

OPINION

THE BALLESTRA

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Contributing Writer

It finally happened! This big event that I've been promising to write about for weeks! But I'm afraid you'll just have to come to Sansepolcro yourself, because I really can't do the Ballestra justice.

For once, the event actually started on time. I was expecting the usual Italian lack of punctuality regarding the 17:00 time printed on my ticket, but I came a few minutes early anyway and was glad that I did. The respective courts of each side had already marched in, and the procession with the Ballestra banner

started just as I sat down. Then, after a ceremonial exchanging of gifts—a decorative plate and some kind of artwork in a frame that I couldn't see well—and lots of speeches, the archers from Gubbio marched in wearing purple tunics and looking very imposing. Then, after more speeches, the Sansepolcrons strode in looking like they owned the place (well, they practically do). And then came a bunch of Belgians. No, they aren't a normal part of the tradition, but they had come along to watch and I think the tournament heads wanted to give them a warm welcome. Privately, I think they thought that their own tunics and tights would look better next to the Belgians' top hats, epaulets, and white gloves. As it was, the contrast had me in stitches.

All the archers lined up, and the champion of each side took an opening shot. Then things got a bit chaotic, as there were six crossbow stands. Each man balanced the front of his crossbow on a post and the back of it on his shoulder, took a very long, very, very careful aim, and pulled the trigger. Sounds simple, right? Not with six men shooting at a time, and not when the little target about six inches in diameter already looks like an overstuffed pincushion. Sparks,

feathers, and often entire arrows flew after many of the shots. Near the end, a little boy who was maybe seven or eight got up with his dad and aimed his tiny little



Photo Courtesy Chelsea Stith

crossbow at the target. I was really hoping he'd get to actually shoot a miniature arrow, but I'm not sure that it would have made it all the way across the piazza.

Once every man (and one little boy) had taken his turn, the judges took down the target, hemmed and hawed, marched the thing around the piazza, and then disappeared to deliberate while the crowd was entertained by more drumming and flag-throwing by Sansepolcro's and Gubbio's teams.

My favorite was the crazy guy who had a flag in each hand and twirled a third with his feet and knees. Another man had also brought his son along; the little guy was wearing the same uniform, waving a pint-sized flag, and taking three steps in his little boots to his father's one. It was also interesting to watch the archers. One younger man from Sansepolcro came over and was talking to his wife and son. He looked so excited and optimistic. Most of the men who compete are in their fifties and somewhat stoic, so it was sweet to see this guy giving his family a thumbs-up sign, a shrug, and a smile. (People say that Italians talk with their hands, but that's not precisely true. They talk with their hands, elbows, shoulders, and faces too.)

When the judges came and announced the winners, happy-family-archer-guy got third place and about burst all the buttons on his tunic. I think that second place

went to Gubbio, and first to Sansepolcro, but everybody was hugging everybody else and hoisting people on their shoulders and jumping up and down so it was hard to tell. And the,

did you really think it was over? The drummers and flag-wavers marched around the city for the third time that day. And after that there was one last triumphal parade of the champions and the target with the three winning arrows and the drummers and flag-wavers again and every archer that had competed and all the court ladies in Renaissance wear and the Belgians for good measure. And next week everyone starts practicing for the spring competition in Gubbio. I really think these people are nuts. AND I LOVE IT!

CLASSIFIEDS

•Private tutoring for math, chemistry, computer programming, BS Chemistry, Math minor, industrial experience. Four years on staff Florida Community College Jacksonville, 2+ years private tutor. References. gfruzze@bellsouth.net or <http://www.facebook.com/snoopoid>

WHINES & GRIPES

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To the math department: why are FTCs necessary? Seriously, when am I ever going to whip out my TI Interactive and Excel Spreadsheet to solve a so called "real life problem" Oh yeah, when hell freezes over.

Why does the Barefoot hallway ALWAYS smell like pee?

To the girl that thought I hit her car: I did not hit your piece of crap car, and if you were really that upset, you would've left your name on the note.

Dear BDH: Have you ever heard of variety? A pasta bar for two months straight? No, thank you.

To the girl across the hall: STOP FREAKING HAMMERING. Love, your neighbors

Does Meredith Security have anything ELSE they could possibly do besides ticket cars? Seriously, get a life.

Will someone please for the love of God PICK UP THE GOOSE POOP!

DEAR ANTS: GET OUT OF MY CAR.

Dear RA: someone stole our dry erase board, and you didn't do anything about it. We think it was you.

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Please send submissions to herald@meredith.edu or place in Whines & Gripes box in the Cate Center