

Hitting



Kids in over
300 Virginia schools
are hearing
“Bull’s-eye!”
thanks to NASP.

the Mark

by Bruce Ingram

The time is 7:30, Monday morning at the Northside Middle School gym in Roanoke County. Twenty-four students in grades six through eight have arrived to engage in an extracurricular activity with their coach, Bob Shelton, a physical education teacher at the school. But these young people aren't there to improve their jump shots or running times. Instead, they are working on their archery skills as part of the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP).

"There are so many good things about NASP," Shelton tells me. "One of the kids who joined had been listed as an 'at risk' child, but now he has a reason to come to school and feel a part of things. NASP is also a great way to stimulate a young person's interest in the outdoors.

"At the beginning of the program, of our 24 kids only three of them were bowhunters. Now, seven or eight have bought their own bows and have caught the bowhunting fever. But one of the best things, and also most pleasurable for me, is that these young people are just excited to be here, improving their archery skills."

Karen Holson, who supervises the outdoor education program for the Department (DGIF) and serves as the state NASP coordinator, maintains that such turnarounds are not uncommon because of student participation in NASP.

"There is a grandmother in Newport News who has a wonderful story about her grandson and how he never participated or enjoyed sports

in the past but really enjoyed archery. He even asked for a bow for Christmas and now shoots every day after school," she says.

Soon, the satisfying sound of "thwack" is heard throughout the gym as the young folks release arrows toward targets at distances of 10 and 15 meters. Five stations exist and each student shoots five arrows before the next quintet arrives to do the same.



Reviewing safety procedures, Coach Bob Shelton prepares his NASP team for practice.

Shelton relates that the National Wild Turkey Federation is a sponsor of NASP and, through the DGIF education program, Northside Middle School has been assigned 12 bows, five targets and arrow-resistant netting, among other things. Communi-

ty support also has developed: A local archery club, Sherwood Archers, gives students discount memberships, and eight or nine students joined early on. Such support around the state is common, adds Holson.

National Archery in the Schools

Starting Up

NASP is designed for students in grades four through twelve and its core content includes archery history, safety, technique, equipment, mental concentration, and self-improvement. Prospective school teachers must undergo an 8-hour instructor certification program referred to as BAI, "Basic Archery Instructor." DGIF outdoor education staff and certified volunteers conduct the training program.

Benefits

Karen Holson relates that NASP positively influences student attendance, behavior, self-esteem, confidence, and on-task behaviors. For more information: Karen.Holson@dgif.virginia.gov 804-367-6355.

Statewide Participation

Kentucky was the first state to incorporate NASP into its schools, in 2002; Virginia got on board in 2006. DGIF staff and volunteers have trained 797 teachers in over 300 schools, and the agency has provided and assigned NASP equipment sets to over 200 schools across the commonwealth. For more information: www.dgif.virginia.gov/events/virginia-nasp-tournament/.

Statewide Tournament

After a "virtual" tournament in 2008, the Department held its first statewide tournament (that is, with teams competing in the same location) on February 28, 2009 at the Augusta Expoland in Fishersville, in conjunction with the Western Virginia Sport Show.

Teams of 16 to 24 students competed in either Elementary (Grades 4–6), Middle (Grades 7–8), or High School (Grades 9–12) Divisions. Winning teams and individuals were eligible to compete in the national tournament in Kentucky this past May.

For more information on the Western Virginia Sport Show:

www.westernvasportshow.com

To see a video of this event:

www.HuntFishVA.com



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Coach Bob Shelton of Northside Middle School tutors Jordan Calloway on proper shooting stance.

"We have many other donors and contributors that make this program work," she emphasizes. "The DGIF and my volunteer instructors put in many hours for the Virginia NASP!"

Shelton says that the fervor of his students has even influenced him.

"I hadn't bowhunted in about 10 years until I started coaching these kids," says the Botetourt County resident. "Now because of their passion, I've started back. Sitting in a tree-stand on an October afternoon after school is a great way to enjoy the fall."

Shelton's program has been so successful that, in 2008, the Roanoke County school won first place in the middle school division. Eighth-grader Will Echols captured the individual award for middle school students.

"Our team winning was really exciting," Echols tells me. "Last year was the first time I had ever shot a bow, and I got really into it. I practice a lot at home, and hopefully I can start bowhunting one day."

Seventh-grader Anna Hensley relates that an incident in phys. ed. class piqued her interest.

In fact, a lot of my kids weren't participating in anything extracurricular until NASP came along. It gives them a place where they feel comfortable and a part of things."

"One day we were shooting and Coach Shelton tells me that I would probably be really good at archery and suggested that I come out for the team," she says. "A lot of my friends also said that archery was really fun, and they were right. My dad bowhunts, and maybe I can start going with him."

Three days later, I am in the gym at Hidden Valley High School, another Roanoke County training site for budding archers, on a Thursday afternoon. Teacher Lisa Sink-Morris has just given her "pre-game" pep talk, this one about the importance of peep sights remaining in a fixed location. Then, employing the same whistle that she does for her phys. ed. class, Sink-Morris sounds off. The students commence shooting.

Sink-Morris, who the students affectionately call Coach Mo, has been

target shooting for some 25 years and credits her mother for introducing her to the pastime. All in all, some 35 students participate in her NASP team program.

“I have the school eccentrics,” laughs Coach Mo. “That is, the ones that aren’t interested in playing ball sports or in various club activities. In fact, a lot of my kids weren’t participating in anything extracurricular until NASP came along. It gives them a place where they feel comfortable and a part of things.”

Later, freshman Wayne Veldsman comes up to Sink-Morris and proudly shows her a “Robin Hood”—that is, two arrows that were shot in the same place on a target, so much so that one arrow’s point has buried itself in another arrow’s nock.

In 2008, her team finished second in the high school division for Virginia’s NASP. But the group’s biggest claim to fame was testifying before some 35 members of Congress about the benefits of NASP and why it should continue to receive government funding. Senior McKenzie Vie, who has been on the Hidden Valley team for three years, marvels at that experience.

“It was very interesting testifying before Congress,” he tells me. “I had expected those Congressmen to know a little something about archery, but they didn’t. So we had to carefully explain to them about the benefits of NASP and archery.”

“I found it very difficult trying to teach adults something new. But things must have worked out because Congress did renew the program.”

I next approach senior Hannah Kocher.

“This is the only club I’ve been a member of my whole time in high school,” she says. “I really enjoy coming to the gym to shoot.”

And that’s reason enough for Virginians to be proud that our state is an active participant in NASP. □

Bruce Ingram has authored many guide books, most recently *Fly and Spin Fishing for River Smallmouths* (\$19.25). Contact him at be_ingram@juno.com for more information.



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Above: Coach Shelton assists student in scoring the arrows he has shot.

Below: Coach Lisa Sink-Morris gives shooting instruction to senior Hannah Kocher who says that NASP has been the only program she has participated in during her high school years.



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