

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
JANUARY 2023

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- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 4 | EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION | 25 | DEVELOPMENT
New Recruit – Harry Brown
Confessions of a Dream Killer |
| 5 | FEATURE: NEW CEO AT USFA | 28 | HEART HEALTH |
| 8 | COMPETITION REPORTS
Veterans World Championships
Eden Cup
One Fencing Family | 30 | OPINION: NAVIGATING PARENTING |
| 14 | A GUIDE TO PARIS OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION | 33 | OBITUARY
Brian Dickinson
Mildred Durne |
| 16 | FEATURE: DOWN UNDER – HELEN SMITH | 35 | RESULTS |
| 20 | FEATURE: COOKING WITH DIMITRI COUTYA | | |

Olympic Qualification Explained

PP14-15



Images within the magazine depict moments with differing sanitary protocols.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE SWORD
Editor's Introduction



Happy New Year everyone! What a great fencing year 2023 promises to be. Paralympic qualification for Paris 2024 is underway and Olympic qualification starts in April. Fencing is included in the European Games in Poland in June and doubles up as the European Championships - a mega-point scorer for Paris 2024. On top of all of that the senior World Championships takes place in Milan, Italy in July and it looks like they've got something special planned. Before that the Cadet and Junior European Championships held in February will be hosted in the beautiful city of Tallinn, Estonia - a country still celebrating its first two Olympic fencing medals at Tokyo 2020. Shortly followed by the Cadet and Junior World Championships which returns to Plovdiv, Bulgaria. There's a lot to pack in and we've crammed in a lot to this issue to whet your appetites.

We start with an exclusive too. Siân talks to the new CEO of US Fencing,

Phil Andrews. He's a man with British connections too who has a wealth of experience in international sport combined with a fearless attitude to doing the right thing. Phil covers a range of topics in his interview, many of which tie in with the fencing journey we are on at home.

There's some competition coverage as well. Susan Uff and Gillian Aghajan tell us about the Veterans World Championships in Zadar, Croatia and we bring you exclusive images from Great Britain's only FIE ratified competition, the Eden Cup. President, Hilary Philbin gives us her vision of "One Fencing Family" exemplified by an integrated fencing-para fencing event which she championed at last year's Commonwealth Fencing Championships.

Staying in the Commonwealth, I had a chat with the recently retired President of the Commonwealth Fencing Federation, Helen Smith, an Australian Olympic fencer who has dedicated her life to the service of fencing since she hung up her swords. She gives us an insight to her life in the sport and her plans for the final two years of her service to the FIE and the Oceania Federation in the run up to Paris.

I was also delighted to grab some time with four-time Tokyo 2020 Paralympic medallist, Dimitri Coutya. He oozed charm, wit and a sense of fun throughout our conversation

but still managed to convey the dedication involved in the life of an elite athlete. His journey to Paris will be well underway by the time you read this along, I'm sure, with the additions to his trophy cabinet.

Back home, we talk to BF's Medical Commission about a fantastic simple guide to CPR. Fifteen minutes of your time could potentially save a life - do you need any more encouragement? There's a feature on the ever-growing GB League in its second year. If you're not involved, you should be. It's for every fencer in the UK, doesn't cost a penny and you don't even have to leave your club to join the fun. We also meet new BF recruit, Harry Brown and talk to Pathways Director, Steve Kemp about keeping it real. Former British World Championship fencer, David Hall tells us about his life as a fencing parent and Jon Willis unveils the revamped Leon Paul Junior Series.

Like I said, there's a lot to get through and I hope you enjoy it. As always, please do send in your stories. You never know, we might print them!

So once again, Happy New Year and Happy Fencing.

Here's to 2023.

Cheers,
Karim

Do you have a regional/club story you want to share?

Submit your stories to the editor:

karim.bashir@catchsport.com

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

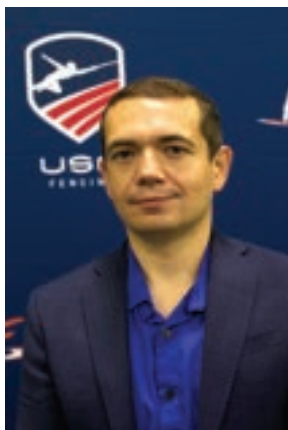
Huge congratulations to the GBR team competing at the Para European Championships. So far, Dimitri Coutya has claimed gold medals in both the Cat B Men's Individual Epee and Foil events and Piers Gilliver is the new Cat A Men's Individual Epee Champion. Dimitri and Piers also teamed up with Oliver Lam-Watson and Joshua Waddell to claim the continental Men's Epee Team title! Well done to Gemma Collis also who took fifth place in both the Women's Individual Cat A Epee and Sabre events!

PRINCE PHIL AND A UNITED STATE OF FENCING

From Essex to Colorado Springs, USA Fencing's newly-crowned CEO talks leadership, membership and steering the ship

Siân Hughes Pollitt

Chelmsford-born, British-American Phil Andrews is better acquainted than most with the inbuilt contradictions of the 'victory narrative' in sport. But, clearly working with the duality of his heritage and life-experiences both here and across the pond, he is really quite adept at balancing our hunger to win with the dangers of losing the quality of the experience. That is why he has stood before the US Congress, giving evidence about 'winning the right way'.



Phil Andrew

"We don't need to excuse winning", says Phil. "What we need to do, though, is find ways to win the right way where we treat people as humans - not as machines. Of course, we are all not perfect at that, but whenever we are left with a choice, let's pick the human choice first. Sometimes these kinds of decisions are black and white, sometimes they're grey. Better that we ask ourselves from whose perspective is that choice right or wrong, and then determine who we should serve the most."

Since assuming his role as Chief Executive Officer for USA Fencing in August 2022, Phil has been emphatic about whom the organisation should serve: and in his view it should be the members. In order to perform a deep dive into the organisation

and hear what everyone has to say, Phil has embarked on a country-wide "Listening Tour" - going into clubs, schools and colleges to gauge the pulse of the USA Fencing membership, and sift through their priorities and concerns.

It comes as no surprise that Chair of the USA Fencing Board, David Arias attributed Phil's success at interview on his demonstrable "creativity and collaborative spirit". What also strikes a chord is this CEO's simple and unadorned approach to fact-finding, intelligence-gathering and information-sharing. He is like a modern-day 'Little Prince' - the character created by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry - who lands on our planet to interrogate the customs and traditions of our time-honoured yet sometimes faltering existence code, sensitively unpicking its anachronisms and contradictions.

In terms of deconstructing where work should be concentrated, Phil says the goal is to 'level-up' and make sure that USA Fencing assesses, consolidates and improves areas in a re-adjusted post-pandemic world. "With our competitive events, for example, we have created a system that seems to have diminished the quality and effectiveness of local tournaments. We need to look at every part of the member journey; the discrepancies in our regional competitions come up on every Listening Tour and, as much of a pride and joy as our events might be, their organisation needs to make more sense."



Listening Tour

Phil says that his tour has been received with a "refreshing amount of gratitude". He adds, "Meeting the fencing community where they're based has been tremendously appreciated. It's where fencing happens. Fencing doesn't happen in my office so out and about is instead where we need to be, listening to what it's like for everyone. What are the real roadblocks experienced by coaches and parents, for instance? There's plenty of talk - sometimes criticisms and ideas for improvement, but all very positive and constructive in nature. Most importantly, nobody has held back."

In any case, Phil does invite feedback via absolutely every single platform possible. He issues his own monthly newsletter, via USA Fencing, entitled "5 Minutes With Phil". His accessible missive cheerily ends with the offer to "hit the reply button" should anyone have anything to add, raise or communicate. Nonetheless, the in-person visits have afforded Phil the opportunity to tangibly sample the widely diverse culture of different fencing clubs across the United States. Phil laughs, recalling that in Boston, he had scheduled one visit on the same night as a Boston Celtics home basketball game and he had a lot of potential attendees politely decline the invitation to chat fencing with him. "But Boston was interesting. Two clubs that I visited highlighted fundamental differences. There



Fencing Lesson – Phil 1st from right on the bottom row

was Boston Fencing Club which is one of our most historic clubs and I visited the newly-opened Echo Fencing Club. It meant a lot to the owner that I walked up the seventy-two steps with no agenda to press and no stump speech to deliver; I just took a look at what they had to offer the young professionals of Boston's Back Bay area. It was helpful for me to get to know and feel those differences."

Difference - that's a keyword in Phil's vocabulary. He states that his overarching mission on Planet Sport is to "make a difference". This is where his professional life-journey takes on fascinating dimensions. His decade at USA Weightlifting, with a short interval at the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), was known for the candour with which he challenged the status quo – and even the tyrannies – of IWF governance, which he coupled with a very personal and heartfelt promotion of individual athletes, coaches and staff.

Go onto Instagram; this behaviour is for all to see. One day in July 2021, Phil posted that he'd been 'honoured' to be able to drive a first-time US Weightlifting Olympian, Harrison Maurus, nicknamed 'Brisbane Harry', to the airport to catch his plane to compete at the Tokyo Games.

"That's the reason I work in sport so that I can take on roles like this which can make a true difference for the athletes. I do need to earn a salary and put food on the table but that is not why I do it. I'd known Harrison since 2017 and when I almost left US Weightlifting in late 2020, Harrison called me and talked me round. He just said, 'I want you to be there at my first Olympics'. That – that is why I do this."

After Tokyo, Phil received a card and gift from another, more experienced weightlifting athlete who thanked him for his ongoing support, sacrifice and for always making sure that 'athletes are humans first'.

"It was truly wonderful to build those experiences with those athletes. And to make a difference for them and to know that they are the moments that make it feel right. I mean, if you can't be excited about being the last person to shake the hand of an athlete before they jet off to their first Olympics, then ..."

On Phil's departure from USA Weightlifting, the NGB's President, Paula Aranda attested, "He leaves a legacy of achievement." There are indeed the lovely, comforting fairy-tale-like stories of championing the human spirit and allowing the athlete and their support networks to self-actualise and feel fulfilled. Then there was, as already mentioned, the flip side, with Phil taking on the mighty establishment of international weightlifting, exposing unsavoury practice at the heart of the discipline.

Phil is philosophical about dealing with both the shiny, happy side and the dark underbelly of issues. He is realistic about the crisis society encounters between the construct of sport and then how we 'consume' it. We all may wish to preserve our sports in an idealised state, forever captured in a state of innocence. In truth, that is only to condemn sport into becoming a perpetual Theatre of the Absurd, where its actors are compelled to repeat the same actions that neither transcend nor transform experience.

There is definitely no such tolerance of keeping things how they are for the sake of it with Phil. Although he hopes never to again live through what he experienced at the IWF, Phil says, "those experiences now go into my arsenal from which I can call on in tough times." He seems to be a personality intent on activating change and that change being for the better. Board Chair, David Arias expands, saying, "What set Phil apart was the insightful questions



The US Nationals is massive

he asked, his approach to problem-solving, his desire to build relationships at all levels of our sport, the importance he places on inclusiveness and athlete safety, and the specific ideas he shared related to the growth of USA Fencing."

Certainly, USA Fencing has instituted quite a number of new initiatives under Phil's custody. Four new awards allow its community to set an example to others. There is a Trailblazer Award named after the social-impact-driven Peter Westbrook. A Para-Fencing Athlete Development Award as well as an award to ASPIRE. The fourth accolade is named in recognition of Mariel Zagunis and is the Women's Advancement Award.

"The focus on the need for representation was crystallised by working in weightlifting where we'd inherited a tradition of low female participation. So, we grew the numbers of women in participation, coaching, refereeing and leadership and it was one of the best things we ever did, with us becoming one of the leading women's teams in the field of play."

USA Fencing deliberately applies meticulous attention to ensuring that the numbers of women in fencing are consciously encouraged to grow. Their press releases have started to make a point of mentioning women first. A tiny detail, but one which Phil affirms is effective. "It puts women front and centre and until their numbers reach a level similar to majority groups, we will continue. It's not that we are saying that we should have fewer white men, say. But if we are set on wanting more women and people of colour fencing, then it figures that we will have more people in total who are fencing. That is good for business."

Phil also acknowledges that, in terms of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), the

task will never truly be 'done'. The work is however beyond the green-shoot stage. He pays tribute to The Peter Westbrook Foundation in New York City which has recently been joined in its efforts by the PISTE Fencing Academy – set up by Westbrook alumnus and Olympian Nzinga Prescod, with a vision rooted in 'providing a sustainable educational option that inspires excellence and exploration to realise human potential'.

In terms of EDI, Phil is also animated about para-fencing. "This is the first time I have had a Paralympic programme under my leadership and I'm excited about it," he enthuses. "Our para community is small but mighty right now and we need to do better. Myself and other new members of the team here at USA Fencing have made it clear that para-fencing, its growth and potential success at Paralympic Games level are all important to the National Governing Body. That means highlighting our para-fencers to our whole community and ultimately getting more backsides in chairs!"

One way of getting people to invest interest in para-fencing has been to introduce an IWAS event in Washington DC for January 2023 – the first IWAS World Cup hosted in the United States since 2003 in Atlanta, Georgia. The moral sustainability of Phil's decisions always appears to collide perfectly with his commercial ones. Another initiative, essential for athlete well being, as well as to protect the organisation from the wrongdoing of others, has been to beef up the reporting of welfare concerns. An independent texting hotline allows people to report their concerns directly with follow-ups that don't compromise their anonymity. In addition, they operate a 'Member Wellness Programme' which recognises that with the training, commitment and mental fortitude athletes – and coaches and officials – must display, these individuals and groups can also come under mental strain. Should any member find themselves in such a predicament, they can directly email Phil or his Athlete Safety and Compliance Manager, Christina Pachuta who will take it upon themselves to connect them to a licenced mental health professional in their local area so that they can receive the requisite therapy and counselling.

Phil states that, while it is impossible to completely eradicate abuse or stress in sport, sporting organisations should be "ready to respond". Like British Fencing



CEO, Georgina Usher MBE – whom Phil praises for her energy and cooperative spirit, and who also happens to consider welfare of paramount importance – this area of focus constitutes a passion.

"Progression in this regard comes quite rightly from increased athlete representation and athlete rights. Athletes now have more of a say – they see issues coming to the fore and they're pinpointing when it's not good enough."

Throughout Phil's spoken and written language, phrases such as: "do the right thing" and "do the maximum and not the minimum" abound. When asked where this moral capacity comes from, Phil exclaims, "I don't know. Ask my therapist!" He then regroups, saying "Well, I've had a strange life and perhaps that's what has led me to this. My mother was convicted of fraud – perhaps it's a case of me rebelling against that. It's just that when you see something wrong going on, you either take a stand or you don't. I am the kind of person who takes and makes a stand and I'm proud of being a miniscule part of overall change and making that difference."

But to be effortlessly unafraid of posing the questions that no-one else dares to ask, of doing the right thing no matter what – from where does that trait originate?

"I have no fear", confirms Phil. "I came from nothing, I can go back to nothing. It's helpful in some ways that I don't come to this job from fencing. I don't have existing relationships that I need to protect. I have the advantage that I can speak up. I can speak up for everyone. Yes, I steer a business, I head a governing body but, really, I lead a community."

Spending a few moments not talking about fencing, Phil tells how, in Autumn 2021, he married his wife, Jessie at Disneyland. They wed in the Park. He sums up their special day by comparing it to the tradition of 'flash mobs' – it was their very own 'flash wedding', welcoming everyone and anyone who could be in front of the fairytale castle at 2pm. Whilst being permitted to get married in the grounds, couples are however not allowed to wear wedding attire there. Undeterred, in the evening, Phil and Jessie moved venues and got dressed for the occasion. Jessie wowed in an exquisite Cinderella gown with Phil decked out as her dutiful Prince Charming. It's a sweet diversion. Yet, as soon as Phil concludes this romantic tale, he goes on to justify the full financial breakdown, detailing how, with Halloween nestled within about a week of their nuptials, the new Mr and Mrs Andrews were able to wear their outfits to another three fancy-dress parties and get their money's worth.

Poetically, we're back to how Phil's moral and emotional spheres must align and coalesce with their commercial and sustainable counterparts to drive and motivate his vision. He is both Little Prince and Prince Charming – the Man who Fell to Fencing Earth as well as the Steadfast Protector of A Sporting Kingdom.

Now that he's at the helm, helping to craft narratives for USA Fencing, placing its athletes first and foremost, speaking face-to-face with members as well as introducing a multitude of measures to ease, facilitate and celebrate the achievements of the whole fencing community, we might see a few happy-ever-after endings emerge.

It is heartening that Phil talks fluently about wanting to work with British Fencing, identifying that there must be opportunities where we could be stronger together. Exactly how that might take shape is perhaps a way off yet. What is for sure, however, is that Phil is scaling up deep-thinking, cultivation, growth and change. It is an indistinguishable revolutionary evolution – or maybe an indistinguishable evolutionary revolution? Whatever – whichever ... it's ambitious and exciting. USA Fencing is revving up to further forge its own positive, life-affirming course to have it permeate far and wide, awakening a raft of expectations in hearts and minds – never to be reversed.

VETERANS WORLD CHAMPS RETURN IN ZADAR

Photos: Gillian Aghajan

The Veterans Fencing World Championships taking place for the first time since 2019, were held in Zadar, Croatia, 6-12 October 2022. There were 849 entries across 18 individual events and 61 entries to the six team competitions. With ambitions of hosting more major international fencing events, the Croatian Fencing Federation put on a spectacular event, enjoyed by all involved.

A buoyant British team flew home with a remarkable twelve medals and we spoke to a couple of the key players about their reflections on their return home.

GBR's most decorated athlete (1 silver, 2 bronze) in Zadar, Susan Uff, not only excelled but also had a great time.

"I was immensely proud to be a member of both the GBR foil and epee teams. I want to thank the organisers, officials and referees for a well organised competition. They were able to provide a friendly atmosphere. Even the Call Room, normally a pretty frozen environment, was relaxed, welcoming and efficient.

There was a wonderful spirit among the fencers, both those we knew and newcomers. Everyone was relieved to



Susan

be back after Covid. I think although we are competitive, we also appreciate each other's skills. Even individuals' habits and foibles (some might say gamesmanship) were accepted in good humour. The only hiccup was the overzealous security guards but our brilliant Team Manager, Gillian Aghajan sorted them out!

My observations are of necessity about the women's (I prefer Ladies') competition, although I believe it applies equally to the men's. I want to thank the unsung heroes, the team captains, Michele Narey, Jenny Morris and Nikki Hull for doing a stalwart and efficient job.

Success in the competition was down to preparation. Both sabre and epee held training camps. Thanks to Caryl, Mariette and Bence, the epee team practised scenarios, rules and team unity. Each person knew what was required of them. We all had jobs even when not fencing. It is difficult in Veterans fencing to find a balance. It is not always desirable to use the 'best' fencers. A balance has to be made not to overwork anyone, however fit they may be for their age.

The foil team, being more widespread, did not have training camps. We did have the benefit of the presence of Graham Forster, whose advice was invaluable. We worked well as a team and came fourth - a little disappointing but sometimes you need a little luck as well!

I was very surprised at the support we had from other nations. We received encouragement both before and during matches. Afterwards there were compliments about our skill in controlling situations, our team spirit, our demeanour and most importantly our support and respect for each other.

I had quite a bit of interaction with officials and all were helpful and pleasant. The referees were amazed at the skills, competence and fitness of the Veteran fencers. Talking of referees, every match I fenced in was managed with good humour and expertise. I thought they were amazing.



TM Gillian with Rita Comes (USA)

My enduring memory from the Championships is one of mutual respect and friendship with both fencers and officials."

The ever-present Team Manager, water carrier, official photographer, chief tour guide and Head of Delegation, Gillian Aghajan, also told us about her memories from Zadar.

"It was a pleasure and a privilege for me to be GBR Team Manager/Head of Delegation at the Championships. Zadar and I have a bunch of memories. The trepidation that we all felt having to take a compulsory RAT test despite numerous negative LFTs and the huge sense of relief that each of us felt getting a negative result. All systems go!

The jubilation of seeing friends at this first post-COVID World Championships and the opportunity to make some new ones. The fabulous camaraderie not just amongst fencers but with officials and referees. The excellent organisation of the event with fencers respected as athletes. The pride of seeing GBR fencers give their utmost, gracious in victory and defeat. Five silver medals and seven bronze!

Congratulations and thank you to the organisers, FIE representatives, referees and all who took part in making this such a successful and enjoyable event and thank you to Team GBR and supporters for your sportsmanship and good humour.

Read Gillian's full report on the BF website [here](#).

See all of the results [here](#).



Jane & Beth with Day 1 silvers



Silver smiles on Day 2 for GBR sabre - Davidson, Brown, Hutchison, Morris, Esimaje-Heath & Frith



Sheila and Susan Claimed Bronze on Day 3



Day 4 Bronze for John



Bronze for Georgian on Day 5



Hugh took Bronze on Day 5



Team Mascot - "Waon"



Zadar Officials - Referees



Day 5 Bronze for Lowen, Causton, McKay, Troiano, Wedge & Abigodun



Last day double silvers



The Sun Sets in Zadar

EDEN CUP 2022

THE SWORD
Competition Report

The Eden Cup 2022, an FIE Junior World Cup, took place at the Lee Valley Athletics Centre on 4-5 November. Over three hundred and fifty athletes took part in

the individual events with Giulia Amore of Italy winning the women's crown and the USA's Chase Emmer claiming the men's title.

A total of thirty-seven entries took to the pistes for the team events with the USA and Japan claiming gold in the women's and men's crowns, respectively.



Johnny Davis Supports (Photo: Andrew Moss)



Close Quarters (Photo: Ruqaiyah Sayoud)



Eden Cup Men's Team Foil Podium (Photo: Yasmin Birch)



London Cup Bronze for Donaghue (Photo: Heidi Januszewski)



Eden Cup Women's Foil Podium (Photo: Heidi Januszewski)



London Cup Bronze for Campbell (Photo: Heidi Januszewski)



Active Defence (Photo: Andrew Moss)



Eden Cup Men's Foil Podium (Photo: Sophie DeVooght)



GBR Women's Foil Team (Photo: Andrew Moss)



Emotions (Photo: Ruqaiyah Sayoud)



Eden Cup Women's Team Foil Podium (Photo: Yasmin Birch)



Thank You Armourers (Photo: Heidi Januszewski)

Lee Valley also hosted the U23 London Cup on 6 November where Yasmin Campbell and Joe Donaghue both claimed bronze for Great Britain.

Useful links:

- [Women's Individual Foil Eden Cup Report](#)
- [Men's Individual Foil Eden Cup Report](#)

- [Full Eden Cup Results](#)
- [London Cup Bronze For Campbell](#)
- [Donaghue Bronze at London Cup](#)
- [Full London Cup Results](#)

ONE FENCING FAMILY

A PERSONAL VIEW

Hilary Philbin – BF President

My fencing career as an able-bodied competitor, team captain and FIE referee had given me very little knowledge or understanding of the wheelchair fencing world. That all changed with my Fencing Manager role at London 2012. Responsibility for organising the Olympic and Paralympic fencing events necessarily threw me in at the deep end and gave me a high-speed introduction to international wheelchair fencing - both to the sport and to the people.



With the 2012 Games behind me I became heavily involved with the two international governing bodies - the FIE and IWAS (International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation) - and I was elected to the Executive Committee of International Wheelchair Fencing. During the following four years I was on the Directoire Technique (DT) of the various FIE and IWAS World Championships which increased my understanding of the similarities and differences. My close association with these two largely separate fencing worlds also made me a firm believer in the concept of 'one fencing family', as working more closely together could produce benefits on both sides. There is much that can and should be done - such as more cross-training of referees and coaches - but experience has shown that joint competitive activities need to be well thought through.

In Rio 2016 I was a member of the DT at both the Olympic and Paralympic Games fencing events. En route to Rio I had a long conversation with a sports colleague (not a fencer) about the importance of innovation in international sport. I had a 'light bulb' moment that started me on a personal mission - to establish an integrated team

event where able-bodied and wheelchair athletes compete in the same team. My preferred format included two able-bodied and two wheelchair fencers in each four-person team, alternating able-bodied and wheelchair bouts. Using our normal relay system, this results in a total of eight fights leading to a maximum match score of 40 hits.

My early attempts at engaging with event organisers both fell at the first hurdle, with one challenge being that most nations have completely separate organisations governing the two wings of the sport. This raises a number of questions - where to send the invitation, who should take the lead, who will organise the integrated team, etc. It is an issue that is manageable with goodwill, co-operation and discussion but it takes time.

In August 2022 England Fencing hosted the Commonwealth Fencing Championships in London and this provided the ideal opportunity. With the full support of the Commonwealth Fencing Federation (in particular the outgoing and incoming Presidents - Helen Smith and Marie-France Dufour) and the cooperation of the IWAS Wheelchair Fencing General Secretary, Udo Ziegler, a demonstration event was included in the programme. A simple set of rules was drawn up, and the event organisers were happy to cooperate with our request to include two exhibition matches (no mean feat, considering that they were already running 60 events during the 12-day championships).

Two 'friendly' exhibition matches took place on consecutive days on the two pistes immediately in front of the spectators.

The Women's Foil match, with teams from India and England, was won by India 40-35. Men's Epee followed the next day with teams from India and Great Britain, with India again emerging victorious at 40-37. With 'one fencing family' in mind it gave me some personal satisfaction to see these integrated matches taking place, and I was pleased to donate and present the trophies for what I hope are the first of many such events.

These matches proved to me that this is a workable format. They were fenced in a friendly spirit and received positive feedback from athletes and spectators. They also showed the potential to be well-presented. It was noticeable that, in an integrated match, the two wheelchair fencers prepare for their next bout while an able-bodied bout is taking place on the other piste. For spectators and live television, this means there are none of the normal long pauses while the frames for the next wheelchair fencing bout are being prepared - a significant step forward.

Currently it is rare in any sport to have an international team event for integrated teams but there is no reason why this shouldn't change - and with fencing at the forefront. It is an exciting opportunity for us all, and hopefully it will give food for thought to other sports. London 2012 showed the world that disability sport can be well-presented and popular with both live and television audiences and, in the 10 years since, there has been an explosion of disability sport on our television screens. Within our own sport, I'd like to see a greater commitment to 'one fencing family' and this would be well demonstrated by the introduction of integrated team events. British Fencing, having become the National Governing Body for Wheelchair Fencing in April 2022, is well-placed to help develop such a programme.



A LEAGUE OF YOUR OWN

“It’s the taking part that counts but the league tables are compulsive viewing if you’re involved.”

Your level, your experience, your age, your weapon, your budget, your location, your club or its size – what do these things have in common? The answer is simple. None of them matter when it comes to being part of British Fencing’s GB League. Now in its second year the GB League, run on the Playwaze platform, had a promising start last season.

Set up as a recreational league and taking place within BF affiliated clubs, fencers can earn points simply for participating in competitive club fencing in designated league fixtures. Taking part in your local GB League fixture, whether victorious or not, sees fencers gain points which link to national GB League leaderboards all of which can be followed on the **national leaderboards** against all other GB League fencers in the UK. Traditional boundaries of age groups and gender are removed, with all fencers (recreational level members or above) able to take part, fence each other and earn GB League points. Every bout sees both fencers gain points towards the GB League leaderboards. As the league grows, there will be opportunities to win booster points, such as ‘double points month’ and extra reward points for sharing your results on social media.

The result? There is no easier way to bring additional meaning to your fencing and be part of the wider fencing community, all from the comfort of your own club. And best of all, it’s free. The only criteria are that the fencers involved hold at least a Recreational Membership and fence at a club affiliated to British Fencing.

There are leagues for each weapon and for those who prefer to fence to 5 or 15 hits (or

both!) making it easy for everyone to get involved.

British Fencing’s Development Officer (Clubs and Regions), Hannah Gavin explains, “The ethos of the GB League is to have fun and give fencers competitive sparring opportunities in club settings. The GB League is for all, from those who have just finished their beginner course and joined a club, to club regulars and those who attend competitions. We hope that the league will start to bring local clubs back together following the pandemic and see fencers return to activity.



Hannah Gavin

Entry to a GB League fixture and management of scores is done through the Playwaze platform, via desktop or using the app. Playwaze is a purpose-built competition platform which allows participants and clubs to create profiles and collate their activity. At present we have over 270 members within the GB League Community and our clubs have run over 60 fixtures across all three weapons.”

The 2022–23 league has evolved and now includes mini-leagues neatly split into seasons. The Autumn League ran from October to December and the first set of results are now available on British Fencing’s website. No matter if you weren’t involved. A new mini league, the Winter League, runs from this month through to the end of March with the Spring League running April through to the end of June. Each mini league will have their own winners with the results from all leagues combined to form the GB League 2022–23 overall winners. These mini leagues allow fencers and clubs to join part way through the season and still have something to aim at. For those interested in being involved for the whole year, the mini leagues act as reference points to progression.

Most recently, British Fencing announced the launch of the Made of Mettle award – a participation award that recognises those that bring an extra spirit to the GB League. Everyone who attends a GB League fixture, including organisers, fencers, referees, coaches and spectators can enter nominations. Launched in November the initiative has been promoted on BF social media platforms and the GB League Zone including information on how to nominate clubs and individuals who are ‘Made of Mettle’.

Hannah tells us, “The Mini Leagues provide greater flexibility for fencers and clubs to join in at any time in the season or to dip in and out as they please. With the emphasis on enjoyment this system also means that clubs that run regular beginner sessions can introduce new fencers to the GB League at any time in the season. Of course, there’s no impact on those that want to take part throughout the year as points gained in the Mini Leagues are collated for the national leader boards.

We also want to recognise everyone involved in the League which is why we have set up the Made of Mettle participation award. Participants, organisers, supporters and fans can nominate those who have demonstrated the BF values of honesty, respect and excellence for the award – an incentive for those that want to score points or set up sessions themselves.

There will be prizes throughout the season for winners of the Mini Leagues and those that top the national leader boards at the end of the season. You’re unlikely to be able to retire on them but we hope they will incentivise everyone to get and stay involved.”

Enthusiastic early adopter Rob Johnson from Great Yarmouth and Waveney Fencing Club couldn’t be happier with his club’s





involvement. "The main aim for getting involved with the league was to allow members who didn't have competitive BF membership to take part. As we moved out of pandemic circumstances it was a great way for our members to get back into competitive fencing at no extra cost. Another benefit was the ability to fight against fencers from another club and not just the same people every week. It removes the competitive element for those not seeking that, everyone gets the same number of fights and it's just a bit of fun. The Playwaze platform is so straightforward for me to set up a session and then for fencers to join that session. It's even prompted us to start using Google Forms which is a safe and secure way for us to collect member's details.

It's also given our members an opportunity to fence all of the weapons. We've teamed up with North Norfolk and UEA Fencing Clubs and between us have hosted events in epee, foil and sabre. People have liked the fact that it's as much about participation as it is about competition and that you earn points for every match you have. It's lovely that there's no real

pressure to perform. It's just another club night and you're just there to fence people."

Asked about his top tip for clubs considering getting involved, Rob said, "Just do it. It's fun and it's really no effort at all. You don't need to bring in other clubs but if you have other clubs in your area then it brings in another dynamic. It's a lovely way to catch up with fencers from further afield. You can't go wrong with the format. It would be great to see more clubs taking part."

Board Director, Francis Wilkinson is heavily involved at Wimbledon Fencing Club who are also involved in the league. "Wimbledon had its first GB league fixture in September. It was really great to see such enthusiasm, especially from the new epeeists who had only recently finished their beginners course. It was our first night back after the summer break and it is usually a rather quiet evening but all the pistes were in action all night long with people ensuring they got to fence with everyone on the list if they could. Some were disappointed to not get in all the bouts they wanted so have told me they would plan their evening better the following week! There were not many foilists in that night so a couple of them came over to the epee side towards the end of the session and joined in the fun. Everyone enjoyed it and the feedback has been good with one or two people telling me they felt they had fenced better with something 'at stake' and one of our oldest fencers delighted to get into the top 50 with his points from the session. After the



Francis Wilkinson

fixture our junior coach asked me for more info as he'd like to start it up at one of his other clubs." Check out the league tables to see how Francis did!

Hannah concludes, "We're here to assist in any way we can. All you need to do is register your fixture and we'll do the rest. You can input your results into Playwaze or send them to us at BF. Just let us know if you have any questions which we'll be happy to answer and enjoy your fencing!"

There you have it. Registering is easy as is joining in. For a simple and fun way to add something different to your club nights try setting up your own fixture today.

All the instructions for clubs and fencers to get involved are available [here](#) or simply email hannah.gavin@britishfencing.com with your questions.



Rob (centre) - Great Yarmouth - Waveney Fencing Club Facebook Page

ROAD TO PARIS

2024 OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION EXPLAINED

Photos: #TeamBizzi

The shortened cycle between the Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Games has presented fencers, coaches and the world of fencing with a second consecutive unique path to qualification.

The sudden break in international sport at the start of 2020 occurred part way through qualification for the Tokyo Games and resulted in differing access to training and competition based on global location. In a way, fairness and equality for all became the poorer cousin to simply making it happen. The outcome? A Games conducted with efficiency, beauty, passion and respect, under the shadow of a potential surge in Covid cases, which thankfully never came. As ever, fencing and fencers adapted and the result of development happening in silos created the magical stories worthy of any Games – think Romain Canone, Estonian women's epee and Cheung Ka Long.



Romain Canone (FRA) Men's Epee Olympic Champion

So, for the second time in the history of the Modern Olympic Games, Paris 2024 will see all twelve fencing disciplines in the programme. And for the second time in history those wishing to take part have not had the standard quadrennial to rest, prepare and then qualify. Touch wood, the qualification period will return during the normal twelve month period – April 2023 to April 2024. However, that still means that



Olympic Team Epee Champions – Estonia

the 32 months between a Games and the start of qualification for the next Games has been reduced to 20 months. Losing an entire year cannot be taken lightly. The time for much-needed mental and physical rest has all but gone – unless you're Race Imboden (although we still don't know if he'll return to the piste). Those seeking time for more extensive injury repairs – for example, Manon Brunet electing to miss the World Championships – have little time to recover ahead of qualification. That said, a number of athletes who may have retired after Tokyo 2020, had Covid not delayed the Games, have decided to carry on due to the short cycle.

We certainly can't predict too much this far out. However one thing we can be sure of is how qualification works. The qualification period for the Games runs from 3 April 2023 until 1 April 2024 with confirmation of entries scheduled for 8 July 2024. Here, we take a look at how qualification works and the good news is that it's the same for all weapons. The whole qualification process is dictated by a clear timeline. So that's how we will break it down.

Teams First

On 1 April 2024, the top four teams in the rankings will qualify directly for the Games, irrespective of their zone. Then we need to consider the teams ranked 5 to 16. The top teams from Africa, the Americas, Asia-Oceania and Europe in that ranking bracket, also qualify. Should one or more of the zones not be represented in that bracket, then the highest ranked team(s) not already qualified will fill the missing slot(s), irrespective of zone.

At this point, we will have eight teams qualified in each weapon. Those countries are allocated three places per team and the fencers selected will take part in both the team and individual events in their discipline. Note: Each team can also select a reserve who can only take part in the team event. A reserve must fence in the team event to be considered an Olympian!

Individual Qualification Next

So with eight teams qualified and three fencers per team, we will have a total of twenty-four fencers qualified for the individual events, so far. There are two additional ways for fencers who haven't qualified through the team process, to make the individual event.

Adjusted Olympic Ranking

First, what's known as the AOR, Adjusted Olympic Ranking, must be compiled. The AOR is simply the individual World Ranking less every fencer from every qualified team. To be clear, because each country can only have three fencers in the individual events, no athletes from the countries with a qualified team can be included in the AOR.

Now, countries that qualify athletes through the AOR are only allowed one



Cheung Ka Long (HKG) Men's Foil Olympic Champion



Aron Szilagyi (HUN) Men's Sabre Triple Olympic Champion

athlete per discipline. So, you have to be the highest-ranked fencer from your country to remain in the AOR. Once the AOR is compiled the top two athletes from Europe and Asia-Oceania plus the top athlete from both the African and Pan-American zones qualify for the individual event in their discipline.

At this point, we will have thirty athletes in the individual events in each discipline but that's not where it ends.

Zonal Qualifiers

If a country doesn't qualify a team or a fencer via the AOR in any one or more of the disciplines, then they can send one fencer (for each discipline they don't have qualifiers for) to the special Zonal Olympic Qualifying Event. These are due to take place between 15 to 30 April 2024.

Each of the winners of these four events will also qualify for the Olympic Games, which gives us a total of thirty-four individual entries per discipline.

Host Nation Places

As hosts, the French Fencing Federation, are given six additional Host Nation Places by the International Olympic Committee. This is a reduction from the previous number of eight – more on that shortly. These can be allocated as they see fit, under one condition – they must respect the maximum quota of three fencers per discipline subject to the FIE rules. So, if France qualifies as a team in any discipline, they cannot add any other fencers from that discipline. If they don't qualify any fencers in any of the disciplines they can select up to three fencers to compete in the individual event in those disciplines. If they select three fencers, they will automatically be entered into the team event as well. In

that scenario, there will be nine entries in the team event and up to thirty-seven in the individual. In the event that the French Federation does not use any of their Host Nation Places, they can be reallocated by various bodies including the FIE and the IOC.

Universality Places

The number of places 'gifted' to the host nation has been reduced from eight to six which will not be seen as a problem for the French. They will be expecting to qualify for every team event and thus fulfil their quota places through qualification.

That said, it is now guaranteed that there will be at least one 'wild card' per gender at the Paris 2024. It appears that the decision on who will be selected is down to a consensus of the National Olympic Committees. Who wouldn't want to be a fly on the wall in that meeting?!

Looking at the situation right now, France would need at least some of the six host places but I can't see that being the case in May next year. There may be a few more 'wild cards' available.

Allons au Grand Palais!

The French Connection

Looking ahead to her home Olympics, French sabreur, Manon Apithy-Brunet gave us an insight to her Games experiences.

"Between the 2012 and 2016 games, everything went very fast. I went from



Manon Brunet (FRA) Women's Sabre Olympic Bronze Medallist



Grand Palais - The Fencing Venue for Paris 2024

being a little girl watching and dreaming about the Games to a young junior discovering the senior world and training for an Olympic qualification.

My dream was to go to the Olympics, so when I got my place in the individual competition, I could hardly believe it. I was hoping for a team medal but I didn't think I could get anything in the individual. When the competition started in Rio, I was so happy to be at the Olympics that I took advantage of it and I fought. It was a strange day but really cool.

From the end of Rio, I only thought about one thing every day – to go back to Tokyo and get medals. It's been a long road. When I found out about the Covid, I told myself that I had one more year to be even better. I had an injury a year before the Games that made me nervous. But I wanted to return to the Olympic track and I tried to tell myself the same thing once again on the stage "You are still in the Games. It is still so beautiful, so have fun and fight".

Going for the bronze medal was not easy. I thought I was coming back once again with chocolate. Bolade (husband and teammate) knew how to find the words to make me want to have fun and fight again. My second team medal was definitely the end of a bitter memory of the Rio games.

But after winning these two medals, I took them in my hands and I said to myself, "This is really cool, but I want more... I want gold".

So I went to train with Christian Bauer to try to win gold in Paris, at the Grand Palais, with my family watching."

COMMONWEALTH GEM

Outback with Helen Smith

Karim Bashir

When you think about Australian sport your mind immediately jumps to cricketers like Ricky Ponting, Shane Warne, Steve Smith and Sir Donald Bradman. Or rugby union greats like Michael Lynagh, Nick Farr-Jones and Phil Waugh. If swimming is your thing then names such as Ian Thorpe, Dawn Fraser and Susie O'Neil spring to mind. They also boast top motorsports athletes like Mark Webber and Daniel Ricciardo and who could forget Cathy Freeman taking gold on the athletics track at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney?

What about their fencers though? Well, there's Seamus Robinson who became Australia's first ever World Champion when he won the cadet epee event in Foggia, Italy in 1991. He went on to compete at the Athens Olympics in 2004. Also competing at those Games was talented foilist Frank Bartolillo. Another foilist, Jo Halls competed at the Games in 2000 and 2008. Olympic epeeist, Evelyn Halls is an eleven-time World Cup medallist and competed at her home Games in 2000 and then four years later in Athens. She was also Australia's Deputy Chef de Mission at the 2020 Games in Tokyo. Then there's the only Australian to ever make an Olympic final, Gregory Benko, who finished sixth at the 1976 Games and also competed at the Games in 1972, 1980 and 1984.



Helen Smith (Photo #BizziTeam)



If you go back as far as I do, you'll also know another Australian Olympic fencer, Helen Smith (AM). Harking from Tawonga, Victoria, she competed in foil at three Games, Montreal 1976, Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984. A fencer, a coach, a referee and administrator, Helen has seen and done it all. She founded Williamstown Fencing Club in 1976 and became Australia's first female Fencing Master in all three weapons in 1992. In 2002 she was elected President of the Commonwealth Fencing Federation, President of the Oceanic Fencing Confederation and became an FIE Executive Committee member. A big year for her then!

As was 2022. Whilst still holding her OFC and FIE positions, Helen stood down as President of the CFC at the CFF Congress before the Championships were held in London last year. The temptation to talk to her about her life in fencing so far was too irresistible. Here's what she had to say.

"I tried fencing at 14 in my second year of high school during a lunchtime 'Come and Try' class. I attended a government school in suburban Melbourne and we were very lucky to have an ex-navy Scottish PE teacher who introduced us to a range of sports not usually included in the curriculum of the 1960's. The girls' sports were softball, hockey and what

we called basketball but it was actually netball. A couple of my friends and I had a go at fencing foil and I carried on. We didn't have a school hall at the time so we fenced outside using plastic plates as chest protectors. I can't remember if we wore our school shoes or sand shoes but we'd just bash around out in the quadrangle. The teacher sustained the fencing club for a good 15 years and he used to pick us up on a Sunday and take us to competitions. Our parents didn't see the inside of a fencing hall for many years and I liked that independence. I then went on to fence at the Victorian Railways Institute Fencing Club under co-founder Andy Szakall who was my coach and my mentor. He was the Secretary General of Australian Fencing and in my university holidays he would call me in to help him sort through all the paperwork to send to the Australian Archives. I suspect that was his way of inducting me into the political and administrative side of the sport. He also made us do coaching and refereeing courses. He was responsible for setting me on the various paths that became my fencing career and was like a father figure to me."

Early signs then that Helen was destined to become involved in administration but there was still a competitive career to be had and a successful one at that. "Selection was always based on international results. I was the reserve for the 1972 Games in Munich but to be honest I didn't have a clue



1978 CFC Glasgow - Cover of The Sword



Helen & Andy Szakall taken for AUS Rolling Stone Magazine in Aug 1984

what I was doing! I went to my first World Championships in 1973 in Gothenburg and made the fourth round. That was my first overseas trip. I flew out with Singapore Airlines stopping in Singapore, the Middle East somewhere and then Heathrow I think. It was an amazing trip and my first experience of the fun and games that is a World Championships. When I stopped in Singapore on the way back I went and did some shopping because the exchange rate was so good. I bought loads of presents for the family. I remember having so much luggage over the limit, but somehow managed to get it on the plane."

"The following year I went to my first Commonwealths in Ottawa where we won team gold and then went straight on to the Worlds in Grenoble, France. The Australian Olympic Committee had to ratify selections for the Games and I'd done enough to go to Montreal in 1976, Moscow in 1980 and then LA in 1984. They were my last Games and then I retired."

Proud that she was only ever given "a thousand bucks" by her dad for that first World Championships, Helen speaks about the great teaching job she had that almost covered her fencing expenses as well as allowing her time to travel abroad without pay to compete three times a year, mainly in Europe.

"It's no different now. We have six national competitions dotted around Australia but there's very little funding support. Our top fencers have to budget carefully to be able to go to the Asian or World Championships, or other FIE competitions. We did have a

World Cup in Australia. Originally it was in Melbourne but in the run up to the Sydney Games we moved it to Sydney and it eventually became the Test Event. It started as a men's epee event before we also introduced women. Whilst it was never huge we'd get quite a lot of good fencers down here - the French, Germans, Italians and some of the American and Chinese fencers. Once the video refereeing and wireless fencing requirements were introduced it just became too expensive to run."

"As Team Manager from 1991 to 2000 I travelled with the team to World Champs and Commonwealths. The Games in Sydney in 2000 were amazing to be part of. The way it was put together, the fact that the weather was beautiful for the whole two weeks, it was the first time that the whole volunteer thing came about. It was just done so well and everyone has emulated that since. The fencing was in the city and we simply walked out of the venue and into Darling Harbour with restaurants and coffee shops. We were very lucky."

Standing down as CFF President after 20 years of service Helen reflected on her time. "I was shocked to realise I have been a member of the CFF Family for 48 years. I first competed for Australia in 1974 in Ottawa, where our women's foil team won the gold medal. In 1978 in Glasgow, I won an individual gold and team silver. I also competed in Barnstaple in 1982, my last Championships as a fencer."

"It was in Penang in 1998 that I was elected Vice President of the CFF & I became President in 2002 in Newcastle, Australia. I am incredibly proud of what the CFF team has achieved over the past 20 years: taking membership from 11 to 40, expanding our program to include Juniors & Cadets, and bringing the Veterans under the umbrella of



Helen (right) Australian Olympic Team Manager for Sydney 2000 (Photo Australian Fencing)



Helen Received Queens Birthday Honour in 2015 (Photo FIE)

the CFF, with a Championships held every two years. We have raised the organisation of our Championships and the quality of the referees and officials to international standards.

There is one goal that we have not yet achieved, despite our ongoing efforts - the return of fencing to the program of the Commonwealth Games. But the CFF will continue to work on it and I believe it is not an impossible dream.

London 2021 was an incredible 12-day festival of Commonwealth fencing. I am happy and proud. I wish my successor Marie-France Dufour and the new Board and incoming committees the very best for the future. I am sure they will take this wonderful organisation and its family to even greater heights. I have a plan. My sunset year for the CFF was always going to be 2022 and for Oceania and the FIE it's 2024. Twenty years is more than enough. It's not really great governance to have the same person in place for that long. It's time to move on and for other people to do these things. Since retiring eight years ago I've had more time and if you want to do it well, it draws you in. I have other things to do in my life now. I have three grandkids and I look after one of them on Tuesday and another on Friday and will look after another next year. I have this wonderful relationship with them and I love it. It's my joy. Quit while you're ahead! I've said I'll help out at the Commonwealths if they are held in Melbourne in 2026 and if they need me. I'm still on the committee for fencing to reenter the main event but really, I'm pretty good at moving on. And why not choose your own time."

"During my time in international fencing, I've seen many more countries participate and membership of the FIE & the Confederations has grown a lot. Twelve gold, silver & bronze medals at the Olympics makes it a very attractive sport for those countries whose governments are willing to invest in it."

"The nature of fencing in the various weapons has changed and evolved. I think it has become more spectacular in many ways. Technology has allowed this evolution, but there is still a lot to be done to make the sport more understandable



Women in Fencing working together at the 2018 Commonwealth Junior & Cadet Fencing Championships in Newcastle, England (L-R Viv Mills, Beth Davidson, Helen Smith, Marie-France Dufour, (the new CFF President) and Georgina Usher)



Helen and Henry in 2018 (Facebook)

to the general public. Overall though fencing administration has become more professional at the FIE level."

Looking towards the future Helen concluded, "We need to establish a way to generate income for the sport to allow massive worldwide development & popularisation, without being reliant on generous individuals who have kept us going until now. We also need to continue attracting young people into the sport. They

are our future but I'll leave the marketing to the experts!"

Helen's contribution to fencing has been outstanding so far and with two more years to go in international administration I'm sure there's still more to come. For now, thank you Helen.



Helen and Ferial Salhi at the FIE Centenary Dinner #BizziTeam



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THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

Dimitri Coutya's Recipe For Success

Karim Bashir



Dimitri Coutya (Facebook)

Working from home, dogs barking and a flaky internet connection are not necessarily the right ingredients to conduct a successful interview with a top international athlete but that's what I had to work with when talking to para fencer Dimitri Coutya ahead of his first Paralympic qualifier. A challenge for sure but we powered through.

Sitting in my kitchen on a Tuesday morning, Zoom connection stabilised, Dimitri gave me over an hour of his precious time during a break from training at the University of Bath. For those that don't know him, Dimitri has used a wheelchair since the age of two when he was involved in a road traffic accident. The resulting severed spinal cord means that he is paralysed from the chest down and uses a manual wheelchair to move about and go about his day-to-day life.

Setting out his stall early he begins. "I don't mind speaking about my injury. It's different and a challenge but the truth is that there are very few things that I can't do. I can do this and that and I can be an elite athlete. It's just that I have to do it in a slightly different way. People expect certain negative things but I don't see it that way. Of course it's horrible and you wouldn't wish it on anyone but you wouldn't wish any of the problems that other people have to deal with on them. It's just something that we do."

The message was immediately clear to me. Don't see the wheelchair. See the person. See the elite athlete and Dimitri certainly made that easy for me with his measured but free-flowing and honest responses. His international record speaks for itself; 2016 Rio Paralympian, 2017 Cat B Epee & Foil World Champion, 2018 Cat B Epee European Champion, 2019 Cat B Foil World silver medallist and Cat B Epee World Champion and four time Paralympic medallist from Tokyo 2020. He's currently (November 2022) the Cat B Foil World number one and Cat B Epee World number two, and has now won fifty individual international medals. It's some record for the 25 year old, with clearly more to come but I wanted to find out more about his journey and his recipe for success. Over to you Dimitri!



Tokyo Team Foil Silver - Dimitri, Piers & Ollie

"I was a pretty active kid and tried all sorts of sports. I did swimming, tennis and basketball. In fact I did basketball for seven years, going every Saturday which was great. I think it's important for kids to be healthy and active. It was incredibly useful in terms of rehab as well, getting used to growing up in a wheelchair.

The whole Paralympic aspiration began for me when we had Ade Adepitan (2004 Paralympic bronze medallist) come and train with us at the Aspire Centre in Stanmore. I remember seeing him move up and down the court with the ball and it looked so graceful. I remember thinking 'I want to be as good as he is at something'. I didn't know what that was at that point. It was just about being as good as he was

at something. I found fencing when I went to a summer camp at the end of primary school and continued it as a games option in my secondary school.

On reflection back then I loved the nature of the sport, the individuality and dynamic. People often ask me why I got into it and the reason is pretty simple - I thought swords were cool. I liked all the films with good sword fighting scenes in them. As anyone who has a similar interest will tell you, it's not like the films at all. After getting over that initial disappointment, pretty quickly, I realised that it was an incredible thing. So I started doing it once a week, quickly building to twice and then three times. It progressed until eventually I did my first UK School Games in 2011 and got spotted by Baldip Sahota. From there, I started to train with the squad that were competing at London 2012 and that's where the inspiration grew to try and qualify for a Paralympics. That's when things changed from doing a multitude of sports as a hobby and starting to commit to one that I felt more passionate about.

Back when I started it was really interesting. The coaches at the school where I started were absolutely brilliant but they hadn't had a lot of experience of wheelchair fencing. But putting aside the footwork it's almost exactly the same as able-bodied fencing in terms of the technique and tactically as well. The only difference is that you don't have a fourteen metre piste to work with essentially. Technically as well, where able-bodied



Dimitri competing in Pisa



When you get it right

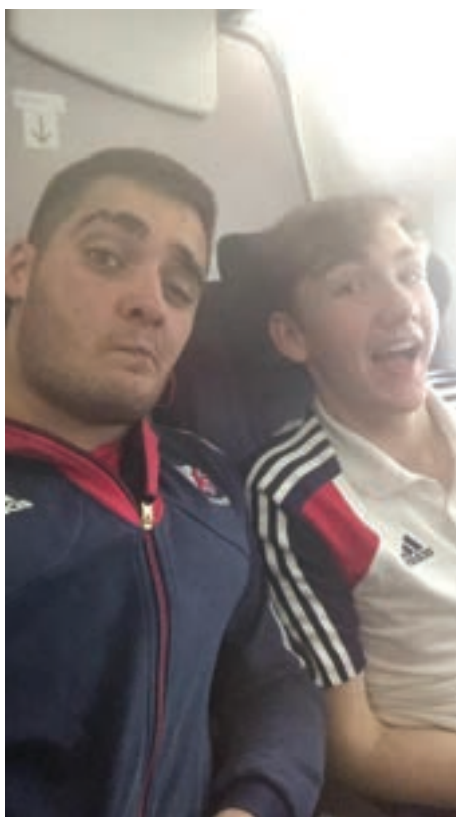
Fencers are relatively rigid in their torso especially in a lunge, with para fencing you need more flexibility in the trunk area. That's where we generate our changes of distance. In terms of point down, arm first and learning the basic moves – disengages, cut-overs, beats, parries – it's all pretty much the same thing. Once you start using them and fencing more people in a chair then you learn how to bring in the tactical side. And I'm still learning every day. It's about when and how to use the moves you've learnt. Perhaps there are a couple of nuances when it comes to wheelchair fencing. It's almost like able-bodied fencing but condensed down to a shorter space.

I'm quite an offensive fencer with foil being my primary weapon. However, I have seen a lot of personal development from a more holistic approach to the sport. The actual fencing bit is just one part. There's the technical ability and the tactics, the use of distance and movement. Those are the three parts that you can break the actual fencing down into but then the psychological aspects are so important, especially at the huge competitions. There are plenty of elite fencers who have a fantastic game but they crumble on the big day. For me, all of that ability to fence is useless unless you can use it and control it. Now, I try not to focus too much on my strengths but try to problem-solve in the moment. That part of my fencing developed quite late but that's the bit I enjoy – trying to respond to what my opponent is doing.

That's the part I'm working on getting stronger at because it doesn't then matter if you're fencing someone for the first time or fencing someone you've fenced a thousand times. That ability to adapt in the moment is so important to me.

In terms of the training, we do lots of sparring through the day plus some gym work and cardio work. What we work on day-to-day depends where we are in the season. I tend to split my time equally between my two weapons and a lot of the training is universal. There can be long days depending on where we are in the cycle.

We do work on the team dynamic but the three men that went to Tokyo – Piers (Gilliver), Ollie (Lam-Watson) and me – we're three individuals but we really gel well together. Of course there's work to do but we're good friends and we care for each other and we get on. We're committed to the wider success of fencing individually and as a team. So we want to see each other do the best that we can be doing. There's no rivalry in that sense. We work together to raise the profile of the sport in general. On that, we've done a lot of work to make our squad as robust as it can be. We've worked together for a long time and have a lot of experience that we can pass



Early Plane Selfie at the penultimate qualifier for Rio 2016



Back to Warsaw, marking ten years of international competition! PL 🇵🇱 🤝

on, about what it takes to become an elite athlete. It's grown organically because of the people we are but everything is done with deliberate practice to ensure consistent results and performance.

In my experience, humour is a huge mechanism in keeping things running smoothly and helping us cope with things as well. If you can joke about something, you can talk about it, assimilate it and work your way through it so that you can give the best performance that you can. Our 'locker room' banter can just look like fun and it is but it's also an important factor in ensuring that we can do what we're trying to do."

I started to see how this delicious recipe was coming together. The physical training acts as the centrepiece of the dish. The accompaniments come in the form of the psychological training and the whole thing is brought together with a mouth-watering sauce of fun and enjoyment of the journey. Following Dimitri on social media give you a small window into his World.

"I'm not the best with social media and I don't post all of the time but I do have a responsibility to boost the profile of the sport. The aeroplane selfies with Piers have become quite a thing. We started that as we usually sit together on the plane. We didn't realise that it had become a thing until a couple of competitions ago when people started mentioning it to us. Maybe they expect it from us now. Of course it's nice for us and it's now become a bit of a game. How do we do something different? How do we keep this going? But the



On Route to Nice for a training camp

other side for us is that we're going to a competition and how can we enjoy it and stay fresh. (Laughing) It's now kind of a responsibility.

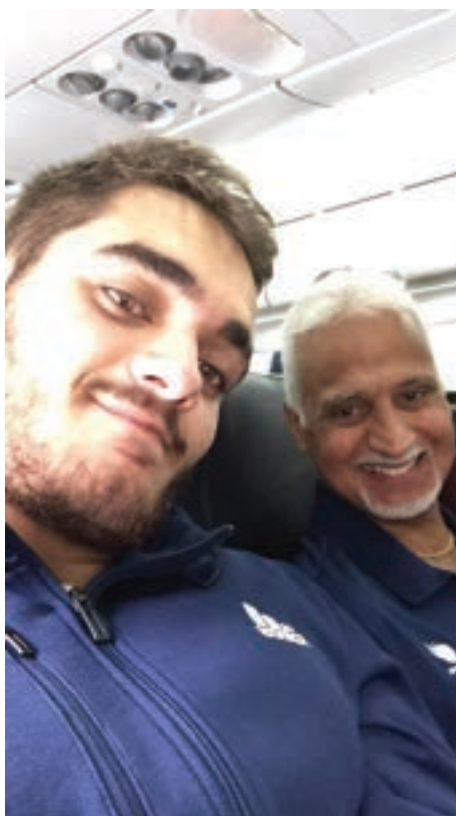
We don't much time to ourselves when we travel. Of course we're away to do a job and I find sightseeing quite tiring so I'm always looking for the next rest day. However, when we go to the major championships or on a long haul trip we try to arrive early and have a look around. About four years ago we had an event in Japan and we spent a couple of weeks in Hong Kong. That was one of the best two weeks of my life. We tried all the different kinds of food, we saw Buddhist temples and generally had the chance to wander around the streets and see what life was like there. It was an incredible experience. We also had a couple of days in Rio after the Paralympics and that was amazing. We went up Sugar Loaf Mountain at night and saw the city and Christ The Redeemer. Amazing and doing that in person will stay with me for ever. It was spectacular."

Clearly a model athlete, I asked Dimitri whether the experience for a beginner para fencer has changed much in his time. "I can only speak from my own experience of that one school club working with John Sloman for many years. He taught me so much of what I know. It was kind of like a process of discovery almost. What I think the key was, was that willingness to learn and to experience new things. That's what really helped with my development and that's what is key not only to para elite athletes but able-bodied athletes as well. The availability of kit is a problem but that willingness to learn and understand new

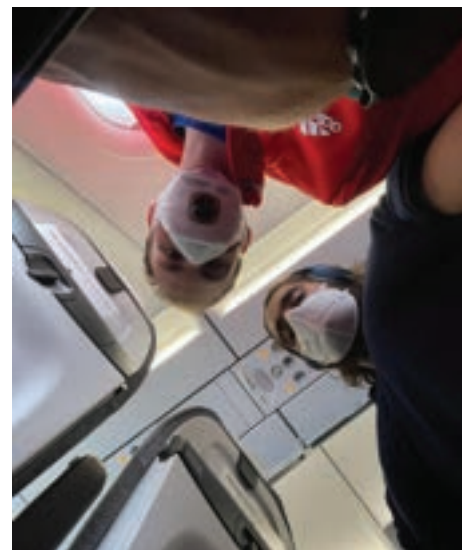
things is so important. It's looking at what you have and saying 'how do I make a great fencer in these circumstances?'. That's what worked for me and the fact that the school I was at, St Benedicts, helped with some of the kit as well.

The numbers have fluctuated in my time. There were quite a lot of people on the international squad around London 2012 but that dipped off. It's starting to pick up now and you hear about people trying it in different places around the country. That's something that should be explored – how do we create a good community in a certain sense? We need to improve the communications so that someone trying the sport in isolation could join us for a weekend of training, for example. Things are good right now in terms of the squad but at grassroots I just don't know. I'd like to think that the transfer of responsibilities to British Fencing will improve the situation. The resources available – kit and people – will allow more young people to have the chance to have a go at para fencing. I'm optimistic but I'm not the right person to ask how that is going to happen."

And what about the Road to Paris? "The run into Tokyo was difficult. We had a competition at the start of 2020 and then Covid meant that everything was



Baldip Sahota getting in on the plane selfies



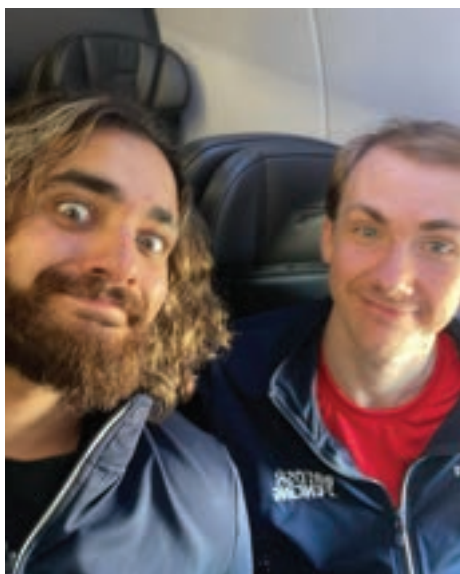
The Force is Strong...

cancelled until a couple of months before the Paralympics in Tokyo. We elected not to attend the events before Tokyo because of the risk of catching Covid and not having time to recover for our pre-departure tests.

Things have got back up and running again now and it's been a return to normality but have felt a bit overwhelming. The next trip will be our fifth this year. It's been an interesting time but it's nice to see that the work that we did over lockdown has been quite fruitful – the results at the Paralympics and since. It's been a good year all together but strange.

We're flying off to Hungary in late November for the first Paris qualifier. We have a week back in the UK before we fly off to Poland for our European Championships. That'll be another qualifier but because it's the zonal it's worth big points. Our last qualifier is in May 2024 just a few months before the Games. We get points at all of the qualifiers but only your best six plus the zonals and Worlds count."

So what's next for Dimitri? Paris 2024 is clearly on the menu but after? "I don't know, is the honest answer. Fencing has given me so much in my life. It's given me some of my biggest life lessons. That process of understanding myself so I can get the best out of myself has been huge. After Paris it's a question of what do I want to get out of another cycle? We always aim



Nov 22 Plane Selfie - First Paris Qualifier in Australia

for medals and that's my biggest goal at the moment. I would love to be individual Paralympic Champion as well as team Champion but that's just the outcome, the end goal. There's so much more we learn and gain from the journey to that goal. Looking back, perhaps I didn't get the results that I wanted to in Tokyo but I've learned so much from that cycle and I can appreciate that now. The way I'm taking it is one Games at a time. I can't predict how I'm going to feel about myself or about fencing until Paris has happened. I've committed to it and will throw everything I have at it for the next two years as I have for the last year. We'll see how Paris goes and I'll make a decision from there.

I've thought a bit about life after fencing and anyone that has done this knows it's a really unique job. Like with anything there's trials and challenges and bits that you absolutely despise about it. But in all honesty I can say that I'm quite lucky for being able to live and experience something that I enjoy so much and for what it provides me. I've thought a bit about what I'll do when I finish fencing and I've got a couple of ideas. The thing is we spend all week thinking and planning, that in my downtime I prefer to just relax. I quite like the idea of studying to be a counsellor and whilst my practice has been quite up there I do like my music as well. I'm trying to get more consistent with my guitar playing so there might be something in that but it's all up in the air at the moment. It's just hard to plan ahead when you're doing what I'm doing.

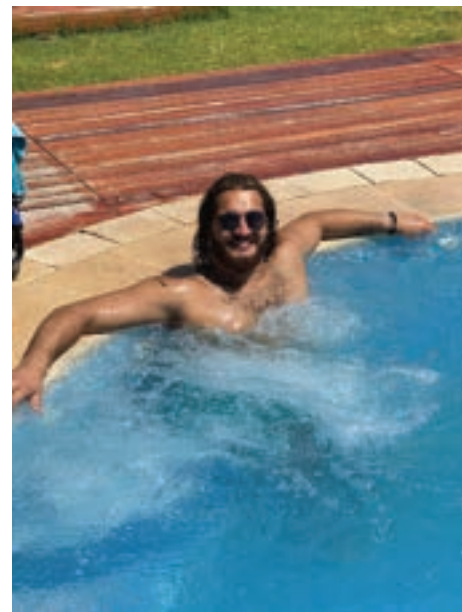
The mission is simply to aim for gold medal standard consistently. For the next two years we're focussed on what it's going to take to win a gold medal or more in Paris. That is essentially what my life will be structured around. That dedication and commitment is something that all Paralympic and Olympic athletes spend hours and hours every day trying to achieve. That's basically what everything is based on. Of course it will depend on how the initial results for qualification will go but if we hit the ground running, we'll have more time to explore and improve for the last few competitions. It's about committing to the grind every day to qualify for Paris."

Before signing off Dimitri had one last important message about his success so far. "My family is very important to me, my mum, my dad and my 19 year old brother - we're very close. I see them pretty regularly and I've also got a good support network of friends in London who I get to see in my downtime. Seeing them is a good refresher for me. It's great to see people you are close to but don't live in your world. I'm pretty low-key when I'm not fencing, going for coffee, reading, playing my music and going to watch movies. It's pretty recuperative stuff and I guess that's what my life is like outside of fencing.

There are so many people who have helped me along the way that I don't want to mention names in case I miss anyone out. They are all so important to me and have contributed to the amazing life and success I've had. I just want to thank them all."



Meeting HRH King Charles III - Nov 2022



Recuperation

Like any masterchef Dimitri has gathered all of the right ingredients, respects them and gets the best out of them. The dishes he's planning to serve both on his way to Paris and at the Games themselves promise to be something special. I don't know about you but I'm hungry.



With Mum and Dad (Photo-Yuka Fujita)

BRITISH FENCING HONOURS 2022

THE SWORD
Home News

Photos: Yasmin Birch

This year's British Fencing Honours were announced by President Hilary Philbin at the Annual General Meeting held on 8 October. Those available were presented with their awards by Board Director Pat Aiyenuro at the Eden Cup in November.

Receiving awards this year were:

Award of Merit: Tim Schofield

Bronze Medals: Marie-Pauline MacKinnon, Maggie Maynard, Peter Rome

Silver Medal: Gemma Collis, Steve Jackson, Kristin Payne, Lyndon Taylor

Gold Medals: Clare Halsted, Steve Higginson, Peter Huggins

Directors' Award: Eddie Goodall

Results Based Awards

Bronze Medal: James Jeal, Carolina Stutchbury

Goblet (Individual Results): Alec Brooke, Jamie Cook

Goblet (Team Results): Alec Brooke, Jaimie Cook, Megan Elliott, James Jeal, Isabella Johnson, Jacob Mitchell, Callum Penman, David Sosnov, Carolina Stutchbury, Amelie Tsang, Nye Ulferts-Kilpatrick, Joseph Walmsley

BF Special Award: Imogen Bulman, Julia Caron, Hannah Lebor, Rachael Lever



Marie-Pauline MacKinnon



Jaimie Cook, Callum Penman, Pat Aiyenuro, David Sosnov, Nye Ulferts-Kilpatrick



Kristin Payne



Steve Higginson



Julie Caron, Hannah Lebor, Imogen Bulman, Rachael Lever - Coach Rees

MEET HARRY BROWN

BF's New National Partnership & Engagement Manager

Sophie DeVooght



Harry joins BF as the newly appointed National Partnership & Engagement Manager. At an exciting period in the organisation's growth, Harry will work in the Commercial Department, expanding the Licensed Partner Programme and focusing on the education sector where BF has just launched its new brand identity, We Are Forging Futures.

Harry, can you tell us about your journey to BF?

"My drive for working in the sports industry was established from my junior days training and competing full time as a professional tennis player, experiencing first-hand the power sport can play in shaping an individual's personal development and resilience. Through these experiences I was lucky enough to train with top athletes and compete at prestigious locations such as Wimbledon, on the historic grass courts.

Following this passion in the sports industry, I spent the past eight years of my career across multiple large leisure operators where I held senior national roles and led strategically across all things sport and community development, engaging collaboratively with partners and making a real impact on participation by working closely with many different NGBs and their sports offerings to grow physical activity.

Prior to this, I spent two years working in media and advertising where I developed some creative flair and an innovative mindset working with large brands. This is where the commercial journey began.

I'm very much looking forward to merging these experiences from my tennis career and coaching background as a qualified level 4 LTA coach, as well as my leisure industry knowledge to aid in growing BF's team and further expanding on its commercial opportunities, through inspiring and enabling people to start, stay and succeed in fencing.



What is your experience of fencing?

I always enjoyed watching and learning about fencing during the Olympic Games, however I haven't had the opportunity to participate in the sport yet! My family background is in farming, so I was always a very active and outdoors person. I remember the imagination and play that was such fun - I enjoyed experiencing fencing as swordplay as children do with family and friends. I'm very much looking forward to reliving these childhood memories and learning how to fence at beginner level, but I'll try not to let my competitive nature take over too much!

I'm keen to bring my wealth of experience from my tennis background and leisure industry career experience to BF as a fresh pair of eyes - to really help BF innovate and grow as an NGB. Having not had the opportunities to participate in this exciting sport at school, I'm really interested in the work around the challenge of changing the perceptions of fencing. I want to partner wider with the education sector through our personal development programmes, to enable more pupils to experience fencing, embedding lifelong behaviours and learnings through the power of sport.

What are you looking forward to in your role and in the future of BF?

I'm really motivated and extremely excited to join BF and the passionate team. I'm looking forward to adding value and delivering growth to further deliver

sustainability across the sport to all levels of fencing.

There is such potential for delivering within this role and supporting the development of a commercial team, so BF can grow its service to new and existing partners and continue to generate a surplus that can be reinvested back into the organisation, to further develop the sport.

We have an opportunity to develop further products and programmes. I am looking ahead to when BF can work with wider partners to engage additional sectors, for example a leisure centre activity programme that can be added to the existing new educational sector personal development programmes. It's all about widening the fencing community and growing a strong, successful and sustainable fencing future.

We Are Forging Futures

Forging Futures harnesses the exciting world of swordplay as part of a distinctive learning journey to help more young people engage in lifelong learning - unlocking untapped potential, renewing self-belief and opening up a world of possibilities.

At school, every student should have the opportunity to begin a fulfilling journey of personal development and release their untapped potential.

Forging Futures from British Fencing helps to unlock that journey, enabling children to evolve into confident, skilled adults. Harnessing the exciting and dynamic world of fencing - from the myths and legends of swordplay to the real-world sport of today - Forging Futures is a comprehensive programme of inclusive, engaging and immersive learning experiences designed for 4-14 year-olds.

For more information go to weareforgingfutures.com.

CONFESSIONS OF A DREAM KILLER

What Steve Kemp thinks it takes to think about achievement

Sian Hughes Pollitt

It was Psychoanalyst Carl Jung who said, "Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakes." Steve Kemp, in his role as Pathways Director for British Fencing is of this school of thought. He also seems to be of the view that life is a very capable teacher, with Steve himself demonstrating that he's one of its keener students.

In his formative years, Steve worked on farms, wanting to make agribusiness his career. One of the fundamentals of his day-to-day was to tend to land and livestock. To him now, this provides a perfect metaphor for the high-performance coaching space.



Kemp Surveys (Photo: @den_pollittphotography)

"To be in farming is to focus on life cycle, growth, an end, often leading to a new beginning. Coaching is also about growing something. Farming can inform us about coaching. When would you see farmer shouting at the crops? You don't. When might you see a farmer uprooting crops and putting them somewhere else? They don't. Farmers always choose the right crop for best soil, knowing when to add nutrient for growth and that there are good seasons and bad seasons. They know they can control some factors but not others. It helps for coaches to think like a farmer; farmers are successful at growing stuff."

Kempsy's point is that life is not a 'what if', "if only" exercise - full of regrets, negative self-reflection and longing. It is more



a series of choices that roll on and out towards tackling the next option and the next.

There are moments in time when you make those kinds of choices, and that tends to be the right choice for that moment in time." In our conversation Steve share many moments, that come to shape and define him at this moment.

These disparate incidents don't sound much like life-changers but are clearly commensurate with a kind of grasp on reality and need to show resilience. Qualities that we know are key attributes to succeeding in fencing at whatever level.

His personal life journey starts to show that while one dream was deconstructed, another more sustainable one was built in its place. In order for such building work to take shape, Steve advises that we have to pay attention not solely to the bricks and mortar but also to the architecture that lets in the light - in other words: the windows.

Specifically, he refers to the 'window of opportunity' - the space, often where dreams have taken root, where athletes can be helped onto the right road, in the right way establishing a more purposeful, guaranteed route to their desired destination.

And it is here that he announces "I understand, I am a dream killer and I take responsibility for that and have to own it"

I sort of feel that it's more than my job is worth to start promoting that British Fencing's Pathways Director is a bit of a psycho. Thankfully, knowing Kempsey as I do, I am 100% confident that he is not, maybe just a little bit!

Steve does qualify his declaration, saying "the dream has to be real and the decisions he makes in his role may expose the harsh reality of being in the ADP Pathway and the performance expectations". In other words, he might kill off pie-in-the-sky notions but he is all about helping the fencing community shape and secure their tangible goals.

"Through life, and within fencing, we all make it to certain 'Choice Points'. Rather than us seeing ourselves as having never achieved what we wanted to, we can look at it differently. It's not that we'll never make it, it's that we can know that we have made it to here. We did make it. We made it to this point. Those outcomes are the products of our choices. I suppose my role in the Athlete Development Programme (ADP) is to show the community the reality of their choices and what the outcomes could be."

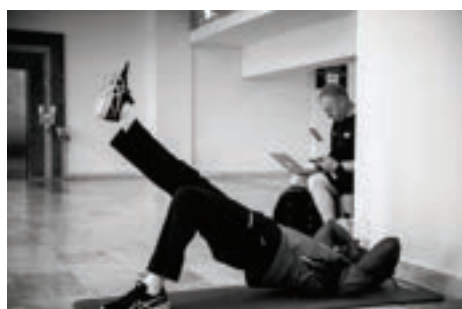
Steve talks about fencing as though it bears all the rhythms of life. The high notes, the low, the crescendos. He is capable of hearing the ebb and flow of the music and wants us all similarly to listen in.

"If you start to flatline in your progression or your performance, then change has to happen. If a fencer hits a certain level and cannot get beyond that, that might be the end of a certain ambition. Equally it might be that an opportunity to create and foster a more effective long-term plan to see you through the next part of your fencing journey can be put into place."



(Photo: #BizziTeam)

Steve airs his favourite Everest analogy and the way in which the fencing journey can be likened to scaling the highest mountain in the world. He is firm as to what the role of the ADP is. "Whilst as humans we don't always get it right, our responsibility is to take fencers up the rock faces and most importantly to bring them back down. But while climbing, everyone realises what their end point is. Some people may feel as though they have reached their end point but then figure out what they can do to get to the next level and get the result they want."



Behind the scenes with James Williams
(Photo: @den_pollittphotography)

Steve's life story as well as the life he has lived are at once fascinating and terrifying, throwing up multiple epic moments of truth.

Steve tells so many stories that show he's acquainted with every type of life experience from its deep shades of detachment to its most passionate highlights. What truly starts to light a spark in him as he talks, is when he is speaking about the generation coming through the ADP now.

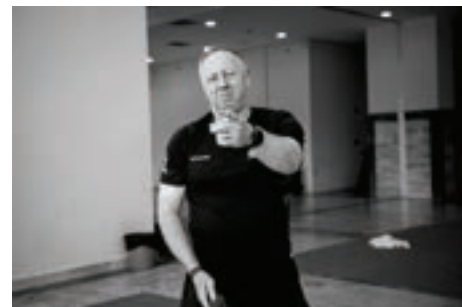
"There is the right intent in this generation. Some special stuff that I can feel. I can't put my finger exactly on what it is and it won't necessarily be confined solely to fencing – but fencing will have contributed to it. The outstanding quality in them is interest. These fencing athletes are interested and curious. They want to understand the rationale and the reasons why things are as they are."

This observation affords Steve an enthusiasm to look to new beginnings, and we are back to agriculture. Well, kind of.

Steve is convinced that High-Performance Coaches are "super-driven" like farmers. As much as farmers care about their livestock and their crops, so too coaches take pride in caring for and cultivating sporting humans who are capable of realising their best potential.

What we need to be mindful of is that any life journey will hand us the unexpected; at times, the seemingly undesired, but you never know what might come next. A big movie fan, Steve picks out the scene in Apollo 13 where Captain Jim Lovell, played by Tom Hanks, recounts a time when he was a pilot on a night flight in the Pacific and his instruments failed. Everything on the craft shut down and Lovell feared he would never find his way back. Then the bright green line of algae that had been churned up by a big ship, show him the way back. Which would never have happened without the lights failing in the cockpit. lighting up his route home.

In reality therefore, this self-confessed supposed Destroyer of Hopes is somebody



(Photo: den_pollittphotography)

rather more philosophical, thoughtfully reflective, and thereby effective. Steve is simply aware of how things align at any one time and what can be done with any one set of circumstances. Just the act of ascertaining where we honestly are at any one point and what are our goals to further our ambitions, might not allow us to attain a dreamlike, flawless perfection. But in seeking out this knowledge, we will become familiar with excellence, and excellence - as Aristotle said; excellence is a habit.

And a habit can become a goal.

And our goals become our dreams.

And then our dreams are for real.

And then we can't really pick it all apart anyway.



Junior Worlds in Dubai 2022
(Photo: #BizziTeam)

MATTERS OF THE HEART

A Resolution for All - Learn CPR

Karim Bashir

Coming from a medical family, I have some knowledge of the tremendous work healthcare professionals do on a daily basis. Their ability to remove emotion from a high-stress situation in order to save lives is an awe-inspiring skill that few, without their knowledge and experience, can replicate. But what happens if, and invariably when, they are not there in a time of need?

In recent times a number of stories about cardiac episodes within a fencing environment got us thinking. Is there a simple and practical guide that us non-medics can follow if we suspect that someone is having a heart attack? With the help of BF's Medical Committee and the British Heart Foundation (BHF), here's a story and guide to how all of us can assist. If you read nothing else this year, please read this. The story and guide come from a report produced by the Medical Committee.

"Undoubtedly this year's Fencing Commonwealth competition was a resounding success. All competitors will have gained from the experience and some will have returned home with medals. The happiest fencer to return home is almost certainly Erik Moncrieff.

Erik is an epee fencer who is based on the Shetland Islands. He is normally a fit and well non-smoker, taking regular exercise and no medications. He and his partner Amanda had decided to have a few days together in London at the time of the Commonwealth to sightsee and have some fun. Erik was competing in the veterans fencing competition. During his fourth bout, he started to feel somewhat unwell. It was a feeling he describes like flu, which came on quite quickly. He felt nauseous but did not have any chest pain. Despite feeling ill, he was very reluctant to stop fencing, as he didn't want to take the opportunity of victories away from his opponents by withdrawing. He completed his poule matches but has very little recollection of further events. Amanda was spectating and remembers looking across and seeing him fall straight backwards onto the piste. It was quickly apparent



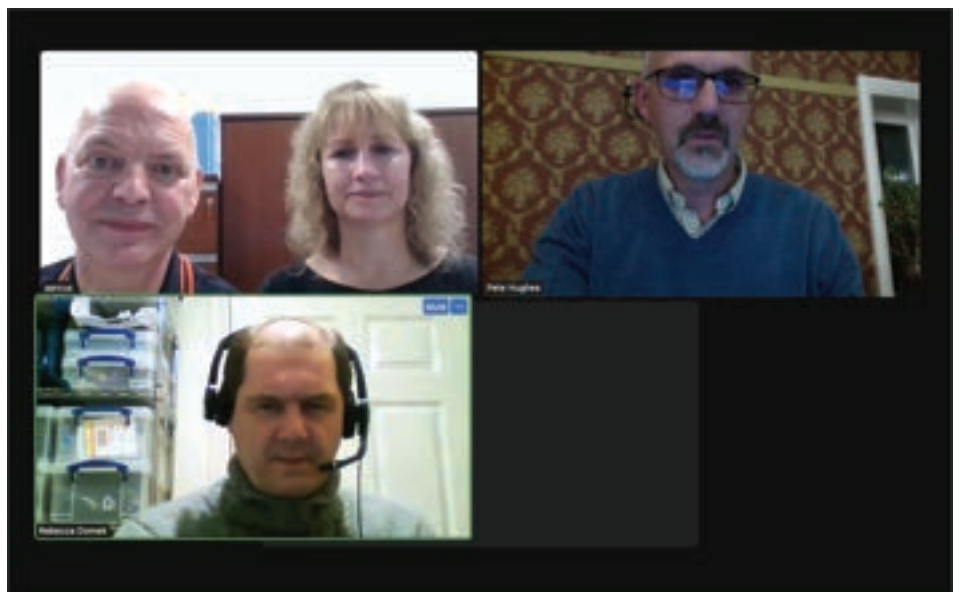
that he was seriously ill and in fact had suffered a cardiac arrest. Several fellow fencers immediately offered assistance. Stephen Domek, a GP and a British Fencing Medical Committee member, remembers being tapped on the shoulder and turning to see a fellow competitor in dire need of help. He immediately assisted by starting cardiopulmonary resuscitation on Erik.

A Canadian fencer and medic, Neil Casey also offered considerable assistance. The event medical team soon attended and a defibrillator was sourced very quickly. Erik was treated with a single shock and his heart then restarted. Stephen recalls, despite the panic of the situation, there was enough clear-headedness to lift Erik off the metal piste before administering the shock. The London Ambulance team arrived within seven minutes. By this stage, he had recovered consciousness and was transferred to Bart's Hospital where

cardiac artery stenting was performed within one hour."

A remarkable story no doubt put into full perspective by Erik who is convinced that he was lucky to be away in London, at the Commonwealths when his cardiac event occurred.

The BF Medical Committee has discussed these events. "It is clear the outcome has been hugely positive. This has been the case because there were other competitors in the area who had skills in cardiac resuscitation. It was also vital that a defibrillator machine was immediately available at the site. The committee has decided to use this event as a stimulus to raise the issues of sudden cardiac death amongst sports people and stimulate as many British fencers as possible to do resuscitation training. The BHF has a simple **15 minute training tool** on their website that teaches people the skills in a simple and straightforward manner. We hope as many readers as possible will do this training regularly to ensure there is always a CPR competent person at every fencing competition. It would also be enormously helpful if fencers attending their clubs can consider whether there is a defibrillator in the vicinity of their physical activity. It is always better to know where



Erik & Amanda thanking Stephen & Peter



Scan the QR code to continue
on your mobile device

You'll get better feedback from our training
if you use a mobile phone or tablet.

**BHF RevivR QR Code – Scan to access this
vital training**

this equipment is, before it is needed in an emergency. All fencing competition organisers should ensure defibrillators are readily available at events.

We would also encourage fencers to consider their own risk of heart disease particularly when performing very strenuous exercise. The risk factors are well known, being high blood pressure, high cholesterol, a past history of smoking and being overweight. Family history is also important. GPs are happy to go through risk factors with patients and would offer them treatment if this was felt necessary."

The BHF's training starts with the following, "Be ready for that day. Did you know a person's chance of surviving a cardiac arrest is tripled with CPR?" Having completed the training myself, I can tell you that it's simple to follow and has given me more confidence that if needed, I could help.

If you already know CPR, great but the training is a useful refresher. If you don't know CPR, please spend 15 minutes doing the BHF training. You never know when it might come in handy.

Call To Action

1. Carry out the British Heart Foundation here, [RevivR CPR Training](#)
2. Locate the defibrillator at every venue where you fence
3. Know your own risk factors or speak to your GP to find out what they are if you don't already know

Fortunately, Erik and Amanda's story had a happy ending and they were able to thank Stephen during a virtual call recently with Erik describing his situation as "dying and being reanimated". We wish him well on his journey to a full recovery and for having not lost his sense of humour.

Thanks to Dr. Stephen Domek, Mr. Peter Hughes, Dr. Mary Cohen, Dr. Clare Halsted



Marion (right) with WFT at the Vets Worlds 2022 (Photo: Gillian Aghajan)

and the British Heart Foundation for helping us share this valuable information. Thanks also to Marion Thomas and Curtis Miller for their reviews of the BHF training.

Marion Thomas

"I checked out the BHF 'How can I help, cardiac arrest online mini workshop?' OMG. How simple was that!? I've done many First Aid courses and this by far made me feel more comfortable and was well within my capabilities. Often these guides can be quite elaborate and overwhelming. My poor cushion is now flat and the idea of the camera to check you're doing CPR at the right speed was so easy and reassuring. I was so worried I was going to do it all wrong... but that is impossible.

Thank you – I have now forwarded this on to many of my friends."

Curtis Miller

"This course is brilliant and perfect for everyone to learn from. The presentation was easy to follow, while the interactive sections provide great information on how to perform CPR the right way. Even if the course has been done before, there are many small details that can be forgotten, so it's always good to be reminded. The more people who take this course the better. 15 minutes is no time at all. Everyone can fit this into their schedule, especially if it is to save future lives. Happy I was able to take the course. I have recommended this to friends and family. I highly recommend this for others too!"



Curtis (Photo: Richard Moran)

“

HOW TO DO CPR IN 5 STEPS

Step 1: Shake and shout

Step 2: Call 999

Step 3: Give chest compressions

Step 4: Keep going

Step 5: Use a defibrillator

David Hall competed in epee for Great Britain at the Junior World Championships in Denver in 1993. Completing a PhD at Imperial College and then an MBA at the University of California-Berkeley he's gone on to achieve in the corporate world. That, however, has not stopped him from finding the time to travel up and down the country and most recently abroad, supporting his two children in their own fencing endeavours. Here's his take on parenting fencers.

"A quick look down. Heart rate at 120. Concentrate. Relax. Here it comes, no missed it! Reset. Here it comes again, too fast, noooo missed again! Breathe. Set it up, wait, yes hit! Now remember that and do it again. Heart rate 115. Let's go!"

For me, that was part of one of my stories of the summer. Coming down the back of the Galibier in the French Alps on my bike, taking part in the Etape Du Tour. French and Italian riders rocketing past, totally at home on the descent. I had lost confidence on the brakes on a section where missing an apex could mean flying off and finding yourself falling down deep into a field of Alpine cows. Exhilarating, but stressful. If you do go off, you'll be mindful of the very public mistake, but have to get back on your bike and have another go.

The strange thing is that this could as easily describe the emotions that you can feel when watching your kids take part in a fencing competition as well as the emotions that they can go through themselves. There's a team around them to help them prepare. You've made a big effort to get to the competition - sometimes driving for hours just to compete. But there's no guarantee that all this will end



Avoiding Alpine Cows on the Etape du Tour



David Hall

up with the result you hope or you believe is deserved.

Sometimes they're on fire. Sometimes they're not. Quite frequently they can be both. All of this in the public gaze. Fragile confidence can be lost in a second, and a refereeing mistake can spark a response that completely throws them off course. And yes, you're also intimately involved. Heart rates hit 120 and you share the ups and downs of your kids while trying to keep everything in check and remembering you're the adult here.

My own journey with fencing began back in the 80s at school where picking up an epee was the only guaranteed way to avoid having to regularly play rugby. While I "retired" from the sport midway through University, fencing helped shape me as a person. I made lifelong friends, got selected for the European and World Cadet and Junior GBR teams, and learnt to deal with success and failure along the way. When my kids were old enough to have a go, I wanted them to have similar experiences. I was thrilled when they showed interest and have enjoyed the sport ever since.

Fast forwarding my own experiences by 30 years, it's amazing to see how far fencing has come in that time. Being married to an Italian and comparing the status of the sport in both countries, it's clear that

there's still a lot of headroom for growth in the UK. However, the sport is much more organised, diverse, inclusive and accessible than it was when I started. That can only be a good thing.

It is, however, a sport that requires dedication from the parents as well as the kids. Not least, taking the kids to and from the training sessions. Our kids train two or three times a week with the Luso International club in Maidenhead. Antonio and James, the coaches are great with the kids combining both fun and meaningful development in their sessions. They have created a great social as well as sporting experience which means that they look forward to going along. It can be hard fitting the sessions in and around homework and school sports plus other activities. It can also be challenging just being the taxi if I'm away for work but thankfully we share the drop offs and pickups with other parents who live nearby.

Fitting in the competitions can also be a challenge. While it's great that there's a full calendar of age group and ranking events for the kids to take part in, it's a full time commitment at the weekend to travel back and forth. Picking which competitions to do, which not, balancing the financial as well as time aspects, can be hard especially when school friends have less intense schedules. International competitions add an additional layer of complexity. However, it's a choice and the kids are happy to compete and have become more dedicated as they've got older.

If things don't go to plan at an event, then that can cause additional pressure. As parents we wonder if it's worth the effort, or the kids feel that they'd much rather have done something else. While we try to be careful not to build up too



Lunge



Yes! A Hit!

much stress before competing, there will always be anxiety - thinking back to the last competition, good, bad, what if? If the travel has involved a six hour round trip, or a whole weekend away then that just ratchets it up a notch. Trying to tell yourself that it's a fun weekend away with the family isn't always particularly authentic!

While results aren't everything, it does get that little more serious as the kids get older, especially if they're going for ranking points. The pressure rises. Smaller things that would normally not bother the kids can bother them. It's the same for the parents. We've driven up to the hall for hours and all want our children to do well. Subconsciously that stress as a parent can be transmitted to the child. Despite our best efforts of putting the game face on, it can be hard.

We're very lucky within our club that there's quite a tight group of kids who compete together and parents who travel together. It's not unknown for me to "quietly" voice some frustration to one of the parents, or to be on the receiving end for someone else as the day progresses. What's important is that we keep the excess stress away from the kids (and the coaches) because they know when something hasn't gone to plan. They don't always need to be told and will perform best if they're focused and ready to take

some ups and downs as they go along. It's all about balance - striking the right spot between being ready and "up for the fight" and being too wound up and not able to perform.

Personally, I find it hard watching the kids, but I can't take my eyes off them at the same time. Our two like us to be vocal with our support, especially in the harder DE matches, so it can get a bit noisy. However, it also needs to be fun and not intimidating for the other kids or inflammatory for their parents. Learning to deal with the pressure of competition is a never ending life lesson and part of that is understanding that not everyone is on your side all of the time.

Fencing is an individual combat sport, so an element of tension is needed to compete effectively and as parents we feel that tension. Our coaches try to focus the kids on what to do and why, instead of who they're facing and whether they won or not last time. Of course, that doesn't always work. Personalities and reputations matter. Some kids get on better with each other - just as in life, but we try to help the kids manage those feelings and make sure that they are respectful to others.

One of the hardest situations to deal with at an event is when a refereeing mistake is made at a crucial point in a match. That can easily tip the balance of a fight which can lead to a DE knock out or progression, impacting qualification points, a season's outcome.

As a parent it can be really hard as well. Your child turns round, exasperated, looking for support, reassurance and you know that there's been a bad call. We tell our kids to ask the referee if they feel that a mistake has been made but refuse to get involved ourselves. Asking for clarification is fine, but they have to accept the answer in return and learn to move on. Fair or not fair, it is what it is and if they can learn to put immediate disappointment behind them then and look forwards, then that is a skill that very few people have and one that will be immensely valuable.

Overall, what's most important to me is that the kids have fun and enjoy the sport. If they achieve success, then great. I'm happy to put in the time, effort and money



to support them. The reality is that it is unlikely that either of them will follow the path to becoming Olympic fencers, but they can make great friends through shared experiences that will help them whatever path outside the sport that they choose.

As a parent I have a huge role to play in their experience. They learn from how I react, how I behave. No one is perfect, so I don't claim to get it right all the time and it can be really hard especially if "it's all your fault". However, those 120 heart beats, those wins, those failures, those "what happened", those "that was awesome" will all help us as a family navigate the road ahead with all its twists and turns, so that hopefully none of us end up face down in an Alpine cow field.



Hiding his emotions

THE LEON PAUL JUNIOR SERIES

Ben Paul

THE SWORD
Community



Ask any fencer on a senior GBR World Cup squad to name one of their first fencing competitions and their response will almost always include the letters 'LPJS'.

The Leon Paul Junior Series has been around for such a long time most people don't know how it started. It was the brainchild of Barbara Paul, the wife of Raymond Paul, who noticed that there were very few competitions for young fencers. So she organised a couple of foil events in London in 1986, some 36 years ago!

The competitions proved so popular other similar events started popping up over the UK. Leon Paul then brought them together, sponsored the series and created a points system for fencers attending multiple events so they could have an LPJS ranking. This also came with season ending prizes and the iconic LPJS t-shirt.

In 2016 the LPJS got a makeover with a new multipurpose website for everything from online entry, results and rankings to information & archived results. You can see who was topping the rankings from 2008 onwards or which clubs were heading the annual medal tables from 2016. Working with artists in Italy, fencers who created an account get a free LPJS passport. They



are a great way to record progress through their LPJS fencing career.

Today's LPJS has tried to keep true to its founding principles as an entry level event for young fencers taking their first steps into competitive fencing. Winning is always the goal of any fencer, but at an LPJS competition this takes second place to having fun and developing their skills. We also find LPJS competitions very educational for new fencing parents attending events with their young athletes for the first time.

Pre-Covid (2019) there were 40 LPJS events all over the UK from Canterbury & London over to Turo & Bristol, up to Manchester via Stratford then across to Durham before heading north of the border to Holyrood and West Lothian. Just like all fencing, the LPJS was adversely affected by the Covid pandemic. Following the full lifting of restrictions there were a few events in 2021 and the first full season back saw only 23 LPJS events in 2022. We would of course like to change this and have LPJS events, big and small, return all over the country in 2023.

An LPJS event is normally organised by a fencing club. They are a great opportunity for clubs to introduce their fencers to competitive fencing in a familiar and safe environment as well being a source of revenue. Leon Paul manages all the entries through the LPJS website and provides a complete entry file to the competition organiser, split into age groups, ranked and with their BF membership checked. It's simply a case of loading the fencers into the computer program and away you go! After the event the organiser sends back the results and Leon Paul uploads them to the website with the rankings being updated instantly. Simple!

To further help event organisers Leon Paul provides, for free, eight 3-weapon scoring boxes & spool sets, eight LPJS mini conductive pistes (full length, half width) and finals set up consisting of an SG12 scoring box, table and tower lights. All the organiser has to do is collect the equipment



or arrange delivery. Jon Willis and his team has also been known to personally go and help organisers run their event on the day.

The finances of the event are very simple. Organisers set their own entry fee for the event. Leon Paul takes £2.40 per entry to cover the admin and payment charges. Each medal set (gold, silver & 2 x bronze) costs £9.60. All medals come engraved and have been redesigned for 2023. These costs are taken out of the entry fees collected before the remaining money being sent to the organiser. A tip from experienced LPJS event organisers is to run a food and coffee stall at the event. This goes down well with parents & coaches while providing an extra revenue stream for the competition.

If any clubs or individuals would like to run an LPJS competition Leon Paul would love to hear from you. The first stage is to get in touch with Jon Willis who manages the series and supports event organisers from the offices at Leon Paul. Jon is a great competition resource and will help you with the administration and putting on a great event.

For more information contact
jon@leonpaul.com or
info@leonpaulfencingcentre.com



BRIAN DICKINSON MBE



Brian Dickinson MBE

It is with great sadness that we heard of the passing of Brian Dickinson MBE, GB Paralympic wheelchair fencer, swimmer and basketball player. Brian, from Blackpool was at the forefront of wheelchair fencing and took part in first Paralympics at the Tokyo Games in 1964, where he won the first three of his six medals from Paralympics with bronze in the men's team epee alongside James Shipman and Cyril Thomas and medals in the 50m breaststroke and freestyle swimming.

Interviewed about the 1964 Games in Tokyo, Brian commented, "It was only my second long-haul flight. My first was to Perth, Australia, in 1962 for the first Commonwealth Paraplegic Games. I remember receiving a certificate for flying over the North Pole. My memories of Japan are overwhelmingly positive. It really helped to bring the whole disabled community out into the open, having previously been behind closed doors."

In the early Paralympics athletes competed in more than one sport and Brian took part in wheelchair basketball as well as swimming and wheelchair fencing but after the Tel Aviv Games in 1968 where he again won bronze in men's epee team, this time with John Clark and Terry Willett, Brian concentrated on wheelchair fencing.

Brian's involvement in wheelchair sport followed his move to Blackpool in 1957, while still in his teens. A cyst on his spinal cord resulted in an operation on his 21st birthday and Brian was paralysed and became a wheelchair user. Brian was treated in the spinal injuries unit at Southport and went to Stoke Mandeville Stadium for sports competitions, where the Games which would become the Paralympics first started in 1948.

Brian served as a member of the Executive Council of the British Paraplegic Sports Society (now WheelPower) for several years. He was also general secretary of the International Wheelchair Fencing Committee from 1994-2005, served on the Directoire Technique (managing elite world competitions), became President of the British Disabled Fencing Association, organised the 1994 European Championships at Blackpool's Norbreck Hotel and was awarded the MBE for services to his sport in the 2014 Queen's New Year Honours. Brian also coached many wheelchair fencers and was highly respected within the sport both nationally and internationally.

When in 1984 Illinois, the USA pulled out due to financial difficulties Brian played a part in taking the Paralympic Games back to Stoke Mandeville and he continued a role in the administration of sport having won two more medals at the 1984 Games with an individual bronze in men's sabre class 2-3 and bronze in men's sabre team with Kevin Davies, Tom Killin and Terry Willett.

At the 1992 Paralympics in Barcelona Brian was part of the men's sabre team together with Jack Bradley, Kevin Davies and David Heaton who won the bronze medal with a 5-0 victory over Italy.

In recognition of more than 50 years' service to wheelchair fencing Brian was asked to be a torchbearer for the London 2012 Paralympic Torch and carried the Paralympic Flame on the Torch Relay leg between Tring and Berkhamsted.

Brian will be remembered by many for his coaching and mentoring of young athletes and was nicknamed the "Grandfather of wheelchair fencing". Brian will be a great loss to all who knew him with the wheelchair fencing community and for his lifetime of dedication to the sport, having invested a great deal of his time encouraging young disabled people to engage with sport and his influence in the sport covered a wide range of areas, including competition rules and the design and development of specialist equipment for use in international competition.

Caz Walton OBE, lifelong friend of Brian said, "Brian was an elegant, intelligent fencer who put so much more into wheelchair fencing than he ever took out. Wheelchair Fencing nationally and internationally owes him an enormous debt. He was a significant contributor to the sport and will be hugely missed."

Condolences to Brian's wife, Val and family from all within WheelPower, Stoke Mandeville and the wheelchair sports community.

Martin McElhatton OBE, WheelPower CEO

MILDRED DURNE (1932-2022)



Mildred & Hilary, centre front row, at the 1975 World Championships in Budapest

Mildred Durne had a successful career in women's foil during the 50s and 60s, training at London Fencing Club and later at Salle Pearson. She made her debut in the British team at the World Championships in Paris in 1957 and competed in the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo in the Women's Foil team. She won numerous medals in European events including gold in Amsterdam in 1958 and Dieppe in 1959, and at home was a regular finalist in national and provincial events between 1955-1971 - a favourite being the Ashton Tournament which she won 5 times.

Juggling her fencing life with her career at the Bank of Australia where she worked in International Travel, Mildred was well placed, upon retirement from competitive fencing, to take on the role of GBR Women's Captain - a role which she held throughout the 70s.

That period coincided with my own competitive career so I came to know her quite well.

Mildred accompanied the women's foil team to most of their championships and grand prix events, including the

1972 and 1976 Olympic Games in Munich and Montreal. There were many memorable trips, and these include the 3 expeditions to Minsk - a trip which was never without its travel challenges. No matter which route was chosen, the team would set off on time but arrive one day later than scheduled. One year we were stranded in Moscow overnight, with the first flight to Minsk departing the next morning at the same time as the start of the 1st round of the competition. Mildred insisted that everyone boarded the plane in full kit to maximise their chance of being able to fence upon arrival at the venue. However, the team was met at the airport by the kind-hearted organisers, who explained that they had moved us all into the 3rd group of 1st round poules. With time to spare they insisted on taking us off for a late breakfast - still in our electric jackets and with trailing bodywires.

Mildred was always courteous, considerate, efficient and full of old-fashioned common sense. She also had the courage of her convictions, which she famously demonstrated in 1983 at the European Championships in Lisbon. Linda Martin (now McMahon) was battling it out against Naila Giliyazova, one of the top fencers from the mighty USSR team, for a place in the final. The score at the end of time was 1-1, with the current rule being that fencers continued ad infinitum until a hit was scored. They each launched numerous unsuccessful attacks until, with the clock showing an astonishing 42 minutes of fencing time and both fencers clearly flagging, the normally reticent Mildred called out to Linda to try a remise. That brave advice immediately resulted in a win for Linda who went on to win the bronze medal - GBR's first medal in a post-war European Championships.

A strong character, Mildred took a 'firm but fair' approach to managing the women's team - which unsurprisingly didn't always suit the wishes of her team members. The 1977 World Championships in Buenos Aires coincided with a very popular Barry White concert, to which 2 of us had been invited by 2 of the Hungarian team. We begged and pleaded with Mildred to agree that we could go, as we weren't fencing the following day, but to no avail - Mildred stood her ground and we therefore turned it down. We always had the greatest respect for her.

When Mildred retired as Team Captain, and with my own plans to retire from competition the following year, it was she who persuaded me to take over from her. I agreed but had no inkling that, at that moment, I had signed up to a lifetime in fencing.

It was fencing's loss that, after her retirement as team captain in 1979, Mildred moved on to pastures new. She relocated to Southwold where she took up market gardening and, after moving to Yorkshire in her later years, started up a local nature reserve, the Glade Trust near Kirkby Fleetham Hall, in an idyllic spot close to her home. The nature reserve continued to be the focus of her efforts until the last, and I don't doubt that she tackled every aspect with her usual common sense, efficiency and dry sense of humour.

Mildred is survived by her nephew, Christopher Durne, and several grand-nieces and grand-nephews.

Hilary Philbin, BF President

RESULTS



*The latest results are now listed online and can be **accessed here**.*

Please forward all your suggestions for additional online fencing results to: events@britishfencing.com

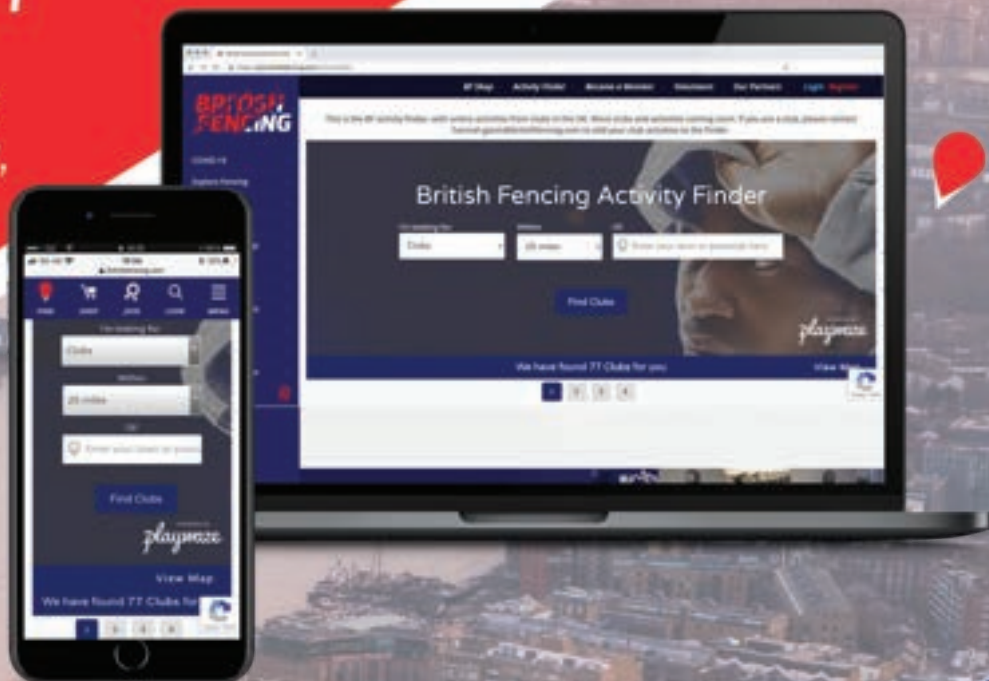
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