

Want to Play a Game?

Okay, after reading the title of this article, how many of you thought about a movie? You know the one—in which the computer takes over the missile guidance systems—oh, never mind. I'm dating myself. Seriously though, how many of you have found the benefit of playing games a help in your coaching? What? Have fun! How dare you! The thought of having fun while training, well, that would be just zenful! Sorry, it was there and I just had to do it. My apologies to the masters.

In Roget's College Thesaurus fun is listed as a noun and right beside it are the words diversion, sport, and amusement. Simply put, all work and no play . . . well you get the idea.

One of the best tools we have in our arsenal of coaching secrets is creativity. Al Henderson speaks about the need to have fun in his book *Understanding Winning Archery*. He explains that in the 1976 Olympics in Quebec the archery team didn't always practice when they went to the range. Some days they just shot a few ends and then tossed a Frisbee around. His explanation was "They knew they were shooting fine, everything felt fine, the shots were going in . . . so why stand there and needlessly repeat it." He knew the importance of "play."

We've all done it at some point during practices. You're shooting, doing okay, had a few not so good shots but overall not too bad. Then for no reason what so ever, you shoot at one of your own arrows. Dang it . . . missed. Bet I can hit it this time. Couple of misses, maybe a ruined fletch, lucky if you Robin Hood; but it took the stress off. You laugh it off and get back to business.

In my experience, adults tend to focus on the matter at hand and what needs to be done to accomplish a goal while kids tend to focus on, well, everything at once. There are those that want to succeed and work hard to do so, but what about those that want to excel except not quite that fast. There will always be those who just want to get enough training to experience archery in a different way, a way that can be enriching as well as entertaining.

How many archers have you lost because they just lost interest? Archers you knew were good enough to reach the elite level. I've asked adult archers how they got involved in archery and most all told me that they were involved as a kid. In the same breath that same number told me that they lost interest at some point. Reasons? Cars, dating, jobs, or they just got bored. A few told me that they just couldn't find the coaching they needed to go farther. It was much later in life that they picked archery back up as a diversion, recreation, or to lengthen their hunting season.

Working with our JOAD kids we find the time to play. How do you balance training with play? At what point do you know that the work is over and the reward of having fun is at hand? Trust me, if you are working with kids they will let you know. Even adults will let you know when they have had enough. Our kids work hard for their ranks and they deserve a break. Even the NAA Level 1 book talks about game playing and its values. We've recognized this in our certification classes and have arranged the classes to maximize the range time. This tends to keep minds active and not fading out during lectures. It not only keeps their minds awake but their bodies as well.

With our young archers the last 15 to 20 minutes of class are spent in some type of game. We even have special days set aside just for fun. We like to schedule our game days so that everyone is excited when they arrive. We call them specialty shoots or fun days. Funny how no one misses those practices. These are not just games but some type of skill enhancing challenge. These games are developed to increase their skills and they don't even realize it. So, let's get down to it. By the way, if you have any games you like or have created yourself, let me know, I'd love to hear from you.

We all know about balloons and we have talked about them before so I'm not going to cover the glories of the "ka-boom." Besides . . . how hard can it be-blow them up, pop them. Use your imagination with balloon games. The games I am going to describe are challenging games. Games that sprang forth during a regular practice when someone said, "You know, it would be fun if we did this." Keep in mind that all the games we discuss have been safety tested by our own "Safety Department" (my wife), so that all participants are guaranteed a safe experience.

QUADRANTS

This game just sort of evolved at a practice one day. Everyone was bored and we knew we had to liven things up. I took a 60 cm target and turned it over and made a giant X across the back. In the valley of each X I placed a direction, N, S, E, and W. Now the ideal was to have them move around on the target shooting at different directions, but each archer soon started calling out areas and they all had to shoot there. Soon they were seeing who could shoot the closest to the center of the X in that quadrant. Some of our archers shoot 3-spot targets and this gave them some great practice moving around.

TIC-TAC-TOE

We play this with a twist. You only get three shots. You have to play to win. Here again you can draw this on the back of a target or I have found recently that you can purchase the target already made (Maple Leaf Press (www.MapleLeafPress.com) publishes quite a number of these novelty targets. The Tic-Tac-Toe target is also available on Amazon.com. Ed.) This has been a load of fun and the winners get to challenge the coach. I get beaten frequently.



POKER CHIPS

Got a few poker chips lying around from the last game night with the guys? Put them to good use. We've done this two ways and find that both are a challenge. Stick an arrow in the target butt and tie a poker chip hanging down with a piece of string. It gets really fun if you put a fan blowing across the room. The other way is to just tape them with clear tape to a target face. It's gotten to the point I have to keep some in my quiver just in case. The bad part is having to clean up afterward. We have had some of our advanced kids try to cut the string.

TEACH THE PARENTS DAY

Want to really have some fun? Try this. Pick a Saturday and let the kids coach their own parents. You'll just absolutely love how they tell Dad that he's doing it wrong. And you'll hear terminology that you thought they were ignoring: set, anchor, and followthrough. Well, they were listening. We had one parent tell us that they enjoyed it very much and his son found something he was doing wrong all along. The best thing about this game is that it re-enforces things you've taught by having them teach it. It even gets the most reluctant parent involved and introduces them to the sport. Who could turn down their own child?

CARD SHOOT

Take a deck of cards and glue them to a piece of cardboard. They get the point value of the cards they shoot. For a twist, they have to subtract the value of face cards from their total if they hit them.

ANIMAL TARGETS

Animal targets provide a new experience for young archers. We like the hunter targets that have the black and white drawings with scoring circles in the animal. You know the kind, the ones where you can't see the rings at 20 yards and have to guess. We put stick-on orange

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dots at the ten ring so it's a bit easier. Color animal targets are fun, too, but sometimes they can be a little too realistic. Some kids, and parents, may not be comfortable with animal targets so make sure you ask before using them. Have alternatives ready.

RIFLE TARGETS

I was in a local sports store and found the coolest rifle targets and thought they would make great archery targets. They are orange circles, squares, and triangles arranged in different designs. As the shapes get closer to the center of the design they get smaller. They are great targets for working on focus. I found that most any target used for sighting in a rifle makes a fantastic archery target.

OKAY, UH, BALLOONS!

I just had to mention this one. Every time we use flu-flu arrows for something someone always asks us about the history of what they were used for (aerial targets). So at a recent outdoor shoot we filled balloons with helium and staked them to the ground at different heights. It was great and tons of fun. One safety point-have a huge area available.

As you can see these are just a few games and with a little imagination there is no limit to what you can come up with. Everybody likes to have fun and a little fun is a great stress reliever. It also gives a coach a little window

of opportunity to do some archer/coach bonding. It's great for getting parents involved and has, at least for us, brought some of our quieter kids out of their shells. When training and coaching don't underestimate the value of having fun.

Tim Scronce and his wife **Sandi** are both NAA Level 3 Coaches. Tim has been involved in archery since around the age of seven. He shoots compound, recurve, and occasionally longbow. He competes regularly, when time permits. Sandi and Tim teach and certify Level 1 and Level 2 instructors, work with Girl and Boy Scouts thru archery, coach in a JOAD program, and have a range at home to teach privately.



In the past three years, they have used archery to raise money for the American Cancer Society, the Union County Lions Club and the Sun Valley Community Fair supporting five schools in the area. Tim does commercial heating and air conditioning. They have two children (Crystal and TJ) who both shoot recurve and compete as well. They are proud to add that Crystal spent two years working on getting an archery club going in her high school which became a reality in February 2002. She now attends North Carolina State where she plans to help reinstate the college's archery team.



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