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Family of archers targets Olympics



Several members of the Trafford family — (from left) Rachael, 12, Heather, 11, Miriam, 8, Skip, Charlene and Hardy, 6 — have won world titles in field archery. "Field archery is the hardest of all archery disciplines, bar none," says Skip Trafford, the children's father. (Greg Pearson/The Times)

The Trafford family file

Skip: 7-time world champion; 8-time U.S. National Team member; 5-time North American champ; 3-time European champ shooting for England (1 time); Hungarian National Team member (1999); 5-time U.S. Olympic Team finalist **Charlene:** 4-time IFAA world champ; 3-time European champ; 3-time North American champ; 1-time U.S. National Team member; 1-time Hungarian National team member **Rachael** (12): current world champion in juniors; holds every existing junior world record in barebow field archery; 3-time European champion, 3-time North American champ; Runner up to Heather in U.S. National Team champs **Heather** (11): 1-time world silver medalist; 3-time European silver; 3-time North American silver; 1-time U.S. National Team (adult) member as 9 year old U.S. National champ **Miriam** (8): World bronze medalist; 3-time bronze at North American championships **Hardy** (6): World champion in cubs at 4 years old; North American champ 3 times; Holds every North American barebow record in under 12 age group at 6 years old

By Jimmy Watson
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The Traffords are grooming their four children as Olympic competitors.

If you're driving through southeast Shreveport and you hear the William Tell Overture being played on outdoor speakers or you see a house with the Olympic rings displayed in the front yard, you might be seeing the Trafford house.

Members of the Skip Trafford clan don't shoot apples off each other's heads and they don't yet have any Olympic rings, but when it comes to overachieving families, the Traffords may have a corner on the market.

The sixsome are not only some of the best field archers in the south, not only some of the best in North America, they're some of the best with a bow and arrow in the world.

Dad, along with mom, Charlene, 12-year-old Rachael, 11-year-old Heather, 8-year-old Miriam and 6-year-old Hardy are currently in training for the International Field Archery Association World Championships June 11-17 off the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

Rachael already has three world titles, as does mom, while Skip has seven and Hardy already has one under his young belt. Heather could take home her first world in Australia after finishing second to her older sister the last three years.

"I'm turning 13 this year, so Heather and I will be in different classes," Rachel said. "She's won the silver medal three times, but she should be the favorite for the gold."

Field archery isn't the same archery you see on television during the Olympics, and it's not easy to master.

"Field archery is the hardest of all archery disciplines, bar none," Skip Trafford said. "It is highly competitive and basically shot on a 'golf course' in the woods."

Numerous sized targets set at various distances over a prescribed course are used. The course difficulty is determined by the features of the terrain at the venue holding a specific competition.

"I have shot competitively for 45 years and have shot straight down out of trees in Slovenia, shot straight up standing in a stream next to the Matterhorn in Switzerland," Trafford said. "I've shot while being devoured by mosquitoes in Southeast Asia, shot next to cobras and baboons in South Africa and stood in water up to my hip during a U.S. Team trials in Ohio."

Their move to Shreveport a few years ago had little to do with his work and nothing to do with archery.

"We wanted to move to Shreveport because it is in the Bible belt," Trafford said. "That was very important."

Charlene Trafford, a former Miss Taiwan, is the daughter of a man who has been called the Billy Graham of Taiwan.

"He's a retired protestant pastor, but he was in charge of 135 churches in Taiwan," Charlene said.

Also important to the family was choosing a home that would enhance the Olympic archery aspirations he and Charlene have for their children.

"We bought a tract of land near Wallace Lake and intentionally chose the house to train the children because it was in the country . . . and the address was 10320 Goldsberry Road," Trafford said. "In archery, a 10 is the points awarded for a perfect shot and, of course, gold is the medal goal in the Olympics."

The Trafford children have been groomed for the Olympics since they were two, according to their father, and they've shot in world championships in Scotland, Hungary, Croatia, Australia and South Africa.

The children have attended school in Taiwan, Budapest, Hungary, and in Tucson, Ariz., but they currently attend Caddo Middle Magnet, Youree Drive and Fairfield Magnet. All of them are straight-A students in the gifted program and each plays the violin in the parish's honor orchestra under the talented arts program. All three girls are in all state with top chairs in violin.

"I've played the violin for five years. Since both archery and violins have bows, I love playing both," Rachel said.

Even though she isn't yet a teenager, Heather has endured her share of international controversy. When she became youngest athlete - at 9 - to make any U.S. National Team in 2004, she flew to Croatia with her father to compete at worlds.

But once there, the youngster was immediately disqualified by officials, who determined at 9-years-old she was too young to shoot on the field course in the Julian Alps. With support from the US Olympic coach Sherrie Rhodes and officials at the U.K., France, Germany and Italy, the Traffords won their protest and Heather was allowed to compete.

"She then went out and beat a large number of adult women and ended up No. 22 in the adult division in the world," Skip Trafford said.

When Hardy was just 4-years-old, he was the youngest competitor to enter and finish the week-long world championships. He won the title, beating Heather for the youngest champ ever, after she had won at 7.

"He is one tough little boy and a tenacious competitor in a variety of sports," Trafford said.

The elder Trafford has been coaching his children but is preparing to turn that job over to former Olympic Taiwan coach and world champ Hardy Ward, the namesake of his son and the best man at his wedding. According to Trafford, Hardy Ward is the one of the finest archery coaches in the world and may be the children's ticket to the Olympics and a match made in heaven against the dominant Koreans.

Currently ranked first in the IFAA world junior division, Rachael has lost only four times in her life, while No. 2-ranked Heather has lost only to Rachael. Miriam is ranked third and Hardy is No. 1 in the world in his division.

All four children are now taking golf lessons and softball as a cross training exercise for archery. And they don't spend much time on a daily basis shooting their bows.

"The children actually prepare for any important tournament by picking up their bows a month before the shoot, and at that point they shoot every day," Trafford said. "But our family is too involved in work, church, school, music and cross training to train every day . . . and I don't want to burn the children out."

Charlene Trafford said she makes sure everything is kept on an even keel. "Our children definitely have a lot of potential, so we provide as much of an opportunity as we can for them to reach their goals," she said.

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