



National Senior Games Association

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Personal Best Athlete Profile

Little Big Eagle, 58

Midland, North Carolina

Targeting the Heart

There he stood on the awards podium in Cleveland, proudly celebrating his Gold Medal in archery won at the 2013 National Senior Games Presented by Humana. His name was announced - Little Big Eagle - and it seemed to convey to every observer that this was a Native American archer who probably had years of experience and knowledge in his competitive field.

As you will find from our interview, he is actually a relative "newbie" in the field and this was Little Big Eagle's first national competition. His experience with the bow and arrow was rooted in traditional close range hunting techniques, not in grueling competition that requires physical and mental concentration to shoot 100 arrows per day at a target 60 yards away.

You will also discover a multi-faceted individual who defies stereotyping. He was born in New York City yet raised with authentic cultural beliefs and practices. He has been a professional musician, champion kick boxer, certified dog and horse trainer, ordained Christian minister, life skills teacher, drug education instructor and proprietor of [The Love & Happiness Ranch](#), a nonprofit faith based outreach program he created to provide culturally diverse youth and senior programs in the Charlotte area. A little of this, a little of that. In fact, his music ensemble is called Lil' Dis 'n Dat because they perform a spectrum of music styles, including a soul-stirring "Heart Song" he performs on the native flute.

In all of his pursuits there is a common thread that is weaved into his heart with traditions and deep faith engrained by his parents and forebearers. His actions always harmonize with a message that all men are brothers and the importance of loving and respecting one another.

Curiosity dictates that we have to start by asking you about your name and what it means.

My parents wanted to give me a name to help me stay balanced. Little Big means "just about right," you know, in between, not quite finished, not too big and not too small. The top of the pot hasn't blown off yet. So every time you call my name it's an attitude check. And the eagle is a majestic, strong bird. The eagle can do two things -he can reward you, and he can take you out. You would never have to say to me, "If I were you I wouldn't do that." Just call my name. You only need to say "Little Big Eagle." It's a name I have to live up to.

It's impressive how your family maintained tradition, heritage, and spiritual teachings right down to giving you your name.

My family was awesome, they were very God-conscious and tried to teach us in the ways of old, what they called survival skills - hunting, taking care of the family, making sure your prayers are correct, how you align your thoughts. Pray all the time, all the time. If you don't get results keep praying until you get some results. It always seems to make your situations in life work. (Chuckles) You know, people think it's funny when I tell them I was born in New York City of all places. You know the Manhattan was an Indian nation.



Yeah, they sold the island for some beads.

Yes, the Wampum. You see this small strand of beads here on my neck? These say it won't happen again. But thank God for Greyhound because we ended up coming back in North Carolina when I was 14. I say coming back because this area was always home for my Tuscarora Nation until the 1700s when we were run out. My people went to New York where the six Iroquois tribes adopted us. So there's the New York connection.



So, how did you become an animal trainer by profession?

My grandfather was a blacksmith and horse trainer and my dad was a dog trainer and horse trainer. We always had 25 dogs around the house. Someone told me once if you look in your back yard you might find that what looks like trash might instead be a gold mine. So I looked in my back yard and saw a lot of dog poop. *(Laughs)* That got me thinking about following in the family path and I returned back north to attend the International School of the Animal Arts in Brooklyn, New York. And I became a professional dog trainer. Both personal security and police dog training. I traveled all over the place - New York, Canada, Panama, you name it. And the horse has always been around my life. It's been around us since the Spaniards brought it to us and we called it "the big dog." So horse training has always been in my family and I continue to practice it.

Tell us about your sports background. As a Native American, one might suppose archery comes naturally to you.

Let me put it into perspective. I played football and did track and field in school - shotput, discus. For a time I was a super heavyweight kick boxing champion. I fought three times in Madison Square Garden in the late '80s. I've also been a champion in police dog and horseback competitions. I can be a warrior.

Now, I've been doing archery since I was five years old but it wasn't a competition thing. My granddad and dad taught me. We were all hunters, and we didn't hunt anything that we didn't eat. So the bow and arrow was a tool, not a weapon. Archery was just a way of life.

But I did a few 3D competitions around here, you know, shooting animal figures just for some fun. Then I put the bow down for 12 years and didn't take it back up until 3 months before the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Senior Games a couple years ago. When I got there I saw how serious it was with the other gentlemen. Suddenly I was back in Madison Square Garden and the competition bug came out. It was like "OK guy, I got to deliver a knockout punch." *(Laughs)* So I got real serious about it and the next year I decided "I'm going to go all the way to Nationals and then go to the world masters event if I do well."

Well, you took Gold in barebow compound for the 55-59 age group at the National Senior Games. What was that like for you?

It was absolutely awesome. We had hundreds of archers there. I witnessed a gentlemen shooting who was 101 years old! We had a small tornado, rain all day, I was absolutely soaking wet. It was great! I loved every minute of it. And even though I won my age group, I was surprised that I did it. First, before competing I had never had to shoot so many arrows in one day, and then to shoot them 60 yards. As a hunter I never had to do that, it was all stealth and close range - boom, it was over.

And then, during my competition my bow started to fall apart and I didn't even know it. A fellow about eight lanes from me heard my bow going "Bing! Bing! Bing!" and came over to my 14 year old daughter (my coach) and me and told us there was something wrong and asked to look at it. He told me the limb saver button was loose and he tightened it up for me. After that it all came into focus and I was able to do my thing.

This was a competitor who assisted you.

It's a great relationship of mutual respect I found even in the dead eye of competition. That man had information and knew that I didn't have a clue what was going on. He came to my aid knowing that there was a possibility that I would take him out. Let me tell you, I thank him every day that I breathe.

What was the rest of your experience like in Cleveland - Were you inspired?

It was incredible seeing thousands of seniors doing this. I was surprised to meet guys from Jamaica and Mexico, all over the world. I even met a Hopi brother in archery. He was 90 years old. I'm praying that I meet him at the next Nationals.

Now you want to talk about inspiration? You need to see these seniors, going for the gusto, going out to do it one more time. Then there's the 101 year old guy. We had to shoot 90 arrows per day. Can you imagine what it was like for him when he was getting out his 88th arrow? My stars!

How do you try to inspire others to get more in shape?

A wise man will investigate what a fool takes for granted. Now listen: you may not be able to jump two foot, but you can jump a half a foot. You may not be able to run a mile, but you can run a half a mile. We are all pushing for our Personal Best. It's what I'm working toward and see in myself. So it's much more than a competition thing. There's always people you look up to too. In fact, there's this one gentleman I won't name that's holding a record in the Nationals...don't tell him, but I'm hunting for him. *(Laughs)* Oooh, woo, the dogs are out on him now! *(Everyone laughs)*

No really, it's not just about competition. I'm out there having fun, but it's also more fun when they walk you on the podium. Now don't get me as being arrogant. That don't fly. It took all the gentlemen who came before me that made it happen so that I would be able to go there and compete. And I'm here. *(gets animated, hand in air)* And By Gaaard - that's my North Carolina accent - By Gaard, I'm gonna stay! *(Everyone laughs)*

Seems like you've always been in good physical shape. Have you had any trials and troubles?

Because of the stuff I did in the ring, I've had both of my hips replaced and had my L4 and 5 vertebrae repaired. I'm also a prostate cancer survivor. These were trials but no trouble, Brother. Life is not designed to be without challenges. What will you do with it? I got through it because of my faith and prayer. There's a higher power than who we are that reaches beyond the sky. God's confidence is true. And I'm here in front of you.

Turning to another facet of your life, you had a music career and still play in a band?

My dad was my first teacher and I mostly taught myself growing up. In fact, back in the day I went to a school to further my education as a bass player. When I auditioned the teacher closed the book and said "Are you making money now?" I said "Yes Sir." He said. "Well I can't help you much more. Have a good day." And that was the end of my schooling. *(Laughs)* I did learn a lot from the School of Hard Knocks from guys on the road. It's not easy to do that professionally.

So yes, I was in bands and was a hired gun during my time around New York, mostly on bass but I also played trumpet. I played with Elton John, Natalie Cole, Ronnie Dyson, D Train, a lot of gospel stuff. Did some gigs in Madison Square Garden in fact.

Now my band here is called Lil' Dis 'n Dat, and that's just what we do...we do a little of this and a little of that. My band is about good music with good musicians. We're able to take 200 songs and mix 'em up to back up a certain singer or to fit just about any occasion. We do cabaret, we do pop stuff, and we also do quite a bit of gospel stuff around town. And then when I break out my flute it goes from Barbara Streisand or James Brown to culture and spirit. When I blow, I want it to affect the listener. I want it to do what normal music doesn't do. Give them something to ease their heart. What I want to do through all my music is healing.

It's nothing that can be repeated, it's nothing I practice. It comes from my soul. When I pick that flute up, it's all new. Down in my DNA, I feel a tone and it begins to vibrate. You know, the earth itself moves on the "A" and vibrates on the "440." *(Smiles at the interviewer's confusion)* I mean in a music sense, the earth moves in the key of A, and vibrates on the perfect tone of 440. Now the closest I've felt I've gotten is the A minor in my playing. But I can hear it in my sleep. I can hear it in my heart.



This conversation would not be complete without recognizing things you are doing in the community. Tell us about the Love and Happiness Ranch program you and your wife operate.

The program was established here in North Carolina but the idea started in 1979 in New York while I was working with kids in after school programs. I originally thought about having an adult camp to interact with animals, teaching what we call equine etiquette with the intent to instill peace of mind and self-esteem. What I found was that it was really a family issue and it turned my head around. Some parents don't have the money or time to do things with their kids. And many children are missing a foundation altogether.

We have an outdoor education youth program that provides life-sustaining skills through a series of activities designed to increase their level of self-confidence and mastering techniques for survival in the outdoors. We introduce farming techniques, equine etiquette and ranching through hands-on demonstration. When people interact with animals it's a form of therapy and they begin to see a lot of things in their lives. I love to see these kids become warriors and missionaries with the strength they learn.

For our seniors we provide assistance with everyday life issues, mini-concerts, crafts, cultural ensembles and many other activities here and in the community. You know, in my background it was always about honoring and helping our elders. That's not happening much anymore. Some of this is ministering to heal people. I'm trying to make a difference. We hope to get grants to work with more at risk children. I have to get my language right so I can attract the support to be better, more efficient and more direct. Our children and families need to be saved.

You certainly have a well rounded life and dedicate your share of time and effort to helping guide others.

This is the only way that I can represent. When you have the authentic thing, the weak things around you can't stand. So we all have to stand true to who we are, the way we are and why we are. So as you think you are, so you attract others who think the same.

It seems that everything in your life has a spiritual center or goal.

That's what I live for. Little Big Eagle...not quite finished, comme ci, comme ca.

A little dis and dat.

(Smiles) God is not through with me yet. I'm working for perfection.

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