

# USA Archery Magazine Nov-Dec 2003

## Archer Spotlight on Aya La Brie by Steve Ross

Having only started her archery career four years ago in 1999, Erika "Aya" La Brie had a tremendous year competitively in 2004. She was part of the Women's Compound Team that took home a gold medal and new world record at the World Target Championships in New York City this past July. At the NAA Nationals, she shot both recurve and compound taking 10th and third place respectively. Aya also shoots the modern Longbow, traditional Japanese bow and is skilled in martial arts. I managed to catch Aya during an archery "holiday" due to a mountain bike accident.

**USAA: I heard you recently had a serious mountain bike accident. What happened and will it impact your archery plans for the rest of the outdoor season?**

Well, I prefer to commute on my mountain bike as a form of cross training for my archery and last Wed. was no different. I was crossing a street on the walk signal and a truck came from the outside lane and turned in front of me. He sent me sailing when I tried to veer and brake. I flipped twice and crashed in a heap in the middle of the street. He paused only long enough to see if I was alive and sped off once I sat up.

I ended up with three mashed ribs, elbows, knee and ankle and large scrapes on my back. Fortunately, I always wear a helmet, which cracked. Otherwise, I have no crippling injuries. However, it did put a damper on the IBO Worlds, which I had to fly to the next morning followed by a five-hour drive. I managed to shoot but was in a lot of pain the whole weekend. Since my return, my training has been put on hold for the next few weeks to let my ribs and knee heal. I have never taken more than two weeks off from training and will have to rely on mental imagery until I can shoot again. Mental training helped me earlier this year when I was hospitalized for two weeks. All the experience gained from this year will help put together a good regimen until I'm ready to hit the range again.

**USAA: I'm glad you're ok and will only need a short break. You have had a fantastic year; shooting on the women's compound team that shot a new world record must have been great.**

"Fantastic year" is more of an understatement to describe the year I've had! I started archery with recurve in 1999 and shot for one year before an injury forced me to shoot with a release if I wanted to continue shooting. So I picked up compound and shot for a year until last year when my hand healed and I could shoot fingers again. I switched back to recurve and made the U.S. World Field Team and alternate for the World Indoor Team. However, after shooting the Vegas Shoot this year with compound and recurve I decided I wanted to shoot both bows for NAA ranking. I had already decided I would shoot both bows at the Target Nationals, so I needed to divvy out the USAT events between both to meet the requirements. Indoor Nationals was the first step for my compound and decided the AZ Cup would be the second. The rest of the season would be recurve. Famous last words...

**USAA: Tell me about shooting at the World Target event; do you treat it any different than just a normal FITA event?**

I was still in a dream-like state when I arrived in New York after making the U.S. Compound Team. I never ever imagined I would win the FITA and OR at the Arizona Cup, Texas Shootout and Gold Cup! Now I was standing on the shooting line at the World Target Championships!

All my FITA's up to that point, I had trained myself not to fear the consequences of my shooting because I shot only for me. If I shot poorly, surely I would not shrivel up and die. Now for the first time I felt the weight of being on a team and representing the USA. My teammates were all experienced veterans and after having some difficulties on the first day of the FITA, I was afraid I would not be permitted to shoot the team round as the coach and other members questioned my experience. I pushed myself even harder and achieved several personal bests in the FITA and the matches. Now I felt that I had to prove myself to my team and to my country. To my greatest relief, the coach chose me to be the starting shooter in the team round. Since I was a rookie and had no expectations other than to shoot my best, I feel very blessed that I share a world record and have a gold medal.

**USAA: Did you do any special training?**

Two weeks prior to the World Target, I moved to the Archery International Training Center in Carbondale, Ill. I worked on my backup bow and practiced shooting matches and having to deal with equipment failure etc. Good thing because I had to use my backup bow for one of the team matches. But not all my training was for the Worlds. I also had to train for the ESPN Great Outdoor Games, which was held just prior to the worlds. The Games required a speed setup and also a considerably faster shooting style than I use for target.

**USAA: I don't know of many archers who in the matter of just a few years are competing at the level you are. Do you credit some of this to your background in martial arts?**

I have made two world teams in four years with two different bows. I guess it is not common, but I have always felt my archery was a continuation of the martial arts I started many years prior to picking up a bow and arrow.

**USAA: From what I understand you were a serious student of Japanese swordsmanship and Kyudo (Japanese archery). Can you describe this training?**

When I started martial arts, I quickly realized that contact martial arts was not a field I should explore if I wanted to preserve my kneecaps. So it seemed reasonable that I should fall in love with weapon's work. The Japanese sword became my top choice from an arsenal of amazing traditional weapons. Along with training to draw, block and cut, I learned the value of becoming "one with your weapon." This approach to fighting is where I found the most valuable tool for the mental game I currently use. Being so in tune with my katana definitely facilitated my way to winning the World Cup seven years ago. The katana was not a choice weapon for women. The training was rigorous and dangerous as we used live blades and actually cut in practice. Ask me how dangerous someday!

When I started Kyudo, I found myself getting very frustrated because of a handicap in my right shoulder. Regardless of how much I practiced, my shoulder refused to relinquish the flexibility I needed for certain motions in the shooting sequence. I shot four hours every day on a rooftop range at a Shinto shrine in Kamakura with my Japanese bow (yumi). Six months later I beat my entire school at a dojo tourney. I also was the first female non-Japanese to be inducted into the Ogasawara School of Mounted Archery. However, I knew that the beauty that made Kyudo an art would never be found with the imperfections in my form. I never even cared if I hit the target. I only wanted to shoot with beautiful style and form. I most definitely credit my training in martial arts to my advancement in archery. My bow is NOT equipment but an extension of my own being, just as my katana and my yumi were. My form, also unorthodox in many ways, is a style of my own and one that I am committed to.

**USAA: You shoot Olympic style recurve, FITA compound, and various traditional bows. As for tournaments, you participate in NAA, 3-D, FITA and NFAA. Am I missing anything?**

I am still new to 3-D but have competed in a couple ASA and IBO tournaments each. I would like to shoot more 3-D but most are on the other side of the Mississippi. Since moving to Colorado, I have enjoyed shooting in CSAA (Colorado State Archery Association) tournaments and have broken nine state records since last December with all three bows. I am also new to the NFAA this year and was surprised to find a whole different organization with a different approach to target and field shooting as compared to the NAA.

**USAA: Do you find it difficult switching between styles?**

This is the most frequently asked question. I learned recurve from a coach in Japan, but I taught myself to shoot compound and recently, modern longbow. Strange enough, my styles are so different from each other that I do not find it hard to switch, even in the same tournament and on occasion, the same shooting line. I find it a challenge to shoot all three bows at the same event, kind of like an archery triathlon.

**USAA: Do you have a personal coach?**

When I started recurve archery in April of 1999, I had a wonderful coach for six months: Tastuo Nobori. He was my only coach and was very strict about mental and physical conditioning. But the foundations that he laid, I still use today. I've never had a compound coach. I just wanted to continue shooting so badly that I figured out how by applying what I learned with recurve to compound.

**USAA: What is your training schedule like?**

I try to shoot four hours every day with focus on repetition of my shot sequence. At the end of training I usually do stamina exercises with my bow followed by a short run. I also cross-train by riding 30-50 miles or more a week on my mountain bike. I also jog 5 miles/run, a couple times per week. Every night just before bed I take a hot shower and stretch for 20 min. NO exceptions! I also do a lot of visual training using former pressure situations as the model.

**USAA: Would you like to mention anyone in particular for giving you support this year?**

I never dreamed I would have the support that I do in archery. My greatest being from the Lord above. My sponsors are TechnoHunt, Doinker, SureLoc, Golden Key Futura, Carter and Specialty Archery. I would like to thank Hoyt USA for making great compound and recurve bows.

**USAA: What are your compound and recurve setups?**

Compound:

60# Hoyt UltraTec XT3000 Cam 1½

Easton X-10 500 Spin Wings

SureLoc Supreme

Specialty Super Scope 6X

Doinker² Stabilizer

Recurve:

44# Hoyt Avalon+ and FX Limbs

Easton ACE 570

SureLoc FITA Extreme

Doinker² Stabilizer