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Sports Standout Golden Touch: Two-time All-American archer Megan Bowker wins gold

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A young woman with brown hair, wearing a purple jacket, is shown in a close-up, focused on aiming a compound bow. The bow is blue and black, and she is holding a blue arrow. The background is a blurred green field. The text "Sports Standout" is in white, bold, sans-serif font, and "Golden Touch" is in a larger, white, bold, sans-serif font with a black outline, both overlaid on the image.

Sports Standout Golden Touch

Two-time All-American archer Megan Bowker wins gold

By Lisa Freedman ('05) -- Montpelier, editorial assistant

TWO-TIME ALL-AMERICAN ARCHER MEGAN BOWKER ('04) WON HER SECOND GOLD MEDAL IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION LAST SUMMER. BOWKER AND HER U.S. TEAMMATES WON A GOLD MEDAL AND SET A WORLD RECORD IN THE TEAM COMPOUND-BOW AT THE 2003 WORLD UNIVERSITY GAMES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA. BOWKER COMBINED WITH TEXAS A&M'S MARY ZORN AND AMBER DAWSON FOR A COMPOUND-BOW TEAM SCORE OF 2,033. BOWKER SHOT A 664 OF A POSSIBLE 720.

In 2002, Bowker teamed up with the same Texas A&M duo and won a compound-bow gold medal at the World University Archery Championships in Thailand.

Archery, like tennis and golf, is both an individual and team sport, and Bowker has succeeded as both an individual and team archer. In the women's individual compound bow competition at the 2003 World University Games, Bowker placed fourth with a 113110 upset of a heavy favorite, her teammate Amber Dawson, who placed second at the 2003 World Outdoor Archery Championships. Bowker also finished fourth in the 2002 World University Archery Championships and has been a member of JMU's last three national runner-up compound-bow teams.

For many, archery is a forgotten sport from the Middle Ages, but for Bowker the sport is uppermost in her mind. Since she was 12, Bowker has worked on her shot. "Archery was just something that I wanted to try," says the Middleborough, Mass., native. "I was already playing basketball and softball, so I liked competition."

Archery is what brought Bowker to JMU. As a sophomore in high school, she attended an archery tournament in Atlantic City, N.J., where she saw the JMU archery team compete. "I watched them shoot the whole weekend, and they won first place in every division they [competed] in," Bowker says. "At that moment I knew I wanted to go to JMU and compete with the university's archery team."

Bowker realizes that in order to do well in competitions, an athlete needs to put in a significant amount of time training. During the fall semester, archery team members practice two hours a day, three times a week. During the spring tournament season, they compete and practice five or six days a week for two hours a day. In the summer months, Bowker practices on her own for tournaments at least four times a week.

The long hours and hard practices that Bowker puts in have definitely helped her find success. This past summer as part of the U.S. Women's Compound Team, she contributed to their victory over the

Republic of Korea 2522 at the World University Games. "I don't even know right now. I'm still shaking. It just feels great," Bowker says.

Bowker should be used to the feeling of achievement, since this championship is not the only one that she has seen. Last year she finished fourth at the World University Archery Championships and was a quarterfinalist at the U.S. Intercollegiate Championships in May.

Also making a name for herself is archer Stephanie Pylypchuk, a JMU junior. She, along with her U.S. teammates, advanced to the quarterfinals before being eliminated in the World University Games women's recurve (Olympic) bow team competition. "Competing in the World University Games was a tremendous honor, and I am very proud of myself and my team for our performance," says Pylypchuk.

Bowker admits, "The hardest part of archery is definitely the mental aspect of it. I think most archers would say that this sport is 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical." Bowker has been working on her mental game since she began shooting and expects it to play a larger role in the rest of her archery career.

Despite her experience and success as an accomplished archer, Bowker has much more she would like to achieve in the sport. "One thing I would like to do is to place in the top three at our college nationals, which will be held here at JMU next May," says Bowker enthusiastically. Bowker plans to continue performing her best and hopes to place on future world teams.

As a top athlete in her field, Bowker emphasizes the importance of enjoying the sport. "Have fun with your sport, have fun with your competitors," she says. "If you're not having fun, you'll have a harder time succeeding."