

South Brunswick Post

No. 9

Published every Thursday

Thursday, February 28, 2008

732-329-9214

packetonline.com

One dollar

Taking their aim

Local archery club aids team in pursuit of Paralympic glory

By Sean Ruppert
Staff Writer

A group of talented young athletes are pursuing their Paralympic dreams with a little help from a South Brunswick club.

The North Jersey Navigators, a non-profit adaptive/wheelchair sport team for young people is training once a week at the WA-XO-BE Archery Club on Major Road for the National Junior Disability Championship, to be held July 19-27 at the Rutgers University campus in Piscataway this year.

The 12-member team, composed of

athletes ranging in age from 5 to 17, has been sponsored by the group and receives coaching from its members.

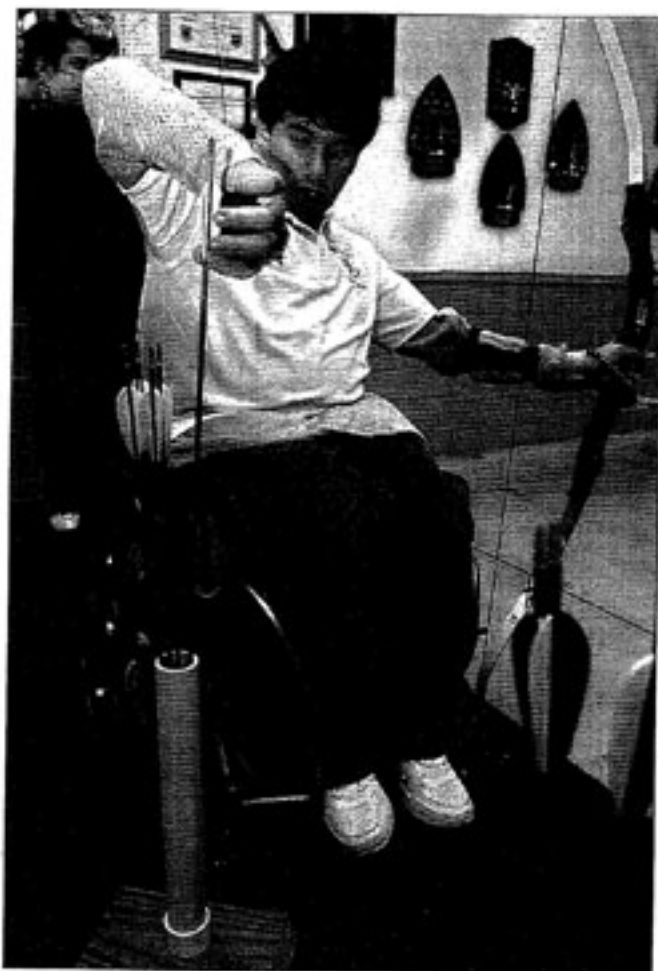
"They contacted us in the middle of the summer in 2007, and we immediately embraced them and took them into the club," WA-XO-BE President Ken Bagala said. "The kids didn't have any archery experience when they came in, and we had to change some of our strategies for them. One kid needed a modified bow, things like that, but we make it work for them. At the end of the day it is still basic archery."

See AIM, Page 4A



Staff photo by John Keating

Alex Choma, a 50-year archer, demonstrates to Gianfranco Iannotta (right) the proper grip.



Jim Westly prepares to fire.



Above, Jerson Calderon retrieves his arrows; below, Jimmy Cuevas helps Crystal Orihuela with posture.



Staff photos by John Keating

Aim

Continued from Page 1A

The National Junior Disability Championship games were first played in 1984, and take place at a different location every year. This is the first time the NJDC has returned to New Jersey since 2001, and it is the third time the Garden State has played host to the event.

Qualifiers for the event will be held on May 17.

Much like the Pan Am Games can provide a training ground for Olympic hopefuls, the NJDC can do the same for athletes interested in the Paralympic Games.

Events at the games are ar-

chery, track, field, pentathlon, swimming, table tennis, 3-on-3 wheelchair basketball and weightlifting. Athletes must be between 7 and 21 years old.

Last year, at the NJDC in Spokane, Wash., the Navigators netted 70 gold, 26 silver, and 16 bronze medals. The effort earned them second place overall for teams consisting of nine to 23 members.

While the competition is strong among the kids, Navigator coach Isabel Cuevas, mother of team member Jim Cuevas, said that just having an opportunity to be on the team has meant so much for her child and

their family.

"Going into sports, having practices to go to, and being around all these kids just being kids. It's wonderful," Ms. Cuevas said. "They learn that they don't have to just look at themselves as a kid in a wheelchair."

Ms. Cuevas' husband, Jimmy, is the team's head coach. Their son Jim, 17, has been an athlete on the team since the eighth grade.

Jim said he has high ambitions for his athletic career.

"I want to go to the Paralympics. I haven't decided what event though," he said. "At first I wanted to do track. I run the

400, 800, 1,500 and 5,000 meter races."

Jim also echoed his mother's thoughts on what the team has meant to him.

"Everyone on it is my friend, it makes it more fun," Jim said.

The Navigators staff consists completely of volunteers and the team runs on volunteer work, sponsorships and donations.

If you have a child that you would like to get involved in the team, or would like to make a donation, you can do so by contacting Jimmy Cuevas at 201-435-1688.