

In Korea *Part 3 of 3*

How To Build An Olympian, The Korean Way

In March, 2002, Guy Krueger and Chris Shull took an eight day training trip to Seoul, South Korea. The trip, arranged by Mr. Park, Kyung Rae of Win and Win Archery, gave Chris and Guy a chance to witness first hand the archery development system that has created the Korean archery dynasty.

Unlike in the United States, there is no recreational archery in Korea. Rather than through JOAD clubs, the Koreans begin training their archers in elementary school physical education classes, around the age of ten. Many schools in Korea have designated archery coaches, similar to



a physical education teacher or even a football coach in the United States. These elementary school instructors understand that the base of any good shooter is perfect bone alignment in the back and arms. The Koreans have set out how to teach proper bone alignment by having all new archers spend three to six months doing drills. The archers begin by learning good shot mechan-

“Most new Korean archers will be able to shoot a 300 at 30 meters the very first time that they shoot it.”

ics with no bow in their hands. Next, they do the drills while drawing a bow and no arrow, then they add an arrow, and after many months the young archers will shoot their first arrow. Unlike the American method of getting a bow in the hands of new archers and an arrow in the target after only a few hours (or even minutes), this “delayed gratification” process teaches perfect alignment right from the beginning. The patience the Koreans have, in the beginning, pays off as there is no need to correct major technical flaws in their archers later. Most new Korean archers will be able to shoot a 300 at 30 meters (36 arrows) the very first time they shoot it.

Guy and I spent an afternoon at the Seoul elementary school archery championships and we had a chance to watch exactly how textbook these young kids are trained to shoot. As you can see in the picture, these children look like miniature versions of their full grown national team. The winners of both the boys and girls divisions shot

RECURVE Tech 300

around a 345 at 30 meters.

The lesson for the rest of us is that it is not an efficient training regimen to put a bow in the hands of our shooters too quickly. We believe that it is acceptable to teach children to shoot incorrectly at the beginning, and then to correct their mistakes over time, but the truth is that this philosophy is a tremendous handicap to our developmental system. We should explore ways to teach the correct technique at the very beginning.



Korean archers continue their training on middle school teams. Just like American middle schools have track and field teams, many Korean middle schools offer archery as a sport. It is in the middle schools that the best shooters are tapped to enter the full Korean training regimen. Their top shooters are invited to leave home and live at one of several physical education high schools, where they learn to shoot at a world class level. Guy and I spent most of our week in Korea training at one such school in Suwon, Kynug-gi National Physical Education High School. Along with weight lifting, track and field, swimming, and air rifle ten young men and six young women hone their skills as archers.

“The winners of both the boys and girls divisions of the Seoul elementary school archery championships shot around a 345 at 30 meters.”

Korean high school students train more than any other shooters in the country. We began our day training with them with a warm up and shooting a full FITA round in the morning, the same again after lunch, and Olympic round practice in the evening under lights. To fit more shooting into a short time we ran back and forth to the target.

Academic class time is limited at the physical education high schools, as the purpose of these schools is to train Olympians. During the off season, archers spend a few hours per day in class, but before major competitions class is withdrawn in favor of more practice. In addition, all practice is monitored by two full time coaches. Mr. Lim, In-Taek, the head coach at Kyung-gi High, participated in the World Championships in the 1980s. He

guided Yun, Mi-Jin, double Gold Medalist in Sydney, during her time at Kyung-gi. Obviously the system works.

For the top archers in the Korean high school team, they have two options after high school. Some will enter Korean Physical Education Universities, and a select few will join one of the many Korean Corporate Archery

Teams. The Korean Corporate archery teams form a professional league of sorts. Archers are paid a salary to compete on behalf of the companies they work for. It takes a minimum FITA ability of around 1330 to earn such a position. Archers on corporate and university teams shoot much less than the high school teams, only two to four- hundred arrows per day, as opposed to the five or six hundred arrows shot in the high schools.

What does this mean for the United States and the rest of the archery world? As I mentioned before, certainly being more methodical in teaching correct technique to our new archers speeds up their development. Beyond doing that, it is hard to say. Our society will not permit us to train in the same way the Koreans do. What do you think?

Chris Shull is a member of the U.S. Archery Team. He currently lives and trains at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, CA, having recently graduated from college.



Here is Chris (far right) with his Pan American Team mates. Photo Courtesy of the NAA.