

Center Shot Archers - Coach's Bio

Larry E. Brown



Coach Larry Brown is a true renaissance man. He has been a pioneering archer, a ground-



breaking Ivy League University coach, a professional photographer who immortalized many of Brooklyn's 70's-era civil rights leaders, a master bead-work artist and designer, coach and mentor to hundreds of inner-city kids, and now, founder of Center Shot Archers (CSA), the only Olympic Tournament Archery Team comprised of inner-city youth. But throughout his accomplished life, the one constant has been his love of archery.

Larry was only five when his father, a bow laminator, took him and his two brothers out for a lesson. Because the elder Brown had a prosthetic leg



Brown with a young archer who is about the age that he was when he had his first lesson.

(and also ran his own upholstery business in addition to laminating), that single lesson was the only one he could manage to give them. But one taste of archery was all young Larry needed to form a life-long love of the sport.

When most boys in the Baisley Park Housing Project in

Coaching History

2008—Founded Center Shot Archers

2004—Founder and Coach of NYC Youth Archery Program. Presently Coaching in 12 NYC Schools

2002—First African-American Head Coach of Columbia University Archery Team

Queens were practicing lay-up shots, Larry Brown was scouring the neighborhood for tree limbs to use in making his own bows, which sufficed until he bought a small bow from a second-hand store at age 11.

He was in his early 20's before finally purchasing a *real* bow after his burning desire to learn to shoot led him to now-defunct Safari Archery Range in Queens.

Being the only African-American in the place added to the nervousness Brown felt on that first visit in 1980, but he received a warm welcome. One of the regulars even generously handed over his own bow and arrow to Brown and invited him to take a shot at the target.

Safari was located in a basement and when a nervous Brown took a wobbly shot, the arrow hit one of the basement pillars and broke. He was embarrassed and felt awful about having broken the stranger's arrow. But instead of being angry, the man gave him a second arrow and calmly said, "Here, try it again."

"If I hadn't taken that second shot, I might not have continued in the sport," Brown admits, remembering his inauspicious maiden range visit. But

luckily for hundreds of NYC kids who would eventually benefit from his skill, Brown *did* continue, purchasing his own equipment that same day.

He soon joined Safari's League Nights and shot in his first indoor tournaments. But he didn't begin to make real progress in the sport until he discovered Proline Archery Lanes in Queens in 1985, the range at which he still shoots today.

"At Proline, I met great archers who were also great teachers who pointed out my mistakes. They gave me the kind of advice that helped me really grow as an archer."

While Brown was developing as an archer, he was also pursuing other interests. He studied Commercial Art at NYC Technical College and photography at the School of Visual Arts. Always eager to learn something new, he even taught himself loomed bead-working and designed jewelry and ethnic art. But he always found time for archery.

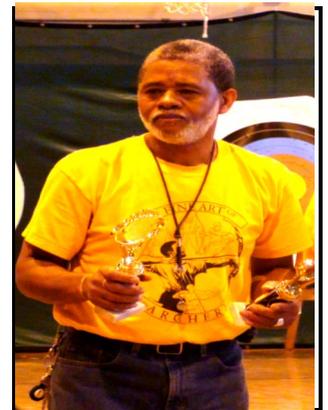
He was making a name for himself on the indoor circuit, but soon wanted to progress to outdoor tournaments.

"Before I started going to Proline, I got most of my information from archery magazines. I'd read them to learn about shooting, equipment, everything. One day, I was thumbing through one and I saw a picture of an outdoor tournament. In those days, you were required to dress all in white at outdoor tournaments. I saw those archers, all lined up in white and I imagined myself there. I saw myself in that picture."

Soon, Brown was "in the picture," winning a coveted spot on New York's Empire

State Games team on his very first tryout in 1985. Later, he would drive from state-to-state to compete in tournaments around the country. His one goal — becoming the best archer he could be.

At Proline, Brown met Randal "Pee Wee" Turner —an early (and current) African-American administrator of the sport until he discovered Proline Archery Lanes in Queens in 1985, the range at which he still shoots today. But touring the country, Brown realized there were very few archers of color competing nationally. But Brown, Turner,



Coach Brown presenting trophies at the 2009 Battle of the Boroughs

and the handful of others, through their courage, personal fortitude and discipline made this essentially invisible and only marginally accessible sport available to inner city or African American communities. They helped pave the way for today's young inner-city archers to set limitless goals.

The desire to see more diversity in archery later influenced some of Brown's career choices. In the 1977 while working as a Teaching Assistant at Brooklyn's Clara Barton High, he tried unsuccessfully to start an archery program at the school. Little did he know that a much larger coaching arena was in his future.

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In 2002, Turner told Brown about a coaching position, but it wasn't at a high school, it was at Columbia University. Brown got the job, becoming the prestigious Ivy League school's first African-American Head Archery Coach.

"I was the first coach to recruit archers to the school," he remembers. "I also upgraded their equipment because they were still using wooden bows. In terms of technique, I didn't reinvent the wheel, I just taught them what I'd learned during my many years of shooting."

Brown transformed Columbia's team. When he arrived, they were poorly ranked, but under Brown's leadership the team quickly rose to **2nd in the nation in 2004!** And while he was proud of what he accomplished there, after a couple of years he wanted to make some life changes.

During each season at Columbia he taught only 12 archers, so he wanted to bring the sport to many more people. Also, his Ivy League archers were from privileged backgrounds and already destined for success, but he wanted to try to impact students who weren't as privileged and hopefully influence them beyond just archery.

After finally convincing Columbia to let him resign (they were so pleased with his coaching that they initially rejected his resignation), Brown revisited the idea of starting an archery program in NY schools. But knew he would first have to convince someone at the Board of Ed.

"To make the proposal more desirable, I spent \$2,200. of my own money on used equipment — targets, bows, arrows I didn't want the idea to be rejected because it was seen as too expensive, so I paid for the equipment myself."

Still, the proposal was rejected by the Board of Ed.

Refusing to give up on his dream, Brown persevered and eventually struck gold.

"Gene Adams, Community Coordinator at Bronx Community College, put me in touch with Robin Fleishman at the Bronx Children's Aid Society. We met, she loved my idea, and in 2004 the Student Archery Program was born."

The first year was difficult. "I only had one set of equipment



and carted it around from school to school," Brown recalls. "But the next year the individual schools purchased their own equipment, so it got easier."

In its second year, the program also expanded to include Brooklyn schools when the CAMBA Beacon Program at I.S. 271 came on board as an additional sponsor.

Today, through the student program, Brown coaches weekly in 12 elementary, middle and high schools, bringing archery to hundreds of inner-city youth. During weekend sessions, adults also join his classes, thus bringing the sport to even more members of the community. Anyone who wishes to learn the sport is welcome, space permitting.

The highlight of the student program is the twice-yearly Battle of the Boroughs and Bronx Community Championship tournaments where archers from

the Bronx meet in a friendly showdown against those from Brooklyn. Friends, family and community residents come out in force to cheer as students compete for impressive trophies and borough "bragging rights."

"I started the tournaments so the kids could get a feel for what real archery tournaments are like, including traveling to compete in unfamiliar locations. That's why we have them twice a year, one in Brooklyn and the other in the Bronx" Brown says.

The tournaments also helped him gauge individual student progress. "By 2008, it was clear that some had outgrown the student program and were ready to move to the next level of competition. I knew I had to provide a vehicle to get them there. I wasn't sure just how I would go about it, but I knew something had to happen so these talented young archers could continue to advance in the sport. I soon realized formation of an actual tournament team was an absolute necessity."

Selecting the first CSA team was a thoughtful process. "I chose archers who not only had the athletic talent, but the desire and the discipline to be champions. I also looked for self-confidence and positive self-image."

Brown's keen ability to put together a winning team was quickly validated. Just as he had led the Columbia team to success, he repeated his coaching magic with CSA.

In only three short years, CSA had built a record of winning and placing at state and regional events. But in 2011, they reached new heights. CSA members not only won most of the top spots in their divisions at New York State Indoor Championships, but under Brown's coaching, two CSA archers — Carlisle "CJ" Brackin and

Tyler Lowther— also had historic wins at Nationals, winning titles in three divisions. Brackin also finished 2nd in the nation at Junior Olympic finals. No other coach in history has ever led inner-city archers to this level of success.

"They're all doing very well and I'm proud of the whole team," Brown says. "But they have even more potential. I only have them one day a week, so imagine how well they would be doing if I could work with them more often. I knew they were ready for this level of competition, so I'm not surprised by their success."

But when it comes to all of his kids — those on CSA as well as those in his student program— Brown defines "success" in terms that extend far beyond tournament wins.

"Archery is only part of what I wanted accomplish when I envisioned an archery program. I was blessed to have a great childhood with a father who taught us good values and set high expectations that we were expected to meet. I bring that same standard to my students. They are expected to do well, not only on the archery field, but also at school. They are also expected to continue with their education beyond high school. I expect the best because I know what they are capable of achieving if they put in the work."

Several CSA members are on hiatus while they attend or prepare to attend college, and Brown believes their archery training has played a role. "Confidence, self-image and ability are the three things they need to be championship archers, but they are also the things that will help them succeed in school and in life, and that's the primary lesson I try to teach them."