

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
APRIL 2025



NEW ERA FOR BRITISH FENCING
WELCOME PAT AIYENURO PP5-6
MEET OUR NEW CHAIR SARA PANTULIANO P7

BRITISH
FENCING

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Editor:

Karim Bashir, British Fencing
1 Baron's Gate,
33-35 Rothschild Road,
London W4 5HT
T: 020 8742 3032
E: karim.bashir@catchsport.com

Print:

Orbitpress Limited,
11 Market Square,
Chesham,
Bucks, HP5 1HG
T: 01494 778053

BF Contacts Page

Safeguarding Hotline:
Liz Behnke, Equality and
Safeguarding Manager
M: 07526 003030

Typeset by:
JS Typesetting Ltd
T: 07927 619752
E: jstypesetting@outlook.com

Advertising:
Karim Bashir
M: 07855 252546
E: karim.bashir@catchsport.com

Cover photo:

Pat Aiyenuro on duty at the 2024
Cadet & Junior World Championships
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Next deadline: 29th August 2025

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Karim Bashir

The post-Olympic season is in full swing, and what a season it's shaping up to be! We've already seen records being broken on the international stage, with young fencers making history. A special congratulations to 15-year-old Jaelyn Liu from the USA, who made headlines in January by becoming the youngest Senior World Cup winner at the foil event in Busan. It's a reminder of how fast our sport evolves and how the next generation is constantly pushing the boundaries.

Closer to home, our cadets and juniors are preparing for their season finale in Wuxi, China. We eagerly anticipate seeing how they perform on the world stage.

This issue, however, focuses on the heart of our sport – our **domestic community** – and we start with some significant welcomes. First, we sit down with **Pat Aiyenuro**, who recently took over as **President of British Fencing**, following Hilary Philbin's tenure. Pat's fencing journey is one of passion and dedication, and we explore her pathway into the role before turning our attention to our new **Board Chair, Sara Patuliano**. Both Pat's and Sara's introductions to fencing came through their children, and they have since blended their professional expertise in academia and the corporate world with hands-on experience of the sport. Their unique perspectives promise to bring fresh energy and insight to British Fencing's leadership.

Another new team making waves is **BF's Fencing Development Team**, led by former submariner **Dusty Miller**. We take a closer



look at their work and how they're striving to support and grow the sport at all levels. Alongside this, we also check in with the **BF Head Office team** to uncover what they've been working on behind the scenes. Whether you're an athlete, coach, parent, or club administrator, their efforts play a vital role in shaping the fencing landscape in the UK.

Speaking of parents, we know that fencing can be a rollercoaster for those behind the piste as well as on it. This issue features an insightful read from our friends at the **Academy of Fencing Masters**, as **Igor shares his journey as a fencing parent**.

For all those mums and dads who have ever found an armoury kit buried under an entry form – or felt the highs and lows of competition day – this one's for you!

We also shine a light on an incredible athlete whose story deserves wider recognition. **Ollie Lam Watson** is arguably the best wheelchair fencer most of us hardly know, but his journey from novice to multi-Paralympic medalist is nothing

short of inspiring. His story is a testament to resilience, dedication, and the power of sport to transform lives.

Coaches, we haven't forgotten about you! **Simon Trevithick** takes us inside his **three-month experience at the FIE Coaching Course in Budapest**. His diary offers a fascinating glimpse into high-performance coaching education and the challenges and rewards of developing as a coach at an international level. Whether you're a seasoned coach or just starting out, there's plenty to take away from Simon's journey.

As always, this issue is packed with great stories, insights, and voices from across our fencing community. There's something for everyone – whether you're here to celebrate our newest leaders, gain fresh coaching perspectives, or simply immerse yourself in the passion that makes fencing such a special sport.

Enjoy the read, and happy fencing!

Karim

PS: A special thanks to reader Matthew Chell. Following up on an article in the last issue, Matthew let us know that Béla – who represented the University of Cambridge at fencing and went on to be the club's President – was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 2011...before, as we had printed, Eric Lauga. Matthew added, "But I imagine Eric is the first to also medal in the National Championships – a combination I can't envisage being equalled."

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

karim.bashir@catchsport.com

WELCOME PAT AIYENURO

Rosie McNally



In October 2024, the BF Board announced Pat Aiyenuro as its new President, succeeding Hilary Philbin who stepped down after three terms to focus on her duties as a member of the COMEX of the European Fencing Confederation.

But how did Pat's journey to becoming BF's President begin?

Pat's love for sports began when she was a child but her parents encouraged her to prioritise education over her passion for athletics. "I was always quite sporty as a child but my parents were more academically focused, so I never really pursued sports seriously," she recalls. "When I had my children, I was determined that they would have the opportunity to explore different sports. I've always believed in the benefits of sport for both the body and mind."

Pat was first introduced into fencing when her son discovered his love for it. "He tried various sports, including archery and fencing, and he found that he really loved fencing," she explains. At the age of nine, her son Soji, joined Camden Fencing Club where Pat started supporting the club on the sidelines. "At the time, the club was relatively small with only about 14 members. I started as a parent volunteer, registering the kids for competitions and helping wherever I could. That was my entry route into fencing."

It wasn't long before Pat's role grew within the club. She saw a need for greater accessibility in fencing, a sport that is often perceived as exclusive due to the costs of equipment and training.

She helped secure a grant from Camden Sports Council, allowing the club to provide equipment and offer discounted rates. This initiative helped to open doors for many young athletes who may not have had the opportunity to try fencing otherwise.

Pat's passion for the sport grew as she became more involved. As the club flourished, she took on more and more responsibilities - from driving young athletes to competitions across the UK and Europe, to stepping into leadership roles. "I arranged for us to use a community play centre's minibus. I would drive the kids, coaches, and sometimes other parents to competitions all over the UK and even to Germany and France. Travel is another expense, so this helped make it more affordable for the families."

When Ronald Velden retired as the Chair of Camden Fencing Club, Pat took over the role. She made it her mission to break down barriers in fencing. "One of my main goals was increasing female participation. I worked hard to redress the gender balance and I'm proud to say that we're now at 50/50, especially among younger fencers."

Pat also supported initiatives to make fencing more inclusive, such as 'Muslim Girls Fence'. "We were one of the first clubs offering fencing to Muslim women, and I also focused on training more female coaches. At one point, we had three female coaches and we currently have two actively working with us." This hard work with community projects and making fencing more accessible was then recognised in 2017 when Pat was awarded a BEM for her services to sports.

Pat became a strong advocate for diversity within fencing. "I started noticing issues within the sport, particularly around diversity. Fencing wasn't always a level playing field - alongside financial barriers, my club had a number of minority fencers who sometimes faced discrimination in competitions abroad, so had another obstacle to face."

Determined to provide better support for young athletes, she trained as a Team Manager, ensuring that fencers from all

backgrounds had someone they could trust and rely on. "They didn't feel there was someone that they could go to. If you're trying to explain racism to people who haven't experienced it. Sometimes it can be embarrassing, or the person you're talking to may not have that empathy there. I decided I was going to train as a Team Manager so I could support athletes if anything like that happened again."

Pat soon found herself managing teams at international events, helping young fencers navigate the pressures of competition.

"I found I had a knack for managing and organising, and I enjoyed working with young athletes. I am young at heart. I have a lot of time and respect for any athlete because I know how much they give up and sacrifice. It's incredibly rewarding to see their progression."

In 2020, Pat joined the BF Board. "It happened quite organically. I started travelling more as a Team Manager and later became a Chef de Mission, managing teams at international competitions. In time, I built relationships with coaches and officials from other countries. It was a really good experience for me and I learned a lot from the Board. It brought me even deeper into the world of international relations, which I found I was quite good at."

One of her proudest moments was fostering a partnership between British and Italian Fencing. Her expertise in safeguarding and governance led to further opportunities, including her appointment to the Fair Play Council of the International Fencing Federation (FIE), an important step towards her long-term goal of shaping fencing on a global level.



Hilary Philbin and Pat Aiyenuro, Dubai 2022

Outside of fencing, Pat also works full-time as a research manager at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "My background is in tropical medicine, and my PhD was on the public perception of head lice – though I don't usually bring that up because it makes people cringe! More recently, I manage laboratory teams working on tropical diseases – mainly malaria."

When asked how she manages to balance this workload, Pat said, "I'm quite disciplined and organised in my day job and in fencing. I work nine to five during the week and I don't take work home with me. I go to Camden Fencing Club two to three nights per week. I also have monthly meetings as Chair of the club's Board of Trustees and I work closely with the BF Board. When there are international competitions, I usually travel over the weekend, so it doesn't interfere too much with my job."

"For major events, I take annual leave. I'm fortunate to have flexible working arrangements, so I can build up leave time. I'd say I take about 25–30 days of annual leave per year for fencing but I make sure to balance it so that I still have personal time. My children are grown up now, which helps!"

Now, as President of BF, Pat has ambitious goals for the future. "One main goal is to get more people from our federation onto international committees and to qualify more referees. We need to maintain and strengthen our international presence."

She also highlights the importance of increasing participation in fencing around the world. "We've been working hard



Pat was awarded a BEM for her services to sports

on good governance, and we are well known for that. So, continuing to solidify our governance standards is essential. I also want to focus on international collaborations, particularly with countries we haven't worked with much before. I'm keen to do more in Africa because we have a lot of knowledge and skills to share, and learning is a two-way street."

Pat is also keen to keep young people engaged in the sport. "We have a lot of dropouts, especially when people go to university or graduate from university. If we can raise the sport's standards and visibility, I believe funding will follow."

"I'm proud of the impact I've had on making fencing more inclusive. Whether it's improving gender balance, supporting minority athletes, or making international connections, I feel like I've helped shape a more welcoming and diverse fencing community."

"I'm also proud of the legacy my son and I built together. Fencing brought our family

closer and it opened so many opportunities for him – he even got a sports scholarship for university. Seeing the next generation of fencers come up and knowing I played a part in their journey is incredibly rewarding."

Pat emphasises that there are many paths into sport leadership. "I wasn't a fencer myself and people often assume you have to be an athlete to contribute. But you don't need to be a fencer to work in international relations or governance. Some people think you need to have been an Olympian to be in this role, but that's not true."

"I'm a volunteer. It's all been a volunteer role but I think it's the passion. I really am so passionate about the sport. I'd probably call myself a bit of a fencing geek because I like watching fencing as well. I enjoy watching all the weapons. It's a great sport."

"I did eventually try fencing as well. I fenced for about eight years. I thought, let me just try this and see how it is. And even won a couple of medals, which I'm quite proud to say."

"The fencing community is so warm and welcoming. I love the fencing family and truly love being a part of it."

It was sad to see Hilary's tenure end, but we wish her well representing Great Britain on the international stage. Pat has been working alongside Hilary for a number of years now. The baton has been passed into safe hands and we welcome Pat, her enthusiasm, passion, ambition, experience and unquestionable ability.



Photo: #BizziTeam

WELCOME SARA PANTULIANO

BF Board Appoints New Chair



In September 2024, following an extensive open recruitment process, the BF Board announced Sara Pantuliano as its new Chair, succeeding Mark Lyttle whose tenure ended following eight years of outstanding service.

New to many, Sara kindly gave The Sword an opportunity to find out more about her.

Tell us a bit about yourself...

My career has been in global affairs and cooperation. I've worked overseas for many years, including in Sudan and Tanzania, where I worked for the UN and the University of Dar es-Salaam. In 2006, I joined ODI Global, a global affairs think tank, where I've held six roles and I am now the CEO.

How did you come into the fencing world?

I'm a mum of two fencers. That's the other side of me. I've been the one offering water and snacks at the end of a piste for years. When my older son was younger, I found a Mini Musketeer club near us and I thought it sounded great. Fencing is a big sport in Italy. I'm Italian-born and at home, in my hometown, which is not very big, there are three fencing clubs. Lots of people fence, including a number of my friends. My main sport though was roller skating, followed by roller hockey, both of which I competed in at national level. Sport has always been important to me.

My son loved fencing and wanted to start fencing competitively. Then our life as fencing parents really started, which meant rushing back from work, getting there in time to drive him to clubs and competitions. I have been to competitions all over the UK and internationally. Just as I thought I was

done, my younger son started fencing too and the cycle began again! So, that's my link to fencing.

How did you come to apply for the role of Chair?

I've been on various boards and am told I chair well. When this role came up I thought, 'That could be interesting'. It's different from my work world but it's something I'm passionate about.

I have always loved the Muslim Girls Fence initiative. Seeing the vacancy, knowing about Muslim Girls Fence and believing in the social impact of sport, spiked my interest in the role.

Many of my colleagues think I'm completely insane because I have a lot on my plate already but I liked the idea of bringing my skills to something connected to my family.

I knew I could help with fundraising and expanding the organisation's social reach. While medal success matters, sport is about more than elite athletes. Sport is important for the community, for integration and for the wellbeing of people who often are marginalised. Sport can help people find their way.

When you found out you had got the role, how did you feel?

The first feeling was "how am I going to fit this in?" The only reason I manage is because my kids are at university in Italy, so I'm no longer a full-time mum. I was also



Sara with her sons - Luca and Mattia
Plastow



excited to learn more. It's been great. I've met the Board. I'm really excited about it all.

I feel strongly about the social impact side of fencing. I think we can do a lot to make fencing better known and more popular in the UK. And we have a lot of fantastic people on the Board of BF. We bring a varied range of skills. We are a strong national governing body, with a lot of dedicated people.

As we develop the new strategy, we will ensure that the volunteers and the members have their say and can play a part in delivering it. Hopefully, over the next four years of the new strategy cycle, we'll have a sport that continues to thrive, that is better recognised, that expands the number of members, can have a deeper social impact, and is no longer perceived as just an elite sport.

What does BF's future look like?

We need to have a stronger recognition of the sport and that will allow us to attract a lot more members and have a lot more people engage in fencing, feeling that they can come to the sport. It's a sport that helps deliver more social impact. I think we'll be doing more with Muslim Girls Fence, neurodiverse children and with Paralympic fencing. But overall the focus is to make sure that we have a sport that as many people and communities feel they can come to and that it is not just for the selected few.

What drives you?

I've always had a lot of energy. I thrive off other people, who have ambitious ideas, are positive in driving change and influencing positive change. That's what my career has been all about. I go to the gym a lot, six days a week. I do a lot of Thai boxing. So that helps pick my energy up. Ironically, I've never tried fencing though...

OLLIE LAM WATSON

The Ferris Bueller of Para Fencing

Karim Bashir

If Ferris Bueller had picked up a sword, he might have looked a lot like Ollie Lam Watson. The 1986 cult classic Ferris Bueller's Day Off follows a charming, irrepressible teen who refuses to let life's challenges slow him down. He takes the world on his own terms, always finding a way to turn adversity into an adventure. In much the same way, Ollie's journey from an architecture student in denial about his disability to a Paralympic medallist and advocate for change is a story of reinvention, resilience and an unbreakable spirit.

A Life in Motion

Born with venous malformation in his left leg – a tangle of abnormally formed veins – Ollie faced a condition that caused constant swelling, pressure and the risk of dangerous blood clots. Despite the pain and the disruption of waking up as often as 16 times a night, he resisted seeing himself as disabled. He wasn't a wheelchair user; he moved with crutches and refused to acknowledge the limitations others might impose on him.

He carried this mindset through six years of architecture school, during which he avoided doctors entirely. But by 24, the realities of his condition could no longer be ignored. He faced an impossible choice: a high-risk amputation with life-threatening complications or continuing to live in constant pain. It was time for a new chapter.

Finding Fencing – And a New Identity

Determined to redefine what being disabled meant, Ollie turned to sports. He started obstacle races in 2017 and



despite being the only participant using crutches, his doctor dismissed it as “not really a sport”. Refocusing, Ollie set his sights on something bigger. Searching for a Paralympic sport, he chanced across wheelchair fencing online. “That looks cool,” he thought. After calling every club in London, he finally found one that opened just for him to try. One session was all it took – he fell in love.

From that moment, he was on a mission. Not just to compete, but to win. He wanted to be the fastest athlete to go from novice to Paralympic qualifier, and he wasted no time. Within six months, he made his World Cup debut. Three months later, he won his first World Cup medal, a team bronze in Korea – despite suffering a concussion after falling in the shower and competing with three staples in his head!

By February 2020, he had secured a place on the World Class Programme as a funded athlete. Then COVID-19 hit. While others were sidelined, Ollie adapted, training with a mannequin at home and “smashing it daily.” Once restrictions were lifted, he joined the elite squad ‘bubble’ in Bath and earned his spot for Tokyo 2020.

Tokyo 2020: A Dream Realised

Joining the GBR squad was daunting. His teammates, Piers Gilliver and Dimitri Coutya, were established champions – the heroes he had studied on YouTube. But they welcomed him as an equal. “Yes, there was pressure,” he recalls, “but you couldn't ask for better teammates.” A French competitor put it best, “You're the number three they were looking for. Now, Great Britain is a force of nature.”

His Paralympic debut was everything he had hoped for. He anchored the team against Italy, and Great Britain secured historic victories over France, Italy, and Russia. In just three years, Ollie had gone from complete outsider to Paralympic medalist, winning team foil silver and team epee bronze.

As his mother watched on, she was in tears. Due to COVID restrictions, she couldn't be there in person, but her pride was unmistakable. Yet after the high of the Games, Ollie felt lost. He had achieved his dream – what now?

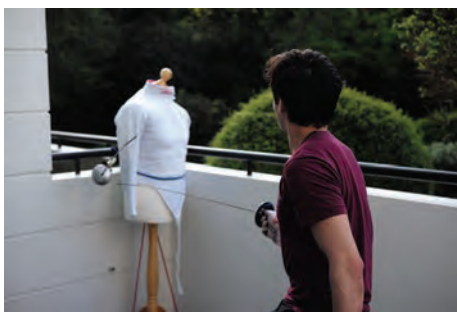
The Road to Paris – and Heartbreak

Training full-time in Bath, Ollie prepared for the Paris 2024 cycle. With Piers and Dimitri expected to qualify, Ollie had to fight for his place. When Piers suffered a concussion, Ollie stepped into the anchor role – a meteoric rise from rookie to team leader.

But just as everything seemed to be aligning, tragedy struck. In November 2022, while preparing for a World Cup in Hungary, Ollie received devastating news: his mother had suffered a catastrophic brain hemorrhage. As next of kin, he had to make life-altering medical decisions. Torn between staying with her or competing – potentially jeopardising his Paralympic qualification – he faced an agonising dilemma.

He knew how much the Paralympics meant to her. She had dreamed of watching him in Paris. So, he chose to compete. “Fencing in that state was hard. I hadn't eaten or slept





Looking Ahead

Ollie doesn't have a rigid plan for the future. He embraces the unknown, focusing on broader aspirations rather than fixed targets. He enjoys spending time with his "wonderful girlfriend" as they consider starting a family. And for now, he keeps pushing forward. What he's doing today keeps him on the pathway to LA 2028.

Ferris Bueller once said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." Ollie Lam Watson embodies that philosophy - never letting obstacles define him, always finding a way to turn challenges into opportunities. From a kid afraid to acknowledge his disability to a Paralympic medalist shaping the future of para sport, he's living proof that, with the right mindset, anything is possible.

in days." He flew home immediately after the individual tournament, arriving just an hour before she passed away. "I didn't make it to the hospital in time," he admits, "but I was comforted knowing she always called after World Cups to check I'd made it home safely. It was like she waited for me to be on the ground."

The grief was crushing, but he carried on, driven by the belief that she would want him to qualify. And he did. At Paris 2024, he once again claimed team foil silver and team epee bronze, cementing his place among the world's best.

Beyond the Medals

Despite his success, Ollie doesn't dwell on victories. There's no euphoria - just the next goal, the next training session. But his impact extends beyond the piste. His mother, an interior designer, instilled in him a love of creativity. "I see myself as a creator rather than an athlete," he says. That creative spirit fuels his social media presence, where he shares the unfiltered reality of life as a disabled athlete.

His mission? To break the glass ceiling. "I want to change the face of disability. I hate the current stereotype. You can be strong. You can be quick. You can be fashionable and stylish." Brands have taken notice - he now models professionally, using his platform to challenge perceptions.



With his drive, creativity, and ability to inspire, there's no telling what Ollie will achieve next. But one thing is certain - he's not just rewriting the story of his own life. He's helping to redefine what's possible for generations of disabled athletes to come.

Continue to be inspired by Ollie's story by following him on Instagram @oliverlamwatson



THE SWORDSEAT™

Innovative Design Hits The Piste

British Fencing, in collaboration with the University of Bath, introduced the SwordSeat™ at the end of 2024. The SwordSeat™ is the innovative, low-cost solution designed to make wheelchair fencing more accessible than ever before.

The SwordSeat™ is a gamechanger for clubs and individuals looking to introduce seated fencing. Only a handful of the UK's 400+ fencing clubs have wheelchair fencing rigs, which cost more than £5,000 and need to have wheelchairs attached, which can total up to £15,000. This leaves aspiring competitors facing significant barriers to trying the sport, so the SwordSeat™ has been created to offer a low-cost alternative.

Funded by the British Fencing Charity, the SwordSeat™ is the creation of Dr Ed Elias, a Senior Lecturer in the University's Department of Mechanical Engineering and his Integrated Design Engineering student Conor Roberts. **The SwordSeat™ is a flat-pack chair**, designed for quick assembly, made from six slot-together pieces. It is lightweight, easy to store and adaptable for both left and right-handed fencers.

The official launch of the SwordSeat™ took place on 8 January 2025 at the University of Bath's world class Sports Training Village. Representatives from different organisations were invited to the event, including UK Sport, ParalympicsGB, The Change Foundation, UK Sports Institute, Disability Sport Wales, World Abilitysport, Active Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & Swindon Sport, Ware Rotary Club, Roma Medical Group and the University of Bath.

Dr Elias, one of the project's creators, explained the motivation behind the SwordSeat™. "The SwordSeat™ is our response to the prohibitive cost and equipment requirements of wheelchair fencing. What's surprising to many is that wheelchair fencers don't need to move their chair when fencing - instead they are fixed into position."

"By removing these complicated elements and simplifying our design to



the essentials, we've created a seat that is cheap and easy to build but meets the needs of anyone hoping to start out in the sport."

The event was covered by BBC Points West, highlighting the impact of this game changing design.

BF CEO Georgina Usher welcomed attendees to the reception, and Participation Director Virginia Bailey and Inclusion Officer (Disability) Rick Rodgers reflected on the past two years of increasing disability inclusion in the sport. The first step was identifying the barriers in our community via the **2023 Level Access Survey**, which showed the prohibitive cost of equipment to be a major hindrance. Our wheelchair frame loan scheme aimed to remedy this problem, bringing frames to clubs around the UK.

Now, the SwordSeat™ further reduces the cost of grassroots wheelchair fencing.

Nat Lewis, BF Project Officer (Para) and Aimee Aronica, coach at Nottingham University, then gave a demonstration of the SwordSeat™ in action. Aimee, recipient of last year's BF Honours award for her voluntary work in the area, spoke about her involvement in coaching wheelchair fencing. She also noted the positive impact of BF's open seated fencing events and the wheelchair fencing GBR Pathway programme - neither of which require classification - meaning that more people are exposed to the sport and can see if it's right for them. She said, "I don't see wheelchair fencing as a sport just for disabled athletes. I see it as a sport for everybody."

Piers Gilliver MBE and Dimitri Coutya MBE - Paralympic Champions at Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024, respectively - shared their journeys from grassroots participation to elite international level. They said that, in addition to making equipment more accessible, one of the most important factors in increasing inclusivity was people's willingness to learn about wheelchair fencing.

To ensure safe and effective use, BF has launched free online SwordSeat™ training via the BF Learning Zone. This training covers essential setup, risk assessments, and practical guidance, ensuring that clubs and coaches feel confident integrating the SwordSeat™ into their sessions.

The SwordSeat™ must only be used under the supervision of a BF-registered coach with valid SwordSeat™ certification, ensuring best practice and safety for all participants.

British Fencing is committed to growing the sport and ensuring that fencing is open to everyone. With the SwordSeat™, clubs now have a cost-effective and practical way to introduce seated fencing without the financial strain of traditional equipment.

If you're a club looking to add seated fencing to your programme, detailed assembly instructions and further information on how to get involved are available on the British Fencing website.

Rick Rodgers, who initiated the project says, "The introduction of the SwordSeat™ is a significant milestone in British Fencing's ongoing mission to break down barriers to participation. By making wheelchair fencing more accessible, we are opening the doors to a new generation of fencers and expanding the opportunities for all to engage with this incredible sport."

For more information, visit our dedicated **SwordSeat™ webpages**.

For more information on wheelchair fencing, please visit our **Disability Inclusion Zone**.

HOW TO:

Become a Wheelchair Fencer

Rick Rodgers - Inclusion Officer (Disability)

Wheelchair fencing is a dynamic and rewarding sport that combines speed, skill, and strategy. Whether you're looking for a fun way to stay active or have aspirations to compete at the highest level, wheelchair fencing offers opportunities for everyone. And the best part? You don't need to be an elite athlete or have years of experience to get started.

So, what do you need to begin your journey in wheelchair fencing? Here's everything you need to know.

Finding a Club and Getting Started

The first step is to find a local fencing club that offers wheelchair fencing sessions. British Fencing maintains a list of inclusive clubs, which you can access via the [Club Finder](#) on our website.

Many clubs are well-equipped to introduce newcomers to the sport, providing beginner-friendly sessions and knowledgeable coaches who can guide you through the fundamentals. You'll start with the basics - how to hold your weapon, how to attack and defend and how to adapt techniques to suit wheelchair fencing.

Once you gain confidence, you can explore further training opportunities. British Fencing's **GBR Pathway Programme** (formerly known as ADP) offers **specialised training camps** where wheelchair fencers can develop their skills alongside others in an inclusive and supportive environment. These camps provide expert coaching and a fantastic way to meet fellow fencers who share your passion for the sport.

Equipment: What You Need

Like all fencing disciplines, wheelchair fencing requires specific gear. Fortunately, most clubs offering wheelchair fencing have equipment available for beginners to borrow while they're getting started. Here's what you'll need:

- **Protective Clothing:** This includes a fencing glove, mask, jacket, breeches, and an under-plastron (protective layer worn under the jacket).

- **Weapons and Body Wire:** You'll need a weapon (foil, epee, or sabre) and a body wire to connect your weapon to the scoring system.
- **Wheelchair and Frame:** Unlike everyday wheelchairs, a fencing wheelchair is open-sided, with a bar to hold for stability. These wheelchairs are secured to a frame to prevent movement during bouts.

British Fencing has helped many clubs acquire fencing-specific wheelchairs, making it easier for beginners to access the right equipment. However, if you want to invest in your own, **RMA Sport** offers an affordable entry-level chair. The traditional fencing frame and chair setup can be costly, but an innovative solution called the **SwordSeat™** (see p10) provides a more accessible and budget-friendly option. This system is easy to assemble and an excellent choice for those looking for a practical alternative that can be used to develop skills before getting competitive.



Do You Need to be Classified?

One of the biggest misconceptions about wheelchair fencing is that you need to have a specific type of disability or be classified to take part. In reality, anyone who struggles with footwork for any reason - whether due to injury, illness, or disability - can participate in grassroots wheelchair fencing in the UK.

More details on the **classification process** can be found on the British Fencing website.

Taking the Leap into Competition

Once you've built up your skills and confidence, you might want to test yourself



in competition. The UK has a growing number of events open to wheelchair fencers. Currently, British Fencing hosts **two national wheelchair fencing competitions each year**. In addition, Scotland and Wales each run one, bringing the total to four annual events. As the sport continues to grow, more local competitions are expected to emerge, providing even greater opportunities for fencers to test their skills.

Competitions open to all, regardless of classification, include:

- **The British Open**
- **The Welsh Open**
- **The Scottish Open**

For those who have undergone classification, additional competitions include:

- **The British Nationals**
- **International competitions** governed by World Abilitysport

Competing is a fantastic way to challenge yourself, meet other fencers, and experience the adrenaline of a real match. Whether you're fencing for fun or with the dream of one day reaching the Paralympics, there's a competition level for everyone.

Final Thoughts: Your Next Steps

So, what are you waiting for? If you're interested in giving wheelchair fencing a try, your first step is to **find a local club** and get in touch.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out - the wheelchair fencing community is ready to welcome you! See you on the piste!



MUSLIM GIRLS FENCE

The Ingredients for Success

Virginia Bailey - Participation Director

THE SWORD
Development



Muslim Girls Fence (MGF) started in an East London school in 2016 as a collaboration between British Fencing and Maslaha and is delivered in schools and community groups across England.



The project aims to facilitate spaces at a grassroots level for women and girls to express themselves through both physical and creative sessions. It centres the needs of Muslim Women to help address the deep-rooted inequalities in sport, meaning people who are ethnically and culturally diverse, are less likely to be physically active. Projects are open to girls of all ages and ethnicities, often delivered by women from the local community and the sessions challenge assumptions and narratives relating to their gender, racial, religious and other identities as well as providing opportunities to fence!

Ingredients for Success

DESIGNED WITH EACH COMMUNITY

Our approach of 'doing with' as opposed to 'doing to' communities means that we see the groups take ownership and shape it to practically do what they need it to do. This is similar to taking the approach of 'coaching the person in front of you', which ensures their needs are met and people come back week after week.



sessions. We aim to support the women to develop a range of skills to continue their projects over years to come. We would like to work alongside coaches from fencing clubs to support the women in developing their fencing knowledge further.



"This programme has been a lifeline for the women and girls we work with, many of whom have been inactive for most of their lives. MGF provides opportunities for a group of people that historically, aren't being catered for by anyone else." MGF Coach



WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

We engage with the relevant organisations to support the developments in each city.

For the long term success and sustainability of each project, we connect with local and national stakeholders who can support, promote and help develop the projects in each city. We welcome the opportunity to engage with fencing clubs who are keen to increase the diversity in their clubs and support opportunities for the women and girls who are looking to develop their fencing further.

DEVELOPING PEOPLE

We continually invest in local women and organisations to deliver and lead the

"I have found fencing to be accepting, not where I have to be accepted. I am free to be who I am. I enjoy being part of something powerful where my voice matters." 15yr old MGF fencer

Focus on Binni's Bladez

In 2019 a new Muslim Girls Fence project was established in Birmingham. As part of the project and alongside the fencing, a series of creative workshops with Muslim women and women of colour was delivered, exploring issues around identity, representation and misrepresentation of Muslim women in society. The result of these conversations was a photo series, created in collaboration with a local photographer, which involved a series of 'self-portraits' curated by the participants themselves.



To ensure the women were able to continue to fence on a regular and long term basis, as well as finding a home to display the exhibition, we worked with local partners across the city to find a suitable location and Ladywood Leisure Centre presented that opportunity. Fast forward five years and Binni's Bladez continues to provide opportunities for women from the local community to take part in fencing on a weekly basis. The exhibition has been housed in the main atrium of the leisure centre and the club is truly embedded in the centre's core values of providing for the local community.



"Binni's Bladez and fencing have become an important and integral part of my existence. I have been attending since the very first session and I am extremely proud of how the club has grown and evolved and delighted about how I have developed with it."

How can you get involved?

We would like to engage with clubs and coaches from across the country to get involved with Muslim Girls Fence.

Competition opportunities

BF would like to work with clubs to provide opportunities for women from MGF



spaces who would like to get involved in recreational fencing competitions. Lots of the women are keen to get into a competitive environment, fence other women and try the electric equipment!



Sparring and coaching support

BF has a number of brilliant coaches who are hugely experienced in community coaching and engaging women into sport. They are keen to develop their sword in hand skills and learn from existing coaches. It is also a great opportunity for coaches to



learn from the women who have a wealth of experience in working in community settings.

I've been fortunate enough to be involved with MGF since the beginning and have had the privilege of working alongside a number of highly experienced coaches and community leaders who are skilled and well practiced in creating welcoming, fun and safe environments for the women in their clubs. I really encourage fencing coaches and clubs to get in touch to see how they can get involved and use it as an opportunity not only to increase the number of women involved in their club, but also to learn from the great work going on in their local communities. We know that there is a huge amount of knowledge in our coaching community and we would like to support coaches in passing this on to MGF coaches.

If you are interested then please email me, virginia.bailey@britishfencing.com.



WE ARE FORGING FUTURES

THE STORY SO FAR

Heidi Januszewski - Content Coordinator



Since its launch in 2022, We Are Forging Futures has gone from strength to strength. With 49 current partners and exceptional feedback from participants and staff alike, BF's educational brand has had a brilliant impact on schools across the UK and beyond.

We Are Forging Futures was born from the previous 'British Fencing Primary School Resource Pack' (PSRP), a researched and field-tested personal development programme designed to bring fencing-based activities to schools. It then became its own brand, stepping away from the colours associated with the governance-based National Governing Body of BF. Instead, its pastel colours and playful swoosh patterns were designed to appeal to its younger primary and secondary school audience.

The brand retains the same premise of the old PSRP, equipping teachers with the knowledge, support and training to deliver 36 Ofsted-aligned lesson plans. Partners attend an in-depth one-day training process that provides underpinning insight and knowledge into how to use games and swordplay fun to introduce fencing to children. We Are Forging Futures emphasises personal development, using fencing as a means of building children's resilience and self-efficacy.

We Are Forging Futures is designed to appeal to all children, whether or not they consider themselves as 'sporty'.

Finding a sport that suits us can often be difficult, especially for young people going through school. Feeling awkward and embarrassed, being forced to go outside in

freezing weather and always being picked last for a team are all common experiences for those who don't enjoy typical sports. Yet physical activity is vital to keeping us healthy, both physically and mentally.

That's where fencing comes in. Because not many young people will have tried it before, everyone starts on the same page. It's also a creative sport, appealing to those interested in video games, books, films, anime and other alternative media. You pick up a sword, put your mask on and imagine yourself as a completely different character.



YST Conference in Telford

Another appeal of fencing is its ability to engage with neurodiverse participants. Over the years, we have received feedback about the positive impact of fencing for autistic children, helping them to reduce social isolation. We Are Forging Futures therefore aims to reach special schools as part of its mission to get young people active. Recently, Trinity Fields School & Resource Centre in Caerphilly joined the first special school in Wales to join our partner network.

We Are Forging Futures has been featured in various initiatives and campaigns, aiming to increase the exposure of fencing to as many schools and activity centres as possible.

In March 2023, We Are Forging Futures took part as an exhibitor at the Youth Sport Trust (YST) Conference in Telford. The event was centred around the 'power of PE, sport and play to improve mental health', in response to NHS findings that the number of children in England needing treatment for serious

mental health problems has risen by 39% in a year.

We returned to the event in the following year, collaborating with Inspiring Learning. The event focused on the attainment gap, referring to the differences in physical activity levels depending on economic disadvantage, ethnicity, disability or gender.

Activity networks were encouraged to think about how 'play can emerge as powerful catalysts for change, creating an event at the forefront of educational transformation'.

In the case of We Are Forging Futures, 95% of schools partnered with us are state funded by the Department for Education. Only 5% are private independent schools, evidencing our focus on tackling inequalities and challenging the stigma of fencing being elitist and for the upper class.

What's more, by the end of 2024, 36% of the school pupils partnered with us were in the most Deprived Places, and 33% in the Poor Health and Disability domain. By partnering with schools in these areas, we can encourage as many pupils to get active, who otherwise wouldn't have had access to fencing.

In September 2023, BF, Inspiring Learning and the International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) convened in Doncaster for an initial meeting to discuss an exciting joint project.

Noting the years of qualitative evidence and observations, it was agreed that



BF's Harry Brown



Demonstration of our newly-launched
SwordSeat™

fencing, particularly when delivered as part of a formal learning programme, has a unique ability to introduce key personal development skills rooted in resilience. This initiated a process of creating a research project proposal through the expertise of Professor John Allan, a respected academic in the field of resilience. The aim of the project is to begin to formally quantify fencing's impact as a tool to introduce and develop resilience and physical literacy.

Defined by the IPLA, physical literacy is 'the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life'.

To celebrate the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris, We Are Forging Futures teamed up with Team GB and ParalympicsGB for their 'Path To Paris' campaign in May 2024. From the birthplace of the Olympic Games in Athens, children took part in a virtual journey in a team bus, completing fun activities on the way. Each activity enabled students to power their virtual bus with the goal of reaching Paris.

The aim of the Path to Paris initiative resonated strongly with We Are Forging Futures, motivating children to take part in physical activity while developing confidence and resilience.

We Are Forging Futures was invited to the YST School Sport & Activity Sector Partnership Summit, held at the King Power Stadium in October 2024. The event brought together representatives from different organisations to share with and learn from each other at the beginning of the academic year.

Officials from Government Departments and Youth Board representatives were also invited to share their insights. The event included sector updates from

Youth Sport Trust, Sport England and the Department for Education. We heard from Matthew Hopkinson, Deputy Director of the Life Skills Division at the Department of Education; and Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister for School Standard.

Harry Brown, BF Head of Licensing and member of the Physical Literacy action group, spoke about the contribution of We Are Forging Futures. "By allowing young people to harness the creativity of swordplay, we can help them to develop a positive relationship with movement. Bolstered by the personal development themes instilled in our programmes, We Are Forging Futures helps them to begin a fulfilling journey of confidence and self-empowerment."

Furthering the themes discussed during the summit, We Are Forging Futures was then featured in YST's Physical Literacy toolkit, helping organisations and individuals to embed the concept into workforce and staff training.

The toolkit contains three chapters: 'Ignite: Why it matters? - connecting networks with their own relationship with physical activity'; 'United: What can we do differently, together?' - developing a consistency of understanding about physical literacy; and 'Excite: How to build momentum, create ripples' - empowering examples of positive impact.

Physical literacy is central to the work that we do at We Are Forging Futures, using fencing to appeal to everyone - regardless of whether they enjoy physical activity - and encouraging them to get active.

As part of BF's partnership with PGL, the leading provider of introductory fencing experiences in the UK, we delivered a national two-day refresher event for their instructors.

The partnership began in 2016 and has grown each year. Over 3,000 PGL fencing instructors have been trained since 2018,



Resilience. Self-efficacy. Confidence.

and almost 100,000 people were introduced to fencing in 2024 alone. The training was delivered by BF's Fencing Development Team, introduced in October last year in order to support the growth of fencing across the country. This included both the practical elements of coaching and an orientation of We Are Forging Futures.

We also discussed accessibility and gave a demonstration of our newly-launched SwordSeat™, a wooden seated fencing frame that can either be bought or assembled. The SwordSeat™ is designed to significantly reduce the cost of wheelchair fencing in order to make it accessible to a wider range of people.

Seated fencing already features as part of our training for new We Are Forging Futures partners, and we hope to bring in SwordSeat™ as a way to improve the experience for students who cannot take part in standing fencing.

With Crown Hills Community College recently renewing their partnership with BF, the future of our work in education is bright. Having achieved substantial success in primary and secondary schools, we are constantly expanding our horizons. Currently, over 25,000 pupils are engaged in fencing across our partner schools, and this participation is only increasing.

As well as building on our existing partner network, the goal of We Are Forging Futures is to connect with the leisure market, allowing more young people to get involved in the world of fencing.

To find out more please email forgingfutures@britishfencing.com.

A PARENT'S MANUAL

The Fencing Competition Survival Guide

By Igor Chirashnya – Academy of Fencing Masters (USA)

Igor at AFM has been a regular contributor to The Sword now for two years and we couldn't resist publishing a recent article he authored specifically for parents who attend competitions with their children. Whilst written for an American audience, this article will surely ring true for many of our readers.

Parents have a huge vested interest in their children's success. After all, this is most parents' life mission – to prepare children for life and help them become successful. We try hard in every possible aspect of life – from studies to extracurricular activities, social circles, exposure, vacations, you name it. Sport is particularly one such aspect. In school sports, we rely a lot on school staff and coaches to guide our children, but once it comes to private club sports, such as fencing, a lot of support falls on parents' shoulders. Fencing is quite a complicated sport that requires specialized knowledge and understanding, and parents often try their hardest to help their children navigate this journey.

While the “routine” aspects of supporting a young athlete might feel familiar – after all, getting your child to regular training sessions isn't that different whether

it's fencing or taekwondo – competition support is where each sport reveals its unique challenges. And fencing, with its intricate rules, equipment requirements, and tournament formats, demands a special kind of parental support system that goes far beyond just showing up and cheering.



Let me share with you what I've learned about being that support system your young fencer needs during competitions. Trust me, it's more than just driving them to the venue (though that's important too, and don't get me started on those early morning tournament drives when even the sun hasn't decided whether it wants to wake up).

The Pre-Competition Marathon

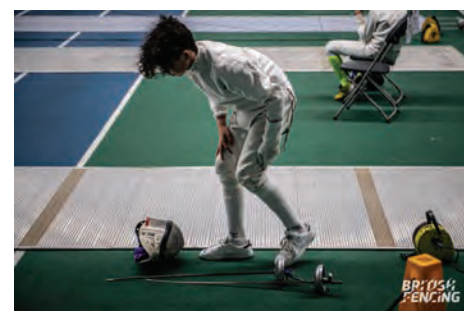
It starts long before the actual competition day. Remember when you thought being a parent meant just loving your child and making sure they eat their vegetables? Well, welcome to the world of fencing parents, where your job description now includes being a personal assistant, equipment manager, and more often than not even an amateur sports psychologist.

First, there's the registration process. You'd think in our digital age, this would be straightforward, right? But between memberships, tournament registrations, and those occasional last-minute email updates from organizers (which, by the way, always seem to arrive when you're in the middle of something important), you need to develop a system. I've learned to keep a dedicated folder in my email just for fencing-related communications. And yes, I check it religiously the week before

any competition. Because nothing's worse than arriving at the venue only to discover there was a schedule change you missed, or notifications about food options, parking situation or a myriad of other things you weren't aware of but must know in advance.

Then there's the equipment preparation. If you're new to this, let me tell you – creating a checklist isn't just helpful, it's essential for survival. I'm not exaggerating when I say that forgetting a single piece of equipment can turn your competition day into a very expensive shopping spree at the vendor booths (if you're lucky enough to have vendors at the tournament). Just recently I traveled with my son to a World Cup and when we were in the venue we found that he forgot to pack his fencing shoes. Trust me, there's nothing quite like the feeling of reaching the venue after two days of travel only to discover the fencing shoes were missing. But to replace the shoes with any athletic sneakers would work in an emergency. Think about reaching the venue after a two-hour drive and find out your child's breeches are still hanging on the drying rack at home and there is no vendor. You can't substitute them with anything generic like you can do with sports shoes.

Here's something I've learned out of the necessity of packing four kids to competitions: help your child develop the habit of checking their equipment the night before. Don't just do it for them – guide them through the process. Make it a ritual. Weapons? Check. Body wires? Check. Mask? Check. Clean uniform? Check. Spare everything? Double-check. And while you're at it, make sure all the necessary





documents are easily accessible on your or their phone – membership card or any specific tournament requirements. Actually I recommend you keep their membership card on both phones – you never know when and where you'll need it. I also recommend downloading the most current version of the card, just in case. You can either mark them as favorites on your phone or even keep these in a separate photo album titled "Fencing Docs" because fumbling through your phone's entire photo library while standing in the registration line might be a bit stressful.

The Competition Day

Competition day is where the real fun begins. Timing is everything – you need to know the check-in time, when weapon check opens, and factor in traffic patterns to the venue if you drive. Add some extra time to whatever Google or Apple Maps say, just in case.

Another important aspect – if you travel and stay in a hotel, check the time for breakfast. Sometimes they open too late on weekends, often at 7am, and this is the time when you already need to be in the venue. If that is the case, check what other options you have and preferably do it a night before. Oftentimes a nearby Starbucks opens early in the morning and while their breakfast is not as good as your hotel's eggs and bacon, their sandwiches are still a good alternative for a breakfast (here I must admit – unlike myself, my kids would prefer Starbucks sandwiches any time over any hotel breakfast. Go figure these modern kids).

Once at the venue, your role transforms into something between a logistics manager and a silent supporter. If it's a regional or national event with pre-competition equipment check, it's better for you to stand in the line for the check, while your fencer warms up. Sometimes you will be hunting and then guarding chairs to sit on during the pools, sometimes you will

be running to bring ice, or fix a weapon, or fill a water bottle, or fetch paper towels from the nearby restroom to wipe spilled coffee, or trying to ensure your fencer stays hydrated and fed – there are plenty of helpful ways to make yourself busy and contribute to the wellbeing of your child.



Speaking of food – don't assume your child will feel hungry during competition. The adrenaline does funny things to their appetite and I've seen too many fencers crash mid-way through DEs simply because they "didn't feel like eating" between pools. I learned to always pack easily digestible snacks – bananas, granola bars, maybe some nuts. When I don't, I try to immediately spot these coveted venue stores or vending machines at these convention centers, where a small pack costs as much as a good Sirloin steak in a Michelin-star restaurant. And yeah, don't forget to occasionally remind them to take a few bites between bouts, although I'm certain that for the price of a raisin and half a nut you just paid, you'll make sure your child finishes the whole thing.

About that repair kit – treat it like your competition day survival kit. Basic screwdrivers, spare tips, screws, springs, and white tape are absolute must-haves. Equipment emergencies have an uncanny ability to happen at the worst possible moments, and a perfectly working and compliant piece of your fencer's gear becomes useless the very next bout. Even if you don't know how to fix a weapon



yourself, (though trust me, you'll learn more about weapon repair than you ever wanted,) having these tools ready can be a lifesaver when your child needs help from a coach or a more experienced parent. If you are an epee parent, you'll see your share of fallen screws. The best would be to teach your kid to do all the necessary repairs but I guess I would need a whole another blog, or maybe even a whole series of blog posts on how to achieve this. I will be fantasizing in these blogs as I personally haven't succeeded yet. And just in case, keep enough one dollar bills to tip the armorers in the venue, because sooner or later you'll know all of them.



Video recording has become another essential parental skill, though I use the word "skill" loosely in my case. Here's what I've learned: overdoing videos is not good. You don't need to record all the bouts of your child. I know it's tempting to, but there is no point in that. You might want to do it from time to time, and for some 'interesting' bouts and for specific purposes. For example, when your child fences a particularly challenging opponent and you want your coach to review it. If your child is such a responsible athlete that they review their own bouts, congratulations! If, however, your child is like these poor 99.99% of kids that will never look at their own videos with an attempt to analyze their mistakes, unless threatened with grounding for a week, then save yourself a space on your phone memory and just enjoy their bout.

Click here to read the rest of this fascinating article including Igor's take on the "Emotional Support Challenge".

INTERNATIONAL COACHING COURSE

A Review of the FIE Intensive Foil Course

Simon Trevithick from Harrogate Fencing Club recently attended the FIE's intensive foil coaching course in Budapest, Hungary. Here, he shares his experience and insights on the course's value.

A Look Inside the FIE Coaching Course

The FIE course has been running for almost twenty years in different formats. Until 2000, it was a three-month program for 24 invited international coaches. After a Covid-related pause, the course was restructured into individual weapon-specific sessions. Now, eight selected coaches per discipline attend separate courses throughout the year: sabre at the beginning, epee in the middle, and foil from late July to late October.

The foil course included eight coaches with varied levels of experience. Among them were national coaches from Iran, Mongolia, Brazil, and Nepal, as well as high-level competitive fencers from Romania and Hungary.

The course was led by **Zoltán Bernát**, a Hungarian fencing master with an impressive track record - he's coached at four Olympics and has led fencers to success at the World and European Championships. If there was anything worth knowing about foil, he knew it.

Engaging, Technical Coaching

The coaching was excellent - highly engaging and deeply technical. The Hungarian system emphasised that **technique drives speed** - the better your technique, the faster you move on the piste.

While the course was primarily conducted in 'Hunglish,' language barriers weren't a major issue. The demonstrations were so clear that actions often spoke louder than words. In fact, some sessions flowed better in Hungarian.

The training took place in a small salle behind a Hungarian junior school, where Coach Bernát runs his **TUS fencing club**.

This setting allowed us to work directly with junior fencers in the evenings, applying what we had learned during the day.

Building the Private Lesson

The core focus of the course was delivering a **structured private lesson** - an essential skill for any coach. We started with a beginner's **30-point lesson plan**, which remained the foundation throughout the course. As we progressed, we adapted and



extended the plan for cadets, juniors, and senior fencers.

We explored how the same action requires subtle adjustments depending on the fencer's level. The course also addressed how the physical differences between male and female fencers influence technique.

The first three weeks emphasised **warm-ups, stretching, and fencing-based games**, following a structured system of rhythm and movement patterns. We covered individual and group warm-ups but didn't



focus on isolated footwork until the last three weeks.

By **week three**, we picked up weapons and began hitting lunging pads. We spent hours refining hand positions, distance control, and action signalling - crucial skills for effectively communicating with fencers in short private lessons.

For weeks three to five, our mornings consisted of warm-ups and stretching drills, while afternoons focused on lesson development. Some days, we would spend an entire session breaking down a single action, analysing every detail.

Putting It All Together: Training Camp Experience

Everything came together in **week six**, when we attended a **summer camp in Esztergom**, on the Slovakian border. We coached TUS Club's cadet fencers, applying everything we had learned. Mornings were spent leading warm-ups and games - each session assessed - while afternoons were dedicated to one-on-one lessons. The fencers ranged from complete beginners to highly skilled cadets, making it the perfect testing ground.





Returning from the camp, we moved on to **junior-level coaching**, refining techniques to meet the demands of higher-level fencers. The same lesson plan remained, but with added complexity and layers of action.

Exam Preparation and Final Assessment

Coach Bernát used all the course participants in demonstrations, ensuring we understood coaching from multiple perspectives. In the final weeks, we refined our exam lesson plans, preparing to present a **20-minute lesson** before a panel of experts, including Bernát and two FIE Masters specializing in epee and sabre.

Beyond coursework, we supported Coach Bernát at **two ranking competitions**, where we observed, assisted, and reviewed bouts back at the club. Those who wanted to spar could do so outside course hours, with open invitations to clubs across Budapest. **Honvéd**, with its stunning salle in a converted church, became a favourite.

Beyond the Salle: University Study and Budapest Life

Alongside practical training, we completed **60 hours of study** at the **Hungarian University of Sports Science (HUSS)**. Topics included physiology, biomechanics, pedagogy, sports psychology, and training theory - some subjects were highly applicable, while others were more theoretical.



- The **sports psychology** and **training theory** modules were particularly useful, providing insights that could be immediately applied to club coaching.
- The **pedagogy** and **biomechanics** sections offered valuable knowledge but would require specialist expertise to implement fully.



- Each subject ended with an exam, and university study contributed **25% of our final grade**.

Outside course hours, there was plenty of time to **explore Budapest**. Coach Bernát and the FIE ensured we were well looked after. Our **full-board accommodation** was just a five-minute walk from Heroes' Square and the city's parks, spas, and music bars. The salle was a 15-minute walk away, and the FIE even contributed to flight costs.



Final Thoughts: Is This Course for You?

The FIE foil coaching course is a fantastic opportunity, but who would benefit most from it?

- **Aspiring international coaches:** If you're a competitive fencer transitioning into coaching, this course is an excellent stepping stone.
- **BFA/BAF Level 2 coaches:** The technical depth and intensity complements and goes deeper into the elements covered in UK Level 2 courses.
- **Level 3+ coaches:** While the last three weeks may offer new insights, the earlier part of the course might not add much beyond what you already know.

And finally - the cherry soup... but that's a story for another time!



WORKFORCE UPDATE

Introducing the Coaching & Workforce Team

Chris Turner - Coaching & Workforce Development Manager

One thing we can all agree on is that we want participants in fencing to have a meaningful and productive experience. Regardless of the context, whether it be in schools, picking up a sword for the first time, on the GBR performance pathway or competing at the BYCs, the experience is what keeps fencers coming back to the sport. So often it is the workforce that play such a crucial role in driving this. The Coaching and Workforce Team working across BF is here to grow, support and serve the individuals creating the experiences. So, who are we?

Dusty Miller - Head of Performance Coaching & Coach Development

Dusty Miller joined BF in 2021 as Head of People and Culture and is now BF's Head of Performance Coaching & Coach Development. Dusty joined BF from a background in the Royal Navy and has experience in Club Development, Performance Support and Leadership. He served in the Royal Navy for 27 years in a variety of environments. From serving in the Submarine Service to operational environments including the Adriatic, Persian Gulf and North Africa his role was to ensure that human performance and connectedness was at the heart of operational activities.

Upon leaving the Royal Navy he joined the Rugby Football Union Community Department and held a number of roles including Club Development in Oxfordshire and coordinating training for coaches, match officials and volunteers primarily in the South West but also supporting national programmes such as the



Dusty

Leadership Academy and Level 3 & 4 Coach development programmes. Alongside his role at BF, he works as a Performance Support Mentor at the English Institute of Sport.

Chris Turner - Coaching & Workforce Development Manager

Chris joined BF in August 2024 from the world of table tennis, working for Table Tennis England where he served in several capacities, from talent development to leading on their national youth participation programme.



Lorraine

Lorraine Rose - Workforce Development Officer

Lorraine made a career change, joining BF in 2022, as she came to us from a science background where she has over 30 years of experience as a molecular biologist at Edinburgh University.

Lorraine was already familiar to many in the BF community as she has been a volunteer in fencing for over 20 years, taking on many roles including events volunteer, coach, Team Manager and Welfare Officer.

Introducing the Fencing Development Team

To help support the growth of fencing and connect clubs and coaches to local opportunities, we have introduced a Fencing Development Team (FDT). By delivering training courses such as Core Coach, the FDT will support the growth of BF's programmes and partnerships.

The team has involved a slight name change from coach developer to fencing developer to more accurately reflect the nature of the role. BF's vision is to develop a strong, successful and sustainable fencing community. Coaching forms one aspect, albeit a very large and important piece of a collaborative fencing community. As the team evolves, fencing developers will support and collaborate with the wider workforce that inspire people to start, stay and succeed in fencing.

The essence of the FDT is to support and develop people. The Coaching & Workforce Team will be working hand in hand with the FDT to support this vital piece of work.

Existing coach developers were invited initially to join the team, of which 21 took up the offer. In addition, a recruitment drive for new developers was undertaken, resulting in eight participants attending a training weekend in January. The weekend was led by experienced developers Neil Brown and Ev Van Gemenen, who demonstrated how to deliver courses and provide feedback to support the growth of individuals. Participants practised a range of tools and frameworks to help their journey of developing others.

Neil Bromley, who participated on the course, said, "Brilliant course. I arrived with a few nerves and have left feeling inspired and enabled to become a fencing developer."

Steph McMenemy, another participant, said, "I found the weekend to be inspirational and absolutely loved it."



Chris

The FDT brings a wealth of varying experiences and this will reflect the courses that various members will deliver.

One of the aims of the FDT is to have a good geographical spread of developers.

For more information on the Fencing Development Team, please contact Chris Turner at chris.turner@britishfencing.com.

Course Calendar

To support clubs and coaches to plan their coaching development, British Fencing will be publishing an annual calendar of courses. We hope this will allow plenty of time for courses to be promoted locally. Although finer details are yet to be ironed out, here are the course dates:

ITCF	
Date	Location
10th & 11th May 2025	East Midlands and Cardiff
7th & 8th June 2025	North East
w/c 21st July 2025	Online
30th - 31st August 2025	South West
11th - 12th October 2025	North West and South West
6th & 7th December 2025	South
31st January & 1st February 2026	Eastern
28th February & 1st March 2026	South East; North East and West Midlands
Coaching Fencing Level 2	
10th, 11th, 17th, & 18th May 2025	West Midlands (Foil & Epee) London (Sabre)
22nd - 25th July 2025	Stratford upon Avon (All Weapons)
29th, 30th November, 6th, 7th December 2025	Southern (All Weapons)
14th, 15th, 28th, 29th March 2026	Eastern (All Weapons)
Weapon Specific Level 3	
21st - 25th July 2025	Stratford upon Avon
27th - 31st October 2025	TBC
Sword in Hand CPD	
31st May 2025	Various Locations Across the Country
2nd August 2025	
15th November 2025	
21st February 2026	

Want a bespoke course for your club / region?

Whilst we have tried to provide a geographical spread of courses, we are also able to work with your club or region to deliver a bespoke Introduction To Coaching Fencing or Coaching Fencing Level 2 qualification. Clubs that have successfully done this and grown their local workforce are Wingerworth and Harrogate Fencing Clubs.

For more information on courses please email development@britishfencing.com.



BF staff and coaches delivered training to eight participants



BF staff and coaches delivered training to eight participants

Sword in Hand CPD

The Sword in Hand CPD days have been trialled throughout 2024 by the Coaching & Workforce Team. The aim is for coaches to come together to share and discuss coaching. This allows coaches to discuss the things that really matter to them and the environment and/or weapon in which they operate. All coaches have varying experiences and this is the opportunity to tap into and contribute to those experiences.



Coaches who have attended have spoken about how beneficial the days have been to network with other coaches and to give and receive lessons along with feedback. The plan this year is to have a facilitator from our Fencing Development Team attend. It's important to understand that the developer won't be there to give a workshop, but to facilitate the discussion amongst coaches as well as share their own experiences.

BRITISH FENCING COMMUNITY AWARDS 2023-2024

In February 2025, winners of the British Fencing Community Awards 2023-24 were announced.

The annual British Fencing Community Awards recognise the hard work and commitment of our clubs, coaches, fencers, and volunteers and their contribution to fencing. Due to it being an Olympic and Paralympic year, this awards period covered the 1st September 2023 to the 7th September 2024.

The awards took place virtually, with nominations and announcements taking place online.

An independent panel selected the shortlisted nominees and winners. The panel was made up of Chris Porter (UK Coaching), Ryan Grewcock (Archery GB) and Ben Quilter (ParalympicsGB).

Each announcement is supported by an excerpt from their nomination.

Results of the 2023-2024 Awards

Performance Athlete of the Year

Winner: Dimitri Coutya

"Dimitri has won over fifty international medals since first fencing internationally at the age of 13. In the last year, he has dominated the international competitions in the category B classification. He has won medals at every international competition in the last year and has finished the year world ranked number one in both epee



Performance Athlete of the Year - Dimitri Coutya, Photo: ParalympicsGB & World Ability Sport

and foil, and number five in sabre. Dimitri has achieved gold medals in foil and epee at the Paris 2024 Paralympics. Dimitri is thoroughly professional in everything he does. Although the events have sometimes occurred outside his training schedule, he still attends the domestic wheelchair fencing competitions so that he can meet and give advice to the club fencers and the junior international fencers. Dimitri is always prepared to give his time to help other fencers."

Young Athlete of the Year (U20)

Winner: David Sosnov



Young Athlete of the Year (U20) - David Sosnov - Photo: #BizziTeam

"David came second in the Udine Junior World Cup in January, and second in the Saudi Arabia Junior World Championships in April 2024. His World Junior ranking was number one at the end of the last U20 season. He took bronze in the Junior World Cup in Bangkok this year. He's regularly made the L64s and often has the best GBR result. David achieved top 16 at the European Championships 2024 in Basel and team top eight. David assists young fencers with development at camps and regularly coaches at ZFW Fencing Club. He has a maturity beyond his years and inspires young fencers to work hard through his approachability and down to earth attitude. He coached at a fencing camp in Taiwan and was a celebrity to children from all over Asia/Southeast Asia. He also attended the Bayani Fencing Awards in the Philippines and is always happy to take selfies with

young fencers in the Philippines when he is there visiting family."

GBR Coach of the Year

Winners: Alex Bela and Glen Golding



GBR Coach of the Year - Alex Bela



GBR Coach of the Year - Glen Golding

"Alex's coaching philosophy epitomises a player-centred approach. Throughout the 22/23 season, his commitment to individualised athlete development and innovative coaching practices has reshaped the landscape of sabre fencing at our academy. Alex's coaching philosophy is anchored in the belief that each athlete is unique, possessing distinct strengths, weaknesses and aspirations. His player-centred approach goes beyond traditional coaching methods, tailoring training programmes to cater to the individual needs of every fencer."

"Glen was the lead coach for the wheelchair fencing ParalympicsGB team which achieved two individual golds, two individual silvers, one team silver, and one team bronze at the Paris 2024 Paralympics. He has devoted himself tirelessly to fully prepare athletes for the competition and help support them to achieve all the medals they have collected. Completely selfless devotion off and on the piste."

Community Coach of the Year

Winner: Paul Davis



Community Coach of the Year – Paul Davis

“Paul Davis has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to growing the sport of fencing within his local area, effectively serving the needs of the wider community. His multifaceted approach not only widens access to fencing, but also fosters a sense of inclusivity and community engagement that is vital for the sport’s growth. Paul Davis exemplifies best practices within the fencing coaching community through his profound impact on his students and peers alike. A true role model, Paul embodies the principles of accountability, gratitude and discipline, shaping not only skilled fencers but also resilient individuals equipped with invaluable life skills.”

Outstanding Contribution by a Volunteer

Winner: Thomas Nipress

“Thomas Nipress is the heart and soul of the very successful Crusaders Sword Club in Hull. Despite having to travel an hour each way when there are plenty of clubs closer to home, he still puts in the extra effort each week to ensure Hull is a vibrant and active club. Outside of club time, he dedicates hours of his life to helping manage the club accounts and ensuring



Outstanding Contribution by a Volunteer – Thomas Nipress

our practices are up to BF standards. He also gives up his weekends to ensure junior members are supported at tournaments. All voluntarily.”

Outstanding Contribution by a Referee

Winner: Christopher Farren



Outstanding Contribution by a Referee – Christopher Farren

“Chris continues to be Head of the Referee Commission for World Abilitysport and in this role is always advocating for more opportunities for both the development and growth of para fencing, from an athlete’s perspective and for referees. Chris is a well-respected referee both in the standing and para space and officiates at both an international and domestic level, always demonstrating best practice at any level of competition. Chris is always offering his support to the referee community, especially to those new in the para space, going above and beyond to increase the numbers of top-quality referees involved in the sport.”

Club of the Year

Winner: Paul Davis Fencing Academy

“Paul Davis Fencing Academy is a shining example of commitment to inclusivity, demonstrating a profound dedication to providing opportunities for all individuals to engage in the sport of fencing within the local community. The Academy’s inclusive ethos is embedded in its programming, outreach initiatives, and community



Club of the Year – Paul Davis Fencing Academy

partnerships, ensuring that fencing is accessible to everyone, regardless of age, ability, or background. Paul Davis Fencing Academy demonstrates an exceptional commitment to supporting its athletes in every conceivable way to help them achieve their best results. The Academy understands that success in fencing is not solely dependent on physical skill, but also requires comprehensive support across various dimensions, including financial resources, coaching excellence, and well-rounded athlete welfare.”

Viveca Abrahams Memorial

Winner: Swindon Fencing Club



Swindon fencing Club

Viveca Abrahams Memorial – Swindon Fencing Club

“Our Discover Fencing Programme provides a unique experience for children and young people who would otherwise never access fencing. Since this programme started four years ago (excluding COVID-19), 4,793 children from schools in Swindon, Gloucester and the area in between have completed our course, all attaining their British Fencing Foil Grade 1 award. BF Coaches Shaun Garley and Neil Bromley are two of the strongest advocates of the BF Achievement Award system, purchasing the largest number of awards from BF – a number that continues to grow as more children participate and enjoy our sport. By mid-2025, over 5,000 children will have participated in this uniquely successful programme, and this is only the beginning. Children learn the basics of swordplay during school time, whilst reinforcing the national curriculum learning about the benefits of a healthy life.”

Thank you to our independent panel members.

Congratulations to all the winners and shortlisted nominees.

BRIAN SPEIGHT, BEM

ESPADA FENCING CLUB PRESIDENT HONoured

Espada Fencing Club President and former British Fencing Board Director Brian Speight has been recognised in the 2024 New Year's Honours list with a British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to fencing. He spoke to BF in January 2025, reflecting on his journey in the sport.

What is your reason for fencing?

I was always attracted to it as a sport. As a young boy, I used to watch films like *The Three Musketeers* and pirate films, in which fencing or sword fighting was going on, and it always caught my imagination. I thought one day I'd like to do that. I used to get bamboo canes from the garden when my mother and father weren't looking. I would get a tin lid, make a hole in the middle, push the cane through the tin and you've got a sword.

Then when I was given the opportunity for some lessons, I took it. The rest is history.

What does fencing mean to you?

I liked fencing because I liked the excitement of it, the challenge, and the physical movement. I also liked the styling, the choreography of fencers dancing to each other's tune, the choreography of the swords and the imagery of the swords moving through the air.

I like the thrill of the fight, the mental challenge and the ability to outfox your opponent when they make an attack. You can deceive the blade and come up with a counterattack. I always like that side, the physical exertion.

I always liked sports, all sports as a child, and I still do. I played other sports as a child – football, cricket, swimming and athletics – but fencing was the one which I was one of the strongest in, and when I had the opportunity to learn I took it.



What positives has fencing brought to your life?

It's developed good eye-hand coordination, fleetness of movement and quick reaction. It's contributed to me keeping fit, I suppose, and looking after my body, keeping myself healthy.

It's allowed me to practise a sport into old age. Some sports are impossible to do once you're past a certain age. Fencing allows you to fence against people of a similar age, well into their 70s and 80s, at your own speed.

Older people are fencing and still enjoying the sport. Although I didn't think that too much at the time, upon reflection, it was one of the things that I've been able to indulge in throughout my life.

There was a period when I was away from the sport. I was working hard, having a young family and getting a mortgage. Then when I moved down to Bournemouth, although I still had some of that responsibility, I was a little older and able to manage it. I had the good fortune to discover there was a fencing club in Bournemouth, Espada. I joined that and I've been a member ever since. That was in May 1971, nearly 54 years ago now.

What does fencing offer people?

Well, it will mean different things to different people, and people will take up fencing for different reasons. But if you ask me, the enjoyment of the sport is the fight.

You think of the Roman short sword, the Iron Age swords, and the sword throughout history – it's always been there. We come right up to the modern day and it is still alive and well. Now, it is safe, attractive, fun, energetic and keeps you fit physically and mentally. It was part of the original modern Olympics in 1896, and it's been there ever since.

It's a wonderful sport for young people to take on. It's something different. You've got football and cricket on TV every day. Fencing you don't see, not every day. It's elegant, stylish, romantic, exciting. It's the dance of the blades, the dance of the individual. It's the attacking and deceiving, the counterattack, trying to outfox each other, the movement across the floor.

It's a fantastic sport.

And for athletes just starting in fencing, what would your advice be?

Work hard. Fencing is a refined skill. It isn't just throwing your arm out and hoping to get lucky. Refining the art takes years of practice, finesse, subtlety of timing, subtlety of movement, and anticipation of your opponent.

Anything that is skilled and has high levels of technique requires practice, hard work, dedication, taking care of your body, and a coach that takes care of you.

Remember sportsmanship, hide your emotions, still shake hands, still congratulate your opponent, and, if necessary, reflect on why you lost the fight. Work harder next time and say, I won't make the same mistakes.

Congratulations to Brian for his well deserved honour. It's easy to see why his services to fencing have been honoured!



DIMITRI COUTYA AWARDED MBE

A Champion's Recognition

British wheelchair fencing star Dimitri Coutya has been awarded an MBE in the King's New Year Honours, capping off what has been an extraordinary year for the double Paralympic champion. The honour recognises his exceptional contribution to the sport and his unwavering dedication to representing Great Britain on the international stage. As one of the world's most dominant wheelchair fencers, Coutya's achievements in 2024 have cemented his place in the history of British sport.

A Year to Remember

Coutya's journey to becoming a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) was paved with historic achievements. At the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, he delivered a masterclass in skill and determination, securing two individual gold medals in the men's Category B foil and epee events. His victories made him a double Paralympic champion, a feat that underlined his dominance and composure under pressure. Speaking about the year, Coutya reflected on social media: "2024, you've been the best one to me yet. Double Paralympic champ, getting the news that I'm going to receive an MBE and some great times with some great people. Thank you to everyone who helped, supported and shared this year with me."

His triumph in Paris was a moment of personal glory but also a significant milestone for British wheelchair fencing. Alongside teammates Piers Gilliver and Ollie Lam Watson, Coutya helped Great Britain reaffirm its status as a powerhouse



Photo: ParalympicsGB & World Ability Sport



Photo: ParalympicsGB & World Ability Sport

in the sport. His gold medals were not just victories; they were statements of excellence, perseverance, and the relentless pursuit of greatness.

Dedication to Excellence

Coutya's fencing career began at the age of ten and he has since transformed into one of the most formidable competitors in the sport. Training at the University of Bath's high-performance centre, he has consistently pushed the boundaries of what is possible in wheelchair fencing. His meticulous preparation, strategic brilliance, and technical precision have made him a formidable opponent on the piste.

His journey has not been without its challenges. Sustaining a spinal cord injury at the age of two, he faced obstacles that might have deterred others. However, his commitment to the sport and an unyielding drive to succeed saw him rise through the ranks. His resilience has inspired not only fellow athletes, but also young people who look up to him as a role model.

A Well-Deserved Honour

The news of his MBE was met with widespread celebration from the sporting community. British Fencing, the University of Bath, and UK Sport all hailed the recognition as a fitting tribute to his dedication and influence in the sport. His old school, St. Benedict's, also expressed pride in their former student's remarkable achievements. The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (RNOH), where Coutya has been a patient, also joined in

the celebrations, highlighting his role as an ambassador for overcoming adversity.

Beyond his achievements in competition, Coutya's impact extends to advocacy and mentorship. He has been a vocal supporter of Paralympic sport, encouraging greater visibility and inclusivity in fencing. His success serves as a beacon of hope for aspiring athletes, proving that disability is no barrier to excellence.



Photo: ParalympicsGB & World Ability Sport

Looking Ahead

With an MBE now added to his long list of accolades, Dimitri Coutya's legacy continues to grow. As he prepares for future competitions, including the build-up to the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games, his focus remains on pushing himself to new heights while inspiring others along the way.

Speaking exclusively to The Sword, Dimitri said, "I'm forever grateful to those who take the time to read about my journey. It's been the result of many mistakes and corrections to get to where I am today, and it's always made a little bit easier when I know I have a wonderful communities' support behind me."

Coutya's story is one of grit, passion, and an unrelenting pursuit of greatness. The honour bestowed upon him is not just a recognition of his past achievements but a testament to the impact he continues to have on British sport. Congratulations, Dimitri Coutya MBE – The Sword celebrates you.

SIMON SAYS

Scouting For Fencers

Virginia Bailey - Participation Director

For several years, British Fencing has delivered a successful Scouts project, ensuring that uniformed groups up and down the country can be inspired by and participate in the sport. Uniformed groups have purchased plastic kits, leaders attended coaching courses, and young people engaged well in sessions. Whilst these sessions have been successful, uniformed groups engage in many activities in addition to fencing and so there is a gap for recruitment!

Simon Trevithick of Harrogate Fencing Club has been engaging with scout groups over the last few years, and has found it to have boosted club membership. "We have been actively working with the scout and girl guiding groups for a number of years, delivering sessions not just on the district patrol nights, but also on jamboree and festival dates across the region. We've found that the sessions have been good at bringing new beginner fencers to the club, whilst at the same time helping develop new coaches with their personal coaching and development plans."

British Fencing has also found that some of the leaders from the uniformed groups enjoy fencing so much that they also wish to develop their fencing and coaching skills. This demonstrates that there is an opportunity to engage not only the young people from uniformed groups, but also the adults too.

In theory, this all sounds great, but how can fencing clubs reach out and develop this relationship?



Venue

Simon shares his advice surrounding where to hold sessions. "The first thing we must consider is where to hold the sessions. Assuming you have the venue and space for it, I suggest you run it at your club. Ideally on a club night, where not only can they take part in that session but they can see fencers in action either in a group or on an electric piste with flashing lights. They not only favour that atmosphere at the club but it also gives them a sense of aspiration. It gives you the opportunity of getting the parents to watch, rather than letting them sit in the car waiting for the session to finish. Alternatively, if you have the resources, you could visit them on a patrol night. Generally, you will be limited with space, but unless you have a clash of nights, this may be the best option. About 80% of our sessions are done away from the venue, as we don't have the space available on a club night."



Equipment

Many scouts have access to plastic kits, meaning that you don't always have to provide equipment. Simon explained that Harrogate FC always use plastic kit rather than metal kit; "We always use plastic kit, never metal. A few reasons for this; one, it gets them fencing quicker, there are fewer health and safety requirements. Secondly, it's easy to carry around, one size fits all, and more importantly, we use metal as an incentive to join our club. As one scout who recently experienced his first metal session said, 'I'm not joining now, because I've done it.' We use the metal as the carrot to get them to the club."

Connection

British Fencing's Scouts Project Lead, Helen Solly, stated, "Scouts groups across Britain have participated in our coaching courses, purchased kit, and utilised a games-based approach to make the entry point to the sport a fun one. The leaders have the enthusiasm to deliver the initial basic skills required to participate in the sport, but often can't develop their young people further in the sport due to a demand to engage in multiple activities at their sessions. This provides an opening: an opportunity to connect with scouts to work collaboratively to develop club membership. We can build a relationship with these groups to work collaboratively so that both clubs and uniformed groups gain benefit from these relationships. It may be that clubs develop their membership through a few taster sessions, or through delivering a 'GB League' style event for both the club and the scouts group. Alternatively, clubs and scouts groups may want to develop their workforce and work collaboratively to put on a coaching course or leadership course."

British Fencing is happy to support the process of connecting clubs with scouts groups. If your club is motivated to connect with local scout groups, please email BF Scouts Project lead Helen Solly at helen.solly@britishfencing.com to find out which scout groups are near you.



BF'S RATING SYSTEM

Boosting Participation and Revenue

Paul Abrahams

It's a December Sunday afternoon in a gym in Hatfield. A cadet sabre event has just finished and seven adult sabreurs – and a nervous foilist masquerading as a sabreur – have gathered to compete. As I stand in an unfamiliar and bulky sabre lamé, I'm about to fence in the first ratings event organised by the Paul Davis Fencing Academy.

The competition is part of a BF initiative aimed at encouraging events for the vast majority of members who might struggle in big open tournaments but still want to compete. There are plenty of Open events for elite fencers in the UK but many members aren't competitive in such events and might not have a great experience.

BF's Ratings System enables competition organisers to run events for members, whether cadets, juniors, seniors or veterans, at a level that suits their abilities. They can earn grades ranging from A (the top rating) to B, C, D, and E, with U being unrated. After 18 months of the scheme, about 15% of fencers in the six weapons are rated C and above, while about 85% are D and below.

"The D/E/U competitions are ideal for fencers who aren't out there competing regularly," says Paul Davis, director of the Paul Davis Fencing Academy. "This gives them a social experience in a formal setting and opens their eyes to what competing can be. We plan to run more events in May and June."

The first D/E/U competition was run in June 2023 by Fencers Club London. At short notice, they ran a foil event on the same afternoon as their Open event. About half of the 23 entries were from those who had been knocked out in the Open's early direct

eliminations and about half just entered the ratings event. The competition proved a huge success for participating fencers and the club.

With no additional costs for the club, the entry fees provided Fencers Club London with additional revenue. The following year, it ran separate men and women D/E/U events, attracting 39 fencers. The club plans to run another competition this June.

"Since we already have the hall booked, pistes laid and referees for the Open event, we are able to lower the entry fee for the D/E/U event," says Debbie Porter, Events Organiser at Fencers Club London. "This encourages more fencers to compete while still providing a great experience."

The Leon Paul Centre, under the direction of Jon Willis, has taken a different approach, running dedicated D/E/U tournaments. "When we set up the Centre we struggled to attract non-elite fencers," explains Jon. In March last year, the Centre arranged its first D/E/U event for men's and women's epee and foil, attracting 56 fencers. Jon was so pleased, he arranged a second ratings competition in October, where 60 fencers competed.

"The D/E/U competitions are my favourite to organise," says Jon. "They are competitive but much more relaxed. People really enjoy them. Going forward, we plan to run two a year." The next one is in May.

The ratings scheme is backed by a state-of-the-art website www.ukratings.co.uk, developed by Brian Britain, a BF Board member. The site explains the initiative's rationale as well as how to earn a rating. You can look up all clubs and the members who have competed since January 2022. In each athlete's profile you can look up their rating, results, poule and direct elimination statistics, head-to-head results and performance trajectory. There is also a list of results and upcoming competitions, including who has entered.

BF has also begun running its own D/E/U competitions. In April last year at the

British Senior Championships in Sheffield, its epee and foil events attracted more than 90 competitors.

"D/E/U events have been a great addition to the BF portfolio," says Evie Millar, BF's Events, Membership and Clubs Manager. "It has been fantastic to see fencers who wouldn't have otherwise attended BF Championship events take part in D/E/U events. It gives them the confidence to look for larger competitions in the future."

"D/E/U events are a smart way for organisers looking to maximise piste usage, as they can begin later in the day when they may have more space after the poules of other events," explains Evie.

Going forward, BF hopes more competition organisers across the country will run D/E/U events, providing more opportunities for members to compete while providing additional revenues for clubs and regions.

Back at Hatfield, the winner of the women's sabre, Riya Sanghera is beaming, her parents looking on proudly. In the men's event, the nervous foilist discovered that broken time attacks don't really work in sabre, but he did pick up a bronze – his first sabre medal in more than a decade.



State-of-the-Art Website



Brian and Paul

MODERN FENCING

A Safe Fighting Sport

By Felicity Marsh, Peter Hughes, Clare Halsted & Mary Cohen-Lavarello

It is a common theme within sports that all athletes will strive to improve their performance whenever possible. Fencing is no different in this respect. Fencers will work hard to improve their fitness and fencing technique, and one way to measure this is progress within national rankings. A major component in maximising this improvement is through injury prevention. British Fencing is very active in creating a sporting environment which is as injury risk-free as possible.

Fencing was one of the nine original sports established in the first modern Olympics of 1896 and has been present at Olympic Games ever since. It is thus surprising that there is such limited data on injury risk within the various fencing disciplines with little research into common fencing injuries, how they occur and how they might be prevented. A large American competition study found that a significant injury, requiring time out of the sport, occurred in approximately 0.3 fencers per thousand bouts, showing that fencing is the safest combat-type sport and substantially safer than most contact sports like football or rugby.

The high quality fencing clothing required by the British Fencing Safety Committee does an impressive job protecting against blade related injuries. We should thank the European Committee for Standardisation for setting the high standards that fencing clothing manufacturers comply with (in Europe). To answer the lack of data on fencing injuries and triggered by a serious injury, Dr Raymond Crawford, British Fencing's first Medical Officer, started collating injury reports in 1984. From 1998 the process was gradually refined with the introduction of a specific report form to encourage fencers and coaches to report any significant injuries and organisers to complete forms for all athletes injured during competitions. An online form was set up in 2021 which now gathers most of the reports including the Near Miss category.

The BF Medical Committee realised that this was probably the largest fencing injury database in the world, spanning such a long period, and well worth analysing. Fortunately, Manchester medical student and fencer, Felicity Marsh, was keen to be involved and has looked at all 845 reports (70% male, 30% female) for the period 2000-2023 (excluding the two pandemic years).

This has allowed BF to make calculations of relative risk across all three weapons. The data showed that sabre is associated with significantly more injuries than foil, with foil having significantly more injuries than epee.

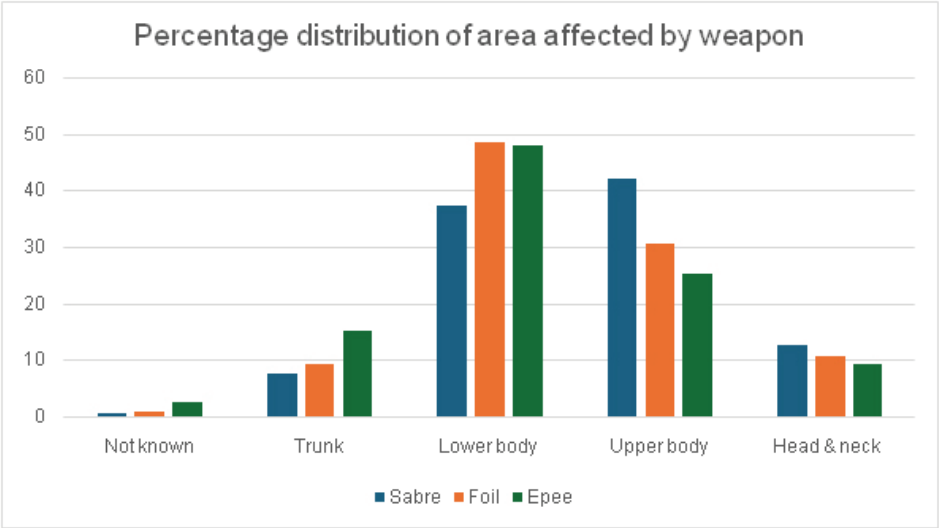
Injuries have been further graded by age, group, sex, circumstances, type and site of injury together with treatment. Most injury reports received are generated from competitions (83%) and it is relatively unusual for injuries from training to be reported. Is this the real situation or are they under-reported? Regular promotion of form completion may help to address this question.

As expected from the skew in fencing participation towards the U18s, this age group generated most reports followed by the 18-30s.

As you can see from Figure 2, the commonest regions for injury were the lower limb (45%) and upper limb (34%). There were however marked differences between the weapons, with upper limb injuries in sabre far more common than in either epee or foil.

It is important to note that just over half of all reported injuries were unrelated to fencing contact. These were linked to general movement, sudden change of direction or contact with inanimate objects. This illustrates the importance of the flooring and keeping the wider piste area free of hazards which has been a priority for BF at major tournaments over recent years.

It also serves as a reminder that the physical preparation of the athlete is a significant factor for risk of injury. It can be tempting to ramp up training in the school holidays, or on a training camp for instance, but if this represents more than a 15% increase in weekly training load, it is well recognised that injury is far more likely. To minimise the risk of injury, fencers should limit weekly training load increases to 10% or less. However, developing physical qualities steadily over time will protect against injuries. Fencing with a "niggle" or through pain is commonly seen in fencing, but can exacerbate the injury.



Analyses of fencing injuries in the UK / A review of the national injury reporting database

Felicity Marsh¹, Peter Hughes², Clare Halsted³, Georgina Usher³

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

¹The University of Manchester Medical school,
Manchester, UK

²Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Preston,
UK

³British Fencing, London, UK

BRITISH
FENCING

Leon Paul
London

1. Introduction

- Despite being one of only four sports that have maintained a position in the Olympics since the first games¹, there exist few epidemiological studies concerning injury patterns within the sport.
- British Fencing (BF) has a large database for injury reporting, and it introduced the first national-level injury surveillance system for fencing injuries worldwide.
- There has been no literature published on a comprehensive analysis of the BF injury reports over such an extensive time frame as this.
- To challenge the misconception that fencing is a dangerous sport, it is imperative that injury surveillance and subsequent prevention programmes exist.

2. Aims

- To provide descriptive epidemiological data on injuries and near miss incidents reported to BF during the periods 2000-2023.

3. Methods

- There was retrospective analyses of the reports, where relevant data were extracted from a variety of online and paper reports, and stratified according to multiple categories.
- The data were then organised in Microsoft Excel for statistical review.
- Near miss incidents, defined on the BF website as a 'close call that could have been worse' have also been included.
- Medical incidents or illnesses have been excluded.
- The years 2020-2021 have also been excluded due to disruptions caused by COVID-19.
- Ethical approval was granted by the CEO of BF.

5. Conclusions

- Fencing is a safe sport at all ages.
- Serious injuries are rare; <5 hospital assessments were required per year on average.
- Sabre has the highest risk for injury, Epee the least.
- There is no significant difference in risk between genders.
- Failure in equipment/penetration of protective clothing is rare.
- Soft tissue sprain is the most common injury type- onsite staff must be competent to manage this.
- Results from this analysis strengthen the previously established understanding that fencing remains one of, if not the, safest combat sport².

4. Results

Proportions of published rankings and injury reports split by weapon and gender

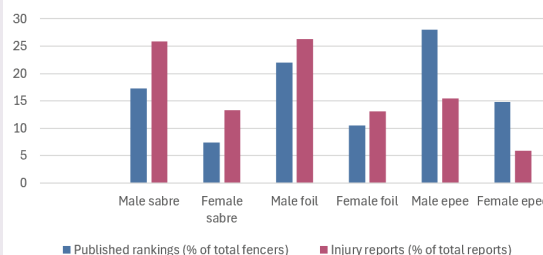


Figure 1. Comparison of injury rates in weapon and gender, using the BF national rankings as a proxy for athlete exposure.

- Using the data from Figure 1, a χ^2 test found Sabre to be the most injury prone weapon, Epee the least ($p < 0.05$).
- Another χ^2 test found there to be no statistically significant difference between injury risk in each gender ($p < 0.05$).

Injury type, location and environment

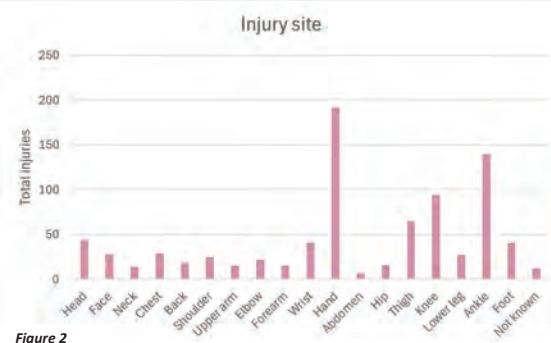


Figure 2

- Only 1.7% of injuries involved a broken blade.
- 5% of injuries involved penetration of protective gear.

Near Miss incidents

- There were 33 near miss incidents, 12 of which caused no injury, 21 involved a minor injury relative to the risk involved.

Treatment methods

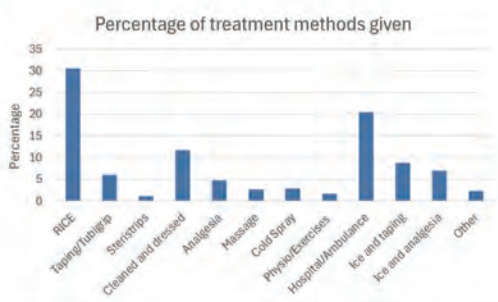


Figure 4 shows that the majority of treatment methods can be given onsite.

Totals

- 845 injury reports in total (not including all near miss incidents).
- 64.4% Male, 30.5% Female. (5% gender not known).
- 25.1% Sabre, 25.4% Foil, 14.1% Epee. (35.3% weapon was not known/not applicable).

- 83.3% of injuries occurred during a competitive setting.

- Only 33.5% of injuries were specific to fencing.

- The most prevalent injury type was strains/sprains (1/3 of total), followed by bruising and abrasions/open wounds.

- On average, there were <3 confirmed fractures/dislocations/soft tissue ruptures per year.

Mechanism of near miss incidents

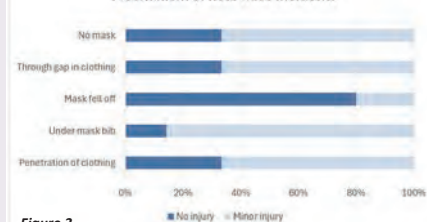


Figure 3



An example of a near miss incident- blade penetrated protective clothing, luckily no injury occurred to fencer.

References

- Caine DJ, Harmer Peter, Schiff Melissa, IOC Medical Commission. Epidemiology of injury in Olympic sports. Wiley-Blackwell Pub; 2009.
- Swatowska M, Akbaş A, Juras G. Injuries in high-performance fencers: a review. Arch Budo. 2020;16:261.

Approximately a third of all injuries reported were strains or sprains (33%). Open wounds including abrasions, cuts and penetrative injuries were next common (19%) and then bruises (17%). These three injury patterns cover over two-thirds of all injuries. This information is very useful to competition organisers planning first aid provision. Wound cleaning and dressing products, strapping and ice are all invaluable at all venues to deal with the primary treatment of these common injuries. It should be emphasised that most injuries are minor and from the reports only 12% of injuries resulted in hospital attendance at some point. In contrast, a large 2019 French study of judo injuries reported 35% hospital level injuries.

Approximately 40% of injuries were related to weapon contact either from the blade or from guard blows or clashes.

Clearly the most serious injury risk is associated with potential blade penetration. In fencing, a penetrative injury is defined as any injury where there is a failure of protective clothing such that the blade has gone through the material. This happened in 42 injuries, making up approximately 5% of reports. Where the specific weapon was recorded, approximately 60% were sabres, 25% foils and 20% epees. Note that in some cases the clothing will have prevented a worse injury.

Blade breakage obviously increases the risk. Fourteen injuries involved a broken blade, with two of these injuries to spectators not wearing protective clothing. The message here is keep well

away from active fencers unless you are also well-protected. There is also potential for injury through gaps in the protective equipment (under the bib of the mask, through body wire holes etc). Injury risk through gaps showed a similar distribution with sabre more than foil more than epee. Taking all penetrative injuries as a whole, approximately a third of these required hospital treatment.

Near Miss – what is this? An event that could have caused significant injury but did not. Especially important are incidents involving the head, neck and chest areas, where there is more potential for life changing injury. For the 21 year study period, 33 near miss events have been identified, 12 of which caused no injury, with a further 21 causing minor injury. Of these near-misses, 9 were penetrative in nature, 7 caused by blades going under the protective bib, 5 from the mask falling off, 6 through gaps in equipment and 6 to individuals who were not wearing masks either as spectators, coaches, referees or fencers in between fights. See Figure 3.

The Safety Committee reviews injury data at least annually with the aim of improving safety via the BF Safety Guidelines or by recommending rule changes. For example around 2014, it became apparent that there had been a noticeable increase in penetrative hand injuries associated with unbroken sabre blades. Similar observations had been made internationally, which eventually prompted the FIE to mandate a new 800N standard for sabre gloves and BF to adopt it. Injury reporting identified 16 penetrative sabre glove injuries in the UK in the 10 years prior to this change, and only 4 such

injuries since: supporting the decision to strengthen the gloves.

An example of the value of near miss reporting was the series of instances of masks falling off during fights, reported in the UK and abroad. Leon Paul played an important role here. Once convinced of the problem, the FIE ruled that all masks should have two point fixation to reduce the risk of injury associated with displacement.

Current British Fencing safety guidance advises that in individual lessons, pupils must always wear a mask and gloves but not necessarily full protective clothing, provided a risk assessment has been carried out. The instructor must always wear the full protective clothing of a coach. During 21 years of reports, there were only two injury reports from a one-to-one lesson situation, supporting this guidance.

Our reporting process continues to provide invaluable data on injury epidemiology in fencing. The more data we have on injury trends the better we can respond with new initiatives to protect our fencers. The Medical Committee thus urges all those involved in the sport to report injuries, whether in competition or training, to continue to build this world-leading database and thanks to all of you who have diligently sent in reports over the years.

[Link to Injury Reporting Form](#)

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READERS' SCRAPBOOK

THE SWORD
Feature

Here's a collection of images that captured our imagination from your Facebook pages.



Fencing at the British Universities & Colleges Sports Nationals 2025



NI Fencing March Taster Session SOLD OUT!



NW Fencing Passing their First Aid Course



Scottish Fencing - Coach Education



Paul Davis Fencing Academy Showcase
Fencing at their January Media Day



Pesky wire stuck in blade groove; Check out Ask the Armourers group on Facebook



Taken at the O'Sullivan Cup - photographer David Hopes captures the moment Chris Stevenson (right) lands a hit on Nikolai Antoniou



Salle Holyrood Fund Raiser



BVF Age Group Championships

BF HONOURS 2025

It's Time to Nominate

Lawrence Burr, OBE - Secretary of the Honours Committee

The British Fencing Honours Committee invites BF members to nominate individuals for this year's BF Honours awards. The process for so doing is now open and will close on the **30th May 2025**.

Nominate Here

The British Fencing Honours nomination system focuses entirely on the membership, with all nominations coming directly from current members. The Honours Committee acts as selectors with the objective of recommending awards in a wide range of categories, whilst ensuring that there is consistency of award levels and criteria. Awards are conferred annually and announced and presented at the AGM by the British Fencing President. **These are separate from the British Fencing Community Awards.**

Nominators are to be aware that their nominee(s) are expected to be British Fencing members who have demonstrably upheld the values of

British Fencing - honesty, respect and excellence. Mention of this is to be made in the description below. If the nominee is involved with an active club, that club must be affiliated with British Fencing and be following minimum British Fencing standards, specifically with regards to safeguarding, coaching and membership. Nominations for those contributing to clubs should also relate to clubs that meet current BF Safeguarding and Welfare standards.

Fencers who have represented GBR, either as an individual or as a team member, and have achieved a podium place in one of the following categories will automatically be recommended for an appropriate award:

- Senior World Championships
- Senior European Championships
- Cadet & Junior World Championships
- Cadet & Junior European Championships
- Veterans World Championships (individual gold only)
- IWAS World Championships (Cat A & B)

- Olympic Games
- Paralympic Games (Cat A & B)

Fencing coaches and others paid for their involvement in our sport will only be considered for an award if they have enhanced the world of UK fencing beyond what might reasonably be expected as part of their paid employment, and which, in the case of those paid by a club, also benefits fencers who are not members of that club.

MAKING A NOMINATION

Please click the link above and complete the application form, giving as much detail as possible for your reasons in making the recommendation.

Please note that for the 2025 awards, your nominations must arrive **no later than 30th May 2025**. Please also note, you must be at least 18 years of age to make a nomination.

The Terms of References for the Honours Committee can be found [here](#).



2025 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

WUXI, CHINA, 7TH - 15TH APRIL

*Information correct as of 25th February 2025

CADET

WOMEN'S FOIL

Lauren Byrne
Lev-Jac Hu
Katie Johnson

MEN'S FOIL

Mohammed Belbouab
Luca Florea
Ashley Crees

WOMEN'S SABRE

Tosin Ononaiye
Hui Xin Sezille
Maya Sutton

MEN'S SABRE

Raphael Bedford
Joshua Bryden
Joe Evans

WOMEN'S EPEE

Isabella Howser
Emma Mitzova
Eilidh Paterson

MEN'S EPEE

Oghenegan Esiovwa-Thompson
Stanley Leech
Alex Nicholas

JUNIOR

WOMEN'S FOIL

Isabella Johnson
Carolina Stutchbury
Amelie Tsang
Zoë Wagstaff

MEN'S FOIL

Jaimie Cook
David Kelly
Callum Penman
David Sosnov

WOMEN'S SABRE

Bethany Brierley
Lexie Craze
Keira Donnelly-Sallows
Melissa Jane

MEN'S SABRE

Joshua Bryden
Joe Evans
Henry Martin
Eiger Swinscow

WOMEN'S EPEE

Olivia Eadie
Harriet Hillier
Grace O'Neill
Megan Upton

MEN'S EPEE

Cador Beautyman
Alec Brooke
Tristan Lumineau
Sameer Sunder-Rajan

BOOK REVIEW

The Choice Point by Joanna Grover, LCSW and Jonathan Rhodes, PhD

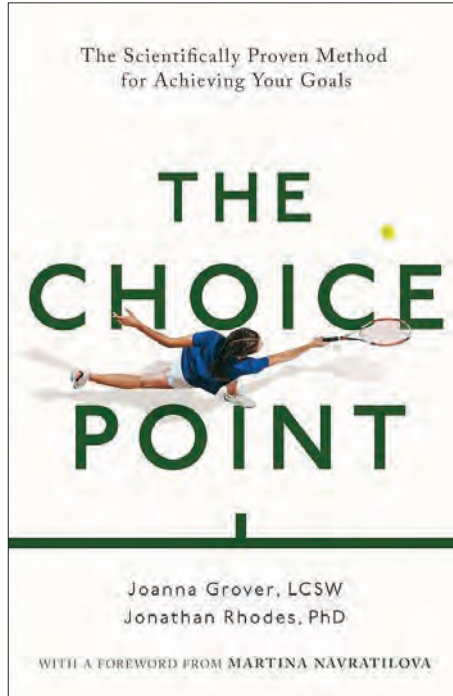
Karim Bashir

The enjoyment of books is deeply personal and I've always struggled with the so-called "self-help" genre. Too often, they feel either overly simplistic or unnecessarily complex. Until now, the only book in this category that truly resonated with me was Stephen Covey's classic, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." For years, I revisited it between Christmas and New Year, using it as a reset button to refocus on what I could control (what Covey calls the "circle of influence") and prepare for the year ahead.

Then, not so long ago, I found myself on a work trip with an old friend, Dr. Jon Rhodes. A psychologist by profession, Jon was part of the team that developed Functional Imagery Training (FIT). During lockdown, he teamed up with Joanna Grover, an experienced therapist and coach, to write "The Choice Point" – a book he gifted to me on our trip.

Life got in the way and it sat on my shelf for a year before I finally picked it up. When I did, it hit me like a steam train. Why had I waited so long? I knew immediately that I had to share this book with readers of The Sword – it's simply too good to keep to myself.

That said, reviewing it has been a challenge. Just because a book resonates with me, does that mean it will with you? After much reflection, I realised why "The Choice Point" works: like Covey's book, it doesn't tell you what to do. Instead, it provides a clear, structured way to guide



your own thinking, allowing you to choose the path that's right for you.

The book opens with a foreword from none other than tennis legend Martina Navratilova – an auspicious start for any sports enthusiast. It's then divided into three parts.

The first introduces the science of how our brains work, complete with engaging exercises to illustrate key concepts. Jon and Joanna explain the fundamentals of FIT before prompting you to reflect on your

own values. They ask a crucial question: Are you living your best life? If not, keep reading.

Next, the book helps you reassess your goals, prioritise what truly matters, and let go of what you can't control. Whether you want to break a bad habit, get in shape, or spend more time with loved ones, the authors never pass judgment. Instead, they guide you through multi-sensory imagery exercises, step by step, to help you visualise success and anticipate obstacles. Crucially, they give you permission to fail – emphasising that setbacks aren't the end, but opportunities to reassess and move forward with renewed motivation.

The third section explores applying FIT in a team environment. At first glance, this may not seem relevant to everyone. But consider this: fencers, coaches, parents, competition organisers – virtually every reader of this magazine – operates within a team in some capacity. By internalising the book's principles, you won't just improve your own performance; you'll positively influence those around you as well.

So, does "The Choice Point" belong on your reading list? That depends on your taste. But I can tell you this – I thoroughly enjoyed it. I apply its insights daily, and I've already seen the benefits. If you're curious, I encourage you to pick it up and see for yourself.

You can buy the book on Amazon here: <https://tinyurl.com/2td97z7p>.

DERRICK CAWTHORNE

1931-2024



Derrick Cawthorne

Derrick Cawthorne, who passed away in December at the age of 93, was probably the last of the 'old school' fencers who competed in an age when respect for the referee and your opponent – together with good manners on the piste – were essential requirements. For many, the 1950s and 60s were considered to be the golden age of British Fencing when World Champions and Olympic medallists were an everyday part of the domestic scene.

Derrick started fencing in 1944 at the age of 13 when he persuaded the powers that be to let him and his two older brothers, Vic and Geoff, join an adult evening institute class being held in a local school. The class was run by French fencing master Professor Ernest Froeschlen and from that first foil lesson Derrick fell in love with fencing. Had his parents agreed to him being evacuated from London in 1939, along with the rest of his school, he might never have fenced.

In the early 1950s Derrick began to make his mark in competitions. While working as a telephone engineer he had many successful outings in the Civil Service fencing team, and in 1952 had the honour of being named 'Civil Service Sportsman of the Year'. In 1956 he won the British Junior Foil Championships, which was the first of numerous titles in his long fencing career.

I once asked Derrick, my father-in-law, about his most memorable fencing achievement and without hesitation he replied, "winning the British Senior Foil Championships". It was on Sunday

6 March 1960 that Derrick fought his way into the final poule of eight, which included the cream of British foil fencing such as seasoned internationals Rene and Raymond Paul, Ralph Cooperman, Len Cook and Allan Jay. At the end of the poule Derrick found himself in a three-way barrage for the title. Having decisively won his first barrage fight against Len Cook he then had the daunting task of facing the hot favourite and reigning World Foil Champion Allan Jay. An extract from the report in *The Sword* states:

"Cawthorne fenced consistently well throughout the competition. He was fast on his feet yet never allowed his more wily and experienced opponent to confuse him in the vital art of keeping distance; his attacks were penetrating, his defence solid and his timing first-rate. All this and his impeccable manners on the piste made his Championship a very popular win".

Derrick was understandably proud of the fact that he had not only triumphed against such formidable opposition but that he had won in a style and manner that would please his coach. Since Derrick's earliest days as a schoolboy Professor Froeschlen had instilled in him that "technique, style and good manners are the essence of a good fencer". All three elements came together to triumph on that memorable day.

Derrick was a member of the British Foil team during the period 1960-64, which included the 1960 and 1964 Olympic Games in Rome and Tokyo. However, he chose to retire from international competition after the 1964 Games owing to the sudden death of his much-loved fencing master Professor Froeschlen. He continued to fence at home, where he and his brother Vic were the mainstays of the newly-formed Allen Fencing Club in North London – set up by their close friend and Salle Froeschlen team-mate Derek Allen.

Around the same time Derrick turned to refereeing and for some years was the top British foil referee. He qualified as an FIE international referee in 1976, spurred on by his desire to accompany his daughter

Hilary (Philbin) who was competing in the 1977 World Championships in South America. He accompanied her again in 1979 as a referee at the World Championships in Australia and was delighted to be selected to referee at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow where Hilary was again competing. At the same time Derrick spent many years working in a voluntary capacity on numerous British Fencing committees. Always smartly dressed – whether refereeing, attending meetings or accompanying the men's foil team to events abroad – he was given the nickname 'The Tie'.

On the work front – it was in 1960 while still working as a telephone engineer that Derrick was approached by Raymond Paul, the younger son of Leon Paul who owned and ran the UK fencing equipment manufacturers and suppliers. Over a series of enjoyable lunches Raymond explained that electric foil fencing was becoming more established and that Derrick's engineering skills and fencing knowledge would be a perfect fit for the family firm. The upshot was that Derrick left the Civil Service and started working for Leon Paul in 1961 at Neal Street in Covent Garden. It was to be a long and successful relationship that lasted 47 years.

During this time Leon Paul was contracted to provide the pistes and scoring equipment for many international events, and Derrick happily travelled to these to undertake the installation, maintenance and trouble-shooting – first with Raymond Paul and later with Barry Paul. He always returned home with a wealth of entertaining stories about their experiences.

To several generations of fencers Derrick was a well-known face of Leon Paul. However, in 2008 at the age of 77 he finally, and reluctantly, retired – having enjoyed every aspect of his life and work in fencing.

Derrick is survived by three children – Chris, Hilary and Janet – along with four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Jim Philbin

RESULTS



The latest results are now listed online and can be accessed [here](https://www.britishfencing.com/results-2/) (<https://www.britishfencing.com/results-2/>).

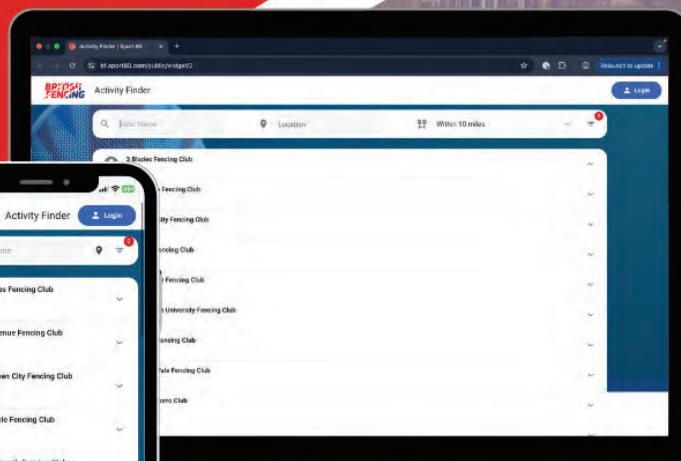
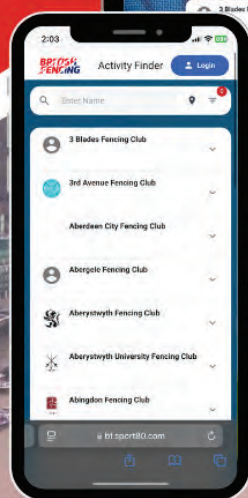
Please forward all your suggestions for additional online fencing results to: events@britishfencing.com





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