

Red Bluff High student aims high in archery

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Paige Pearce has been shooting a bow and arrow since she was 18 months old.

She began competing in archery competitions when she was 2. That could be why the 14-year-old Red Bluff High School freshman holds more than 100 state, national and world records.

Paige was among 450 teenagers from 58 countries who traveled to Ogden, Utah, last month to compete in the 2009 Youth World Archery Championships.

"I like representing my country and meeting so many new people," Paige said.

She was just an infant when her parents, both archers, gave her a Nerf bow and arrow set.

At 10 years old, she broke her first state record. She said competing is what she enjoys most.

"I thrive on the pressure," she said.

Paige said she likes to set goals and work toward accomplishing them. At 13, she advanced into the cadet division for 15- and 16-year-olds and made the United States Junior World Archery Team. In 2008, she and her three-person team competed in the Youth World Championships in Antalya, Turkey, winning the gold medal and breaking the International Archery Federation (FITA) world record.

A FITA round involves shooting four rounds of 36 arrows from four different distances. The center ring is worth 10 points, and each successive ring marks one less point. Final FITA scores are used to rank archers and place them into brackets for the individual and team elimination round. In Ogden, Paige finished in second place in the individual round.

Kailey Johnston of Georgia and Kayla Harmeyer of Wisconsin were her teammates at the Utah competition. The team earned first place and set a FITA 2008 team world record.

The Mexico team earned second place and Russia came in third, with India and Australia trailing. After all team matches were complete, the U.S. earned the gold medal over Mexico by three points.

During the individual elimination round, archers are required to shoot 12 arrows from 60 meters. The winner advances while the loser is eliminated. Paige beat competitors from Hong Kong, Canada and America - including teammate Harmeyer.

"The victory was bittersweet," Paige said.



After the semifinals, Paige and Stephanie Sarai Salinas of Mexico were left to compete for the gold and silver.

Charley Washburn, head coach of the Nevada County Gold Archery Team and a Level 4 National Archery Association high performance coach has trained Pearce for two years.

"Even more than skills, she must have a mental game," Washburn said. "I tell my students 'You'll shoot thousands of arrows and score thousands of points, but it will ultimately come down to one arrow.' "

He was right.



"The wind was calm, but tension was high," said Paige's mom, Stacy Pearce. The score was 89-92 with Paige ahead.

When tensions mount, Paige remains calm by singing a song in her mind. "I sing the song 'Do You Believe in Magic?' " she said. "The beat goes with my shot sequence (stance, pull arrow, etc.)."

Photo courtesy of Gary Holstein

"For the final three shots, Salinas' first shot was a 10, and then Paige shot a 10," Stacy Pearce said. "Salinas' second arrow hit the 10, as did Paige's. On the last arrow of the match, Salinas shot a 9. To win the gold medal, Paige had to score a 3 on her final shot. But to break the individual world record she needed to shoot a 10."

Paige scored a 9, just shy of the bull's-eye. She tied the world record and won the individual gold medal for the United States.

"It was awesome," Paige said. "Even though I'm the youngest to make the team, I had set my mind to win."

Her two gold medals hang on the "trophy hearth" behind a wood stove alongside her other awards. Even with two new team world records and tying the individual world record, she said she's not done yet.

"I definitely want to wipe out some more records," she said.

