had her eighth birthday she should get a bow and arrow set. The first results with the new bow hardly gave Doug any indication of where his daughter would be at this point in her life.

"It's night and day talking about how she was shooting and how she is now," Doug said. "When she first got her bow she could barely hit a thing. The dedication she has put into it since that day though is just amazing."

April admits she wasn't too hot on the idea of shooting a bow either, but after a short time she warmed up to it.

"I was bad at first," April said. "But the more practice time I got, the more encouraged I got. Pretty soon, I started going to tournaments."

Her first competitions came in the form of 3-D tournaments, which occur outdoors in the woods and consist of archers shooting at three-dimensional targets such as deer.

Once April began to show an affinity for the tournaments, Doug decided to make her a deal: train seriously and win a 3-D tournament and April could get a big-time compound bow, the elite type of bow.

April came through on her end of the bargain and her father came through on his, and the rest, as they say, is history.

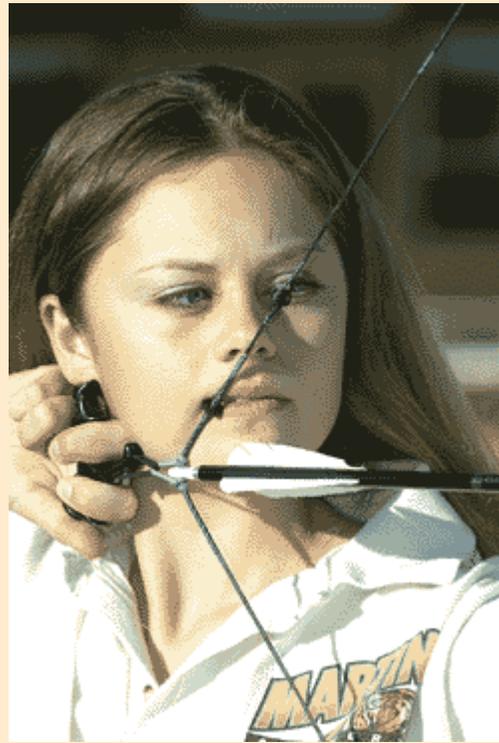
The natural

April competed in local tournaments for several years while training with her father, as well as her coach, Mike Koistinen.

After picking up steam, and a lot of confidence, in the local tournaments, April took the leap to national competitions three years ago. Her first national tournament, in Georgia, was an admitted eye opener, but she still finished a very respectable eighth.

Not to be discouraged, April traveled to Michigan a month later for the National Target Championships, and moved all the way up to third nationally in her age group.

Doug Witt said his daughter obviously has a natural talent, but that's hardly the reason for her success.



“It’s all about the hard work and dedication she’s put into it,” he said. “Archery is a lot like golf in that if you put enough dedication into it you can become good at it. Factor in her hard work and her natural ability and that’s why she’s where she’s at today.”

April’s crowning moment to this point as an archer came Jan. 3-5 in Harrisburg, Va., at the World Indoor Archery Team trials. It was there where April, competing in the junior compound division, wowed the crowd with a second-place performance, earning her a spot on the U.S. Archery team competing in Paris this March.

“I’m really excited,” April said. “I’ll be going against the best archers in the world. It’s the largest archery competition in the world.”

Doesn’t that make April nervous?

“I hadn’t really thought about it too much, but it’s really coming to a reality right now,” she said with a laugh. “I’m sure when I get there I’ll be a little nervous, but it’s going to be the same targets, at the same distances, so I just have to go out and do my thing.”

What about mom?

For every Yin in life, there must be a Yang, and in the Witt household, April’s mother, Julie, serves as the counterbalance.

Julie not only serves as April’s mother and confidant, she also has been April’s teacher for a good portion of her life — at home. April attended Millennium High School last year as a freshman, but now attends school at home through an online institution.

At the tournaments, Julie serves as the quiet inspiration, although the matriarch admits she’s hardly calm when her daughter competes.

“I’m so nervous,” Julie said. “She really looks to her dad as the coach, so my job is to sit there and be quiet. I get so nervous when it gets to the end though, especially when it gets down to a point or two.”

Both of April’s parents say they can’t believe how dedicated and responsible their daughter is in every aspect of life, not just archery.

Then again, Julie said, that was the deal.

“We told her upfront we would support her as long as she puts in the time and effort. She’s done that from day one. We really haven’t had to push her,” Julie said.

April gives her parents equal credit. The young archer said her parents’ unflinching support, such as allowing her to be home schooled, has made her the archer she is today.

“I like going to school at home a lot. I don’t have to get up and get to some class right away. I can shoot in the mornings now,” April said. “It’s just given me a lot more time to train and practice.”

Now the Witt clan is preparing for a European vacation, of sorts, and Ma and Pa Witt said they can’t wait to sit in the Parisian stands as proud parents.

“I’m so proud,” Julie said. “She’s learned what she needs to do to be successful and she’s run with it. The thing I’m most happy about is how she handles herself. She’s just so humble and calm.”

Doug, the proud papa, agreed. “I can’t say enough about the girl,” he said. “Even at her times of greatest disappointment she’s handled herself with class. She doesn’t live and die with this sport. It just makes me proud beyond belief.”

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