

ARCHERY AT THE GAMES OF THE VIIth OLYMPIAD, ANTWERP 1920

by Roland Renson and Anthony Th. Bijkerk

When Bill Mallon wrote his valuable book *The Unofficial Report of the 1920 Olympics*, he stated, in the chapter about *archery*, that, and I quote: “Almost nothing is known about the 1920 archery events, except the results. The moving bird target events were held in a park in the city of Antwerp, but the exact location is also not known. It is unknown if the fixed target events were held at the same site. Belgium’s Hubert van Innis starred, winning four gold and two silver medals.”

A short time ago (in September 1995) Roland Renson’s book with the title: *De Herboren Spelen* (in Dutch) and *Les Jeux Ressuscites* (in French) (the Reborn Games, in English) was published and a review about this book was written to be published in *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, shortly afterwards. Renson elaborates about the archery events on page 63 of his book, writing (in translation from his Dutch and French version): “About this ‘archery à la belge’, there exists the highest possible confusion in Olympic literature. To that it seems most desirable to clear this matter once and for all. The standing pole of 31 meters high was used both by teams of six shooters each (with two possible reserves) and for the individual shooting.

“There were two shoot-outs: 1) shooting at small birds, which are placed on four cross beams on the pole; and 2) shooting at higher birds, with the ‘popinjay’ (‘oppergaai’ - ‘oiseau superieur’) counting for five points; the two ‘sidebirds’ (‘zijvogels’ - ‘poules laterales’) counting for four; the two ‘kalvogels’ - ‘canes’ for three; and the eight ‘guetteurs’ for two points. Each participant was allowed to shoot twenty arrows.

“Target shooting also had both a team event, with teams consisting of eight persons and an individual event, on three distances, 28, 33 and 50 meters. During two consecutive days of shooting, each participant had thirty arrows daily, plus two trial shots.”

But Renson himself did not go into full detail of the events, which took place in the Nachtegalenpark, to end the confusion once and for all. This the more so, since an incorrect term has been used for the target shooting for a very long time. Even such eminent Olympic historians as Erich Kamper, Bill Mallon and David Wallechinsky have used the incorrect term: “moving bird target” for the 28, 33 and 50 meter events, which as will be shown later, completely missed the real target description of those days. Let us go back to those days!

In the *General Programm/Rules and Regulations/Committees* booklet that was published for the Games of the VIIth Olympiad in Antwerp 1920, by the Organizing Committee for the 1920 Olympic games, we find on pages 96/97 the programme and the target description for “pole-archery.”

The description is as follows (taken from the English version):

“1) Shooting at small birds. Four cross beams on the pole with small birds only (no higher birds). 2) Higher or upper shooting. Four cross bars or beams on the pole with five higher birds and eight middle birds (no small birds). Each of these events to comprise 20 trials [i.e. 20 arrows per competitor]. The birds were all of the same size and placed at arrow spot.

In the first competition each bird to count for one point. In the second there will be attributed to the highest bird (the ‘oppergaai’ - ‘oiseau superieur’ from Renson’s book) five points; each hen (the ‘zijvogels’ - ‘poules laterales’) four points; each cane (the ‘kalvogels’ - ‘canes’) three points; and each guetteur, 2 points. [These ‘guetteurs’ were the eight sidebirds, each placed at the extremes of the four cross beams.]

In the event of two birds being landed by one arrow, only the first one of the two to count. The birds were to be immediately replaced when one was shot down. The competitors therefore would always have a full field. The height of the pole was 31 meters. This text was correctly published in the *Report of the American Olympic Committee* (s.d.: p. 273-274).

This description should suffice; but nevertheless Renson found a sketch for this article to show how the pole and its cross beams with the 'bird(s)' appear. There is one difference though; in 1920 there were *four* instead of the now shown *three* cross bars or beams.

The team events took place before the individual event. The programme gives the following description, as follows:

“Individual competitions to take place after the team competitions and under the same conditions. In each of these competitions each country to be represented by the shooter who has been the most successful in the team competition.”

The description of the archery (target) events is given on pages 98/99 of the same official publication from the Organizing Committee as mentioned above, and is follows:

“Team Events. Maximum number of entries: one team of 8 from each nation, with 2 reserves.

1) Distance 28 meters. Diameter of target 60 centimeters, 9 points, 10 centimeters in diameter. Division in target 7, 5, 3, 2, and 1 centimeters in width.

2) Distance 33 meters. Diameter of target 72 centimeters. Points same as above. Diameter of center 12 centimeters, the others 6 centimeters in width.

3) Distance 50 meters. Diameter of target 1.20 meters. Points same as above. The center 20 centimeters in diameter. Other divisions 10 centimeters. In each of these competitions the competitors to be allowed 30 arrows each the first day and 15 the second day. Two trial arrows allowed each day per competitor.

Individual Events. Maximum number of entries: one from each nation. Individual competitions to take place after the team competition and under the same rules and regulations. In each of these competitions each country to be represented by the representative who has been the most successful in the team competition.”

This official description collaborates exactly with the text from an article which appeared in a Dutch newspaper from 10 August 1920 and which was published in 1989 in the official publication from the Netherlands Archery Federation. It was published through the efforts of one of the members from this Federation, Jacques Eijsbouts from Vlierden, who some years ago attempted to reconstruct what happened in Antwerpen 1920.

His efforts also confirmed the location *where* these archery events took place! The answer to that question is: in the 'Nachtegalepark' (the Nightingale Park) in Antwerp, as indicated by Renson (p. 63).

In the newspaper article the writer gives the same description of the *fixed* target, as mentioned in the official regulation-booklet.

Because this target differed from the usual target used in the Netherlands, this description gave the exact reason that the total score from the Dutch team of 3,087 was higher than would have been possible using “Dutch” rules.

We therefore can conclude that the “Moving Bird Target” is a completely mistaken description of the real *fixed* target that was used in 1920 in Antwerpen.

The above mentioned newspaper article also told the story of what happened when the Dutch team had won the team competition.

“When the Dutch archery team had won the championship, they sang their national anthem at the top of their voices. Some people from the audience begrudged the Dutchmen the championship and called them ‘kaaskoppen’ (cheeseheads). But our plucky archers were not at all disturbed about this abuse and sang even louder.”