

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
MARCH 2021



#ADVANCE

SOUVENIR ISSUE
LOCKDOWN WINS
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

BRITISH
FENCING

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WELCOME TO THE SWORD



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|----|--|----|-----------------------------------|
| 4 | EDITOR'S WELCOME & PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE | 24 | LOCKDOWNLOAD STATESIDE |
| 6 | SALT LAKE CITY 2020 TEAM | 26 | COACH PLAYBOOK - SABRE |
| 7 | IMAGES FROM THE HEART OF LOCKDOWN | 28 | RELATIVITY |
| 8 | THE REFEREES' CALL | 31 | THE WAYS OF THE SWORDS |
| 10 | LESSONS LEARNED | 32 | NEXT GEN |
| 12 | COACH PLAYBOOK - EPEE | 35 | LOCKDOWN WINS |
| 13 | GOING PLACES VOL 1 | 38 | MESSAGE FROM THE CEO |
| 15 | MIND MATTERS | 39 | IMAGES FROM THE HEART OF LOCKDOWN |
| 16 | WHO'S THE GREATEST? | | |
| 18 | COACH PLAYBOOK - FOIL | | |
| 19 | GOING PLACES VOL 2 | | |
| 20 | PULL-OUT POSTER | | |
| 22 | BLAZING A TRAIL | | |

The Class of 2020



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:
Cambrian Printers,
Llanbadarn Fawr,
Aberystwyth,
Ceredigion, SY23 3TN
T: 01970 613059

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

Typeset by:
JS Typesetting Ltd
T: 01656 788551
E: jstype@btconnect.com

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

Cover photo:
Image © Den Pollitt

Parent Working Group
Sian Hughes Pollitt
Flair Gougoulia
Jacqui Lever

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Souvenir Issue

EDITOR'S WELCOME

Karim Bashir

Welcome to this special issue of The Sword magazine. Clearly, 2020 was a challenging year for everyone and the following pages have been put together to recognise the efforts of our developing fencers, their support teams and families in a competition-free season, and to serve as inspiration for what is beginning to look like a brighter future.

Putting this magazine together has been a great privilege for me; reading every single article submitted has proven a great pleasure. Your stories have moved me, made me laugh and reminded me how, when people fence, they fall in love with the sport. You all shine through this material, embodying British Fencing's values of honesty, respect, excellence, accountability and teamwork. You're a remarkable bunch of people who have faced the most unimaginable time with a smile or through gritted teeth - TOGETHER.

Now, for those of you that don't know me; I began fencing at school at the age of seven and in the following twenty-six years, I competed for Great Britain and Wales in every age group through to senior level. My greatest competitive achievement was a senior team Commonwealth silver medal at the 1998 Championships in Malaysia. Since retiring from competition I've remained involved in the sport, mainly on the communication side of things, working for and with British Fencing, the FIE, the EFC and a number of other national fencing federations. After graduating in Maths and Sports Science, I eventually started a sports marketing company.

During my life, I have been in your shoes and faced similar challenges, pitfalls and joys. I have coached, refereed and team-managed at Cadet and Junior level. I have been a student of sports psychology and now, my working life means that I watch a lot of fencing, and am still personally and professionally captivated by its unique nature.

I want you to feel as though you have been recognised during the last 12 months, and for you to know that you still belong to a wonderful community who want to celebrate you. Also read this issue with a



view to your future. What does that look like both within and outside of fencing?

2020 was an interesting year for me too. Like everyone, I had to adapt. Normally, I work abroad off and on for around six months, visiting up to 20 different countries but, since the pandemic, I haven't travelled further than 20 miles from my house. The changes to my daily patterns have been fundamental. I've had to "resize" my expertise, knowledge and experience to fit my customers' needs. I've developed new skills to cater for a new normal. I've eradicated some bad habits. I've adjusted my mindset to cope with moving from a fast-paced, globe-trotting existence to working from home. I've not only survived but I'm stronger for it. My family has also survived me being around full-time!

So knowing that you've all had to adapt too, I have some messages that I'd like to share.

We are fencers. Whatever else we are in our lives (students, employees, volunteers) we are fencers. Fencers like to fight. We are built for conflict and adversity. We are wired to seize the day.

The challenge that we faced in 2020 was also an opportunity. An opportunity to work on new physical and mental techniques. An opportunity to repair a niggling injury. An opportunity to rethink game plans. An opportunity to have some life-balance. An opportunity to rest and recuperate. An opportunity to get stronger. Opportunities still remain; it's down to each of us to take advantage of them.

The importance of a trusted team has never been more significant. Irrespective of age, it is so easy to get wrapped up in yourself, your goals and your dreams. However, no

one can survive, succeed and be happy without a great team around them. Remember those who have supported you in the last twelve months and beforehand - take them with you as you move forward.

Battling with adversity, whether you win or lose, makes you stronger. Every win gives you confidence, whilst every loss gives you experience. That may sound clichéd but it is simply true. If you've come through this challenge with a weapon still in your hand, you will be stronger for it. We are becoming known as the "Covid Generation" and you as the "Covid Squad". That does not begin to describe how you have emerged from this time shining more brightly than I could have imagined. In the past year we've been in a fight against a formidable and awkward opponent. The stories I've read in putting this issue together have shown me that you not only opened the distance but also observed, learned and thoroughly prepared for your next move. You are still holding on to your sword and are unlikely to ever put it down. My guess is that you'll never give up the fight. I can't wait to see what you do next. I know it will be worth watching!

In a way, I wish I were in your shoes now! Don't get me wrong. Life without competition would drive me nuts. That said, at no time in my life has the opportunity for young British fencers been better. The structures in place now create a clear pathway to success in fencing as well as the foundation to become the best that you can be. I urge you all to embrace it and wish you every happiness and success as we look forward to returning to the bright lights of the piste.

To finish, I am going to hand you over to Hilary Philbin. Most of you will know that Hilary is the President of British Fencing but I'm guessing that few of you will know that Hilary was a fencer who competed for Great Britain at the 1976 and 1980 Olympic Games. Hilary also led the team that ran fencing at London 2012 - an event that served as inspiration for many of us. Whilst a lot of her work as President is unseen - trust me - she works hard for all of us. After all, Hilary is a FENCER.

Happy reading!

Karim

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am very pleased indeed about the publication of this special edition of *The Sword*, which follows an extremely difficult year. The competitive careers of all our fencers have been hugely disrupted throughout 2020 by the impact of the pandemic and the resultant cancellation of all international fencing events. I feel for all affected by these necessary measures, and in particular our top Juniors and Cadets. The cancellation of the 2020 World Championships, due to be held in Salt Lake City last April, must have been a devastating blow, and more tough news was to come with the cancellation of the 2021 Cadet & Junior European Championships. Sadly, following the recent announcement that the 2021 World Championships is going ahead in April in Cairo, the current UK travel restrictions make it uncertain that a GB team will be able to compete.

As a former competitor I understand how much work - by both fencers and coaches - has gone into preparing for these major events, and the sacrifices that will have been made. Sadly, some fencers will have lost the opportunity to represent Great Britain in the World Championships at Junior or Cadet level, and it would be understandable to view this year as a year lost. However, my message to those in this group is that you are our fencers of the future, and the effort that you have already put in is 'money in the bank' for a return to fencing at the next level.



Hilary with the 2004 Athens Olympic Torch

Throughout this period our CEO, Georgina Usher, and her Head Office team have been working very hard behind the scenes in a variety of ways - producing webinars and online training material, guidance for clubs regarding their preparations for re-opening, and online support to all areas of our fencing family. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking them for all that they are doing.

Internationally also, online activities have filled a number of gaps. Urgent FIE business has been undertaken online, a webinar was arranged on aspects of Head Office administration and operations, and much work has been done in producing guidance

for competition organisers on how to manage fencing competitions in a Covid-safe environment. The European Fencing Confederation (EFC) led the way with holding their annual Ordinary Congress online, and this was managed with great efficiency. The success of this event could therefore open the door to discussions on how things might be done differently in future. In addition the EFC are offering referee webinars, and this programme has been well received.

Elsewhere, informal groups of fencing nations have sprung up and gather for online discussions - thus replacing the ad hoc face-to-face gatherings that would normally take place at major events and congresses. These groups too are now organising webinars to share knowledge and ideas within the international fencing community. People are increasingly finding ways of maintaining and developing their fencing links in this challenging period.

While the current situation continues we must all stay positive and look ahead to when our fencing lives will be as dynamic as we always hope and envisage them to be. As I write this there are encouraging signs - giving hope that international fencing activities will resume in the not-too-distant future. I truly look forward to the day when I can see again our competitive fencers performing at their best in international events - back in action and back on the podium.

Hilary Philbin



TEAM 2020

You made it to every competition you could. You made it to every training session. You trained hard. You trained smart. You battled through injury, disappointment and joy. You made the team.

You are Team 2020.

Cadet Team

Mens Epee

Alec Brooke
Joseph Walmsley
Edward Scott-Payne
NTR Louis Taiwo-Williams

Womens Epee

Isabella Summers
Sophie Peat
Patrycja Krzyzaniak
NTR Keira Papadopoulos

Mens Foil

Rafael Rhys-Pollitt
Oliver Strange
Jaimie Cook
NTR Dario Stenbeck-Schiavo

Womens Foil

Carolina Stutchbury
Amelie Tsang
Martha Carus Bird

Mens Sabre

Rory McLellan
Sam Allen
Maximilian Cromie
NTR: Ian Ho

Womens Sabre

Lexie Craze
Bethany Brierley

Junior Team

Mens Epee

Ben Andrews
James Jeal
Billy Shepherd
Harry Palmer
NTR: Nathan Foster

Womens Epee

Laura Sheffield
Alexandra Powell
Rachael Lever
Louise Sadler
NTR Maia Henderson-Roe

Mens Foil

Cameron Evans
Isaac Jolley
William Lonsdale
Matthew Abrahams
NTR: Edmund Howlett

Womens Foil

Yasmin Campbell
Teagan Williams-Stewart
Bronwen Granville
Mhairi McLaughlin
NTR: Phoebe Newton-Hughes

Mens Sabre

Julian Richards II
Barnaby Halliwell
Luke Haynes
Bertie Holdsworth
NTR: Alexander Le Maitre

Womens Sabre

Sophia Potter
Ellen Robbins-Wilkinson
Hannah O'Reilly
Elsie Llewellyn
NTR: Bea Abram-Moore



IMAGES FROM THE HEART OF LOCKDOWN



Besties



Kew Garden



Courtly Fencing



Strength & Conditioning



Fencing For Dummies



Summer Fencing Vibes



Young Guns



Back of the Net



Flat Out

THE REFEREES' CALL

They make the all-important calls on the piste so who better to judge our Yearbook Awards than a bunch of referees? Alex Savin led a motley crew of Kola Ayanwale, Jen Sancroft, Adrian Speakman and Sarah Steacy who ignored - ahem, navigated the rule book to announce our winners! Who will report them to the DT first?

I was surprised to be asked to join a panel of referees to discuss the BF-equivalent of a high school yearbook. Normally categories are decided upon within a school cohort and it's been long enough since we were that age! I admit that we had to frantically Google how a yearbook actually worked!

We then realised that on the domestic and international cadet and junior circuit, we see (or used to see pre-Covid) the U17s and U20s more than most. We also get to be entertained by their more imaginative attempts to reason with us or cajole us into cutting them slack: those jelly babies and jaffa cakes in a sports hall in the back-end of nowhere are much appreciated though! So, we figured we'd give this one a go...

Our only request is that you take this in the spirit intended - a light-hearted look at some of the fantastic young people involved in the sport. Although it was a struggle to narrow down winners in some categories given to us by The Sword editorial team, we enjoyed sharing stories about you all over zoom and a bottle of wine. We hope that this piece of ridiculous writing at least makes you smile!

Most likely to become a referee - Barney Halliwell

The most obvious place to start for a group of refs and one where we reached our conclusion quite quickly. The panel has



Barney

memories of Barney refereeing Senior Women's Sabre at the Hamlet Open. Really quite a great referee with exactly the right temperament: calm, self-assured and a great laugh! When you stop fencing, Barney, come join us in the ref's room.

Britain's Got Talent Winner - Amy Westwell on the viola



Amy

Word is that Amy is a dab hand at the viola so our thoughts turned to the electric string band, Escala that got to the finals of BGT in 2008. Yes: We know she was barely in primary school back then and yes: that makes us feel very old. Our call is that if Amy jazzed up the act with a bit of techno-electricness, she'd have Simon Cowell on his feet applauding.

Most likely to become a millionaire - Oliver Strange



Oliver

Oliver is a bit of a whizz kid with computers and coding. Set to start university soon, is it possible that fencing could provide the next Zuckerberg with a new Facebook? Although our group had to admit we'd much prefer MySpace to be resurrected - MySpace was the real MVP. Is that how you meme? Did we meme right?

Most likely to turn up at an airport without their passport - Elsie Llewellyn



Elsie

While the "losing passport" gig seems to be a theme common to a fair few Scottish sabreurs, Elsie's tale might be our favourite. When she "wisely" handed her passport over in the airport to a coach for safekeeping, Elsie promptly forgot doing this at all, spending the next 30-40 minutes in a panic that she couldn't return home. I think we all agree it's lucky her coach was there to come to the rescue!

Most likely to become a coach - Jaimie Cook

We think that there's a reasonable chance that Jaimie will follow in dad's footsteps and go into coaching. He certainly has the charisma and sense of humour to make a great coach! Of course, if he doesn't wish to pursue coaching, we'd recommend comedy as a potential profession. At least some of the panel have been reduced to tears of



Jaimie

laughter by his antics both on and off the piste!

Most likely to get a speeding ticket - Laura Sheffield



Laura

All members of the panel have been to at least one competition where Laura has got to check in just in time before it closes, often signing her name by the skin of her teeth. For no other reason, we reckon Laura at least has a decent chance of accidentally nudging an mph or two over the speed limit. What with the number of speed cameras around the Leon Paul Centre, that's probably going to end up with a ticket!

Most likely Nobel Prize winner - Ian Ho



Ian

No real strong evidence behind this one but the panel were unanimous: Ian strikes us as a clever cookie - super switched on and motivated. So while we have no idea what he's going to go into, we're confident that he's going to excel in it; maybe becoming a fencing Nobel prize winner!

Most likely to write a book - Mhairi McLaughlin

Mhairi is at university studying psychology. We reckon that if she continues in this field, she could write a fantastically intriguing memoir. Maybe a "Psychology of Fencers" book? There's got to be something interesting going on with us! We enjoy



Mhairi

spending our weekends in anonymous sports halls strewn throughout the country and the world!

Most likely to become an MP - Ed Scott Payne



Ed

Ed was an instant and natural choice. Almost everyone on the panel can recall a time when Ed "debated" with the ref; sometimes more successfully than others. Ed has also become increasingly engaged with the Cadet Epee Facebook community, and taken responsibility for managing his own season. We think those are great traits for a public servant!

Most likely to win the Hunger Games - Isabella Summers

We reckon Isabella is fencing's own Katniss Everdeen. From her dedication to her military-style instincts, presumably picked up from her parents, we think she has what it takes to go into the Hunger Games arena



Isabella

- and come out as champion. With the number of sisters she has, we also imagine she's had a degree of practice in the brawl over the last roast potato, making her even more qualified to emerge as victor.

Honourable mention for the unluckiest flier - Billy Shepherd



Billy

Any discussion of notable incidents isn't complete without a tale of woe from international travel. Billy takes the crown for 'unluckiest flier' in British Fencing. By our count, Billy through no fault of his own, has lost his kit three times in one season to the carousels at various international airports. Our panel has seen some true luggage disasters on fencing trips, but none of us has ever seen one person fall prey to "luggage handling errors" as often as Billy. Hopefully, next time you fly, Billy, all of your kit will make it to the right country on the right day!

Most likely to become an Olympic/ World Champion

The last category for us to decide and frankly we found it impossible to choose. The entire cadet and junior cohort from last season are a phenomenal group of individuals. Dedicated to their fencing, they've formed close-knit teams and friendship groups, also earning spectacular domestic and international success. We've no doubt many will go on to overcome the challenges that have arisen in the past 12 months and achieve great things, both in fencing and in their lives outside of the sport.

Our only advice, and it is genuine and heartfelt, is to always remember in the hard times how much you enjoy this slightly ridiculous sport, and to embrace the many life-lasting friendships that you will make over the course of your competitive careers. We wish all of you all the best and hope to see you on the piste somewhere soon!

LESSONS LEARNED. EXPERIENCES GAINED.

British Fencing Olympic Team Manager Johnny Davis tells us how a fencing life is for learning as well as for living.

When I was 12 years old I had an accident and was lying in hospital when I saw something that changed my life forever. In the hospital room there was a television which was showing the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. Competing on that day was Mary Peters, a Belfast girl who went on to win the gold medal in the Pentathlon event. At that moment, before I had been introduced to fencing, I decided I wanted to win the Olympic Games. In which sport or in which city? I had no idea but at that point I decided that I was going to try and win an Olympic gold medal. At that moment my life changed for ever and most definitely for the better.



Lessons learned: Looking back on this episode in my life I have realised that it is important to know and understand yourself and to be honest with yourself as to what it is you want to do in life. At this stage in my life I hadn't even started fencing. I didn't personally know anybody who was an Olympic athlete. I hadn't discussed the idea with anybody, family or friends and no one from Northern Ireland had ever gone to the Olympics as a fencer. So I was completely lacking in facts and process but I acknowledged and started to feed the burning desire I recognised in me. The fact

and information gathering which I needed to go through, identifying the process I needed to follow and building a support team around me came from my desire and curiosity. Too many people in life look back with regret on things they didn't do and the chances they didn't take. Stepping into the unknown is difficult and challenging but it's a better journey to be on than one that has nowhere to go.

I began fencing at 14 and at that stage I was just fencing once a week at school. I was doing many sports and it was quite a few years before I focused on fencing. I feel that I benefited from doing these other sports. They helped to develop my athletic ability, coordination and mobility.

At 16, I began to take our sport more seriously and at this stage I also started to set myself goals. I started a diary and I set objectives which were ambitious and achievable. It was also at this stage that I started to choose to make sacrifices in pursuit of my goals. I am a big music fan and I remember deciding not to go to some gigs and not to buy some records, so that I could go training and save money to go to competitions. It was also at this stage that I began to understand that the life my friends were living - partying, staying up

late, eating what they liked - was one that I could do later in my life. I realised that I had two options - the amazing opportunities that my sport offered me or this other "normal" life. It was clear that most other people only had one option and that I really wasn't missing too much.

Lessons learned: Given the choices you will have to make - I don't like to call them sacrifices but life opportunities - it is really important that you enjoy the journey of your life in fencing. It can seem really tough - training, travelling, not socialising like your friends - but be aware of and appreciate the amazing opportunities that fencing gives you. Travel, friendships, amazing life experiences. Don't look back on your career and not have explored and appreciated these opportunities. Your fencing career will be a short part of your life - enjoy all that it offers you.

One of the things I would like to have done better was to be able to learn to separate my fencing life from life outside of fencing. It's important to be able to switch off from fencing and do other things in order to get a healthy perspective on your life as a whole. I am really into music and worked in the music industry for most of my fencing career. And whilst it was





sometimes very difficult to balance work and fencing my time, working with some amazing artists and groups gave me a fantastic escape from the pressures of training and competing. Even if you are ever lucky enough to be a full-time athlete it is important to have something outside of fencing to give you alternative mental stimulation. Learn to compartmentalise your life so that you are 100% focused on all aspects of your fencing at the right time but also able to switch off from it to all. To be a successful international athlete you have to love your sport deep - deep inside your soul and to be 100% driven to succeed but it is important to give yourself room to breathe outside of it, in order to refresh and regenerate your mind and body.

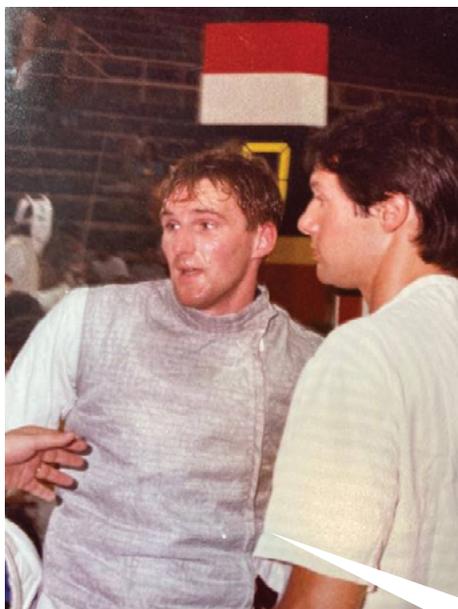
Being based in Belfast I didn't have a coach. So, I simply learnt by practicing with the other kids in school. I was lucky enough to win age group medals at U14, U16 and U18 National level with a style of fencing that I can only describe as determined and agricultural. I used to go to competitions in England and Scotland and be so jealous of these kids with their own coaches. Imagine having your own coach!!! Rather than get frustrated with my situation I decided to focus on what I could control and where I could learn. I vowed that I would never lose hits because I wasn't fit enough and that I would never lose hits because my equipment didn't work. I could largely control those two things. I also became really curious as to what these kids with their coaches did that I didn't do. I watched how they moved, when they moved, tried

to work out what they did and when they did it. I made notes and I came home and made my club schoolmates practice these moves with me over and over again until I could do what those other kids could do.

Lessons learned: It taught me to always be curious, to always try to learn and improve. Successful people never stop learning. I encourage you to never stop asking questions and to keep finding new information which will help you maximise your potential. There is no such thing as a stupid question. Ask your coach and the senior fencers around you for advice and guidance. If you don't find the answer you want then ask again. Someone once told me that "you show your level of intelligence not by what you claim to know but by the questions you ask" and I believe in that statement 100%.

I moved to England to pursue my dreams when I was 18 but wasn't invited to take part in my first Junior World Cup until I was 20. This was really frustrating, as I knew I was better than many of those fencers who were getting selected but I used that frustration to drive me on. I focused on what I had to do and didn't get distracted by what they were doing. Part of my plan in moving to London was to get to work with Ziemek Wojciechowski but it took a full year before I was able to get lessons from him. Whilst waiting for the opportunity I made sure that he saw me training hard and regularly in order to get his attention, so that he would start coaching me. This required constant discipline and determination and focusing on my desired goal.

Lessons learned: Being a successful athlete requires a high level of ability and



talent but there are a lot of key actions which you can control which require no talent. Being punctual. Being organised. Working hard. Being super fit. These will all contribute massively to your success and simply require that you have the correct disciplined attitude and focus. It was at this stage that I started a training diary which became my bible. I set goals, wrote up a plan - year, month, week, day, each session - and what I was focusing on in each and every session. I reviewed and reset them regularly. This is key to success. Plan - Do - Analyse - Check.

For a short while I probably allowed myself to become too distracted by what others were doing - their results, rankings etc - and looking back on it I would like to have learnt not to give any energy or attention to that and to simply focus on what I could control.

Within a few years I was lucky enough to break into the GB Senior Team (ahead of most of those with their own coaches!) and I then started to really believe that I could have success at Senior level.

Looking back on it I believe that those difficulties I faced - no coaching, no selection (including not being selected for an Olympic Games that I should have gone to!) tested my resilience and determination and made me a better and stronger athlete and person.

Lessons learned: Wherever you are on your journey you should appreciate that you are blessed to have found something in life that excites you and motivates you in the way your sport does. Never lose sight of why you started fencing. Remember the pure joy of fencing. If times get tough always allow yourself to remember why you are fencing.

I am so grateful for having found our amazing sport. Most people I know outside of my sport circle have never found something in their life which has given them the feeling that fencing gives me. Be grateful for all that fencing offers you. It is an amazing sport which helps us to learn about ourselves.

COACH PLAYBOOK - EPEE

KEEP GOING

ADP Lead Epee Coach, John Rees on how it is the courage to continue that counts ...

Resilience - the ability to bounce back: it's in the job description for athletes. But the capacity to recover from unplanned breaks like Lockdown can be harder to muster - for both athletes and coaches. Many athletes have enforced career breaks due to injury. Fixable injuries are a pain but rarely stop a committed athlete from returning to training and competition. Breaks can give athletes time to reflect and grow, even enhancing long-term prospects.



With Laupheim Team

This is my take-out after my own stop-start journey in fencing. I was a keen sportsman in my younger days competing in multiple sports (and even folk dancing!) until I was introduced to fencing. My first enforced break was down to relocating for work but I came back. My return signalled the beginning of my coaching career when asked to fill a void left by a retiring coach. Still my competitive flame burned so I evolved into a "player-coach". Again work pulled me away but around a decade later, after a fluke meeting with a former pupil, Matt Haynes, fencing pulled me back. Those of you who know Matt will know of his passion for fencing. It was not too hard for him to convince me to return to the sport we all love; this time though, I ditched my competition jacket for my coaching one. It was one of the best - and easiest - decisions I've ever made.

I combine a long-term approach to teaching fencing with individual athlete-centred plans. Teaching technique is only a small

part of becoming the best. Fight-craft and style takes time. To be more specific, you learn to win hits and fights by losing them! Each loss is a valuable lesson on the route to winning.

But anyone's best-laid plans were thrown into turmoil within the past year. In person contact time for me and my athletes was reduced to nothing. So what happens when you can't even fight in training? How can you learn those valuable lessons? I would say the signposts to show us the way are clear: Adapt. Keep Going. Control the things you can control!

Fitness is the easiest one. A prerequisite of any high level athlete is supreme sport-related fitness. So the first job for my fencers was to ensure they knew how to stay fit and improve their fitness during the various lockdowns ... and wow, did they do that. Home gyms were set up - and you really don't need much. We stepped it up though with the support of international epeeist, George Morris, who ran S&C Zoom sessions that have gone down a treat. Well done George! A true gent who has shown his best in challenging times, helping so many others.

My other go-to was video analysis. Prior to the global pandemic, of course we analysed videos of fencing matches. But the lockdowns moved this to an entirely different level. Before, I can remember



With San Juan Bronze Medalist Alex Powell

athletes watching videos and saying things like "Oh! That was a cool hit". It probably was, but that's not really analysis, is it? The time we have been afforded now allows us to delve a lot deeper. We've had time to gain a better understanding of the sport by watching videos, breaking them down and then taking time to plan future seasons with a coherent strategy.

I'm not for one minute suggesting that the past months have been ideal. Lockdown for me has meant missing coaching, travelling and face-to-face interactions with both fencers and coaches here and abroad. It has left a large hole in my life but I've kept with it, as have the fencers. We find ways to cope. I've even started playing computer games to pass the time: something I haven't done since the very first games consoles were released!

Lockdown may seem like a lifetime but fencing is a long-term sport. Most fencers will not reach their peak until their late 20's while the competitive lifespan of a top performing fencer is at least until their late 30's. So, a year out from competition at Cadet and Junior level can be used for advantage - although it may not seem like that initially!

The key is to remember why you are (or even were) fencing - remember the fun, remember the enjoyment. And then the one thing you shouldn't forget:

You have time. Keep going.

GOING PLACES

A Fencing Travelogue: Volume I - Jon Willis

One of the overriding disappointments of the last season was not being able to travel, buy those delightful little fridge magnets as a memento of the thirteenth largest city in the Ukraine, spend too much on your mum's preloaded bank card and tip out all your toiletries into a bin because you didn't remember the 100ml rule. Gladly we have the Worldwide Wonder, otherwise known as Jon Willis, who in his previous life as one of Britain's most successful epeeists has managed to travel the world using his ... ahem ... inimitable Northern charm to diffuse the most undiplomatic of situations. Here is one of his merry memories.

"How far would you go for World Cup Points?"

In January 2010 following a successful hip arthroscopy and a six-month injury lay off, I bravely boarded a flight to Dubai on what was the first leg in my quest for some easy World Cup points. These points were said to be located on the Iranian Island of Kish, the location for the first World Cup of the new season. Trying to protect my world ranking (having missed both the European & World Championships the previous year) it made sense as the Iranian leg of the World Cup circuit was, for some reason, the poorest attended on the tour. The aim of a cheeky L8 and 14 World Cup points or more would be a nice way to start the year!

After landing in Dubai, you have to navigate yourself from T1 to T2 then queue up to pay an ever-increasing price in cash for a flight to the 'Beautiful Island of Kish'. A process that takes substantially longer than the 20-minute flight time.

Travelling now with a couple of epee fencers and likely lads from Ireland & Australia that I met up with in Dubai, we got off the tiny turboprop and set foot on the gulf island paradise. Breezing up to passport control, Andy handed over his



Irish passport and got waved through, Nick handed over his Australian passport and was also waved straight through. I then handed over my British passport, the officer took a long look at it, looked at me, looked again at the passport and once more back at me and said, "Wait over there".

Not wanting to upset him or anyone behind me, I did as I was told and stepped aside to let the rest of the passengers through. As I sat and patiently waited, two gentlemen stepped out of an office and started walking towards me. Both dressed in a military uniform, sporting the finest pair of moustaches I have ever seen, think General Sir Anthony Cecil Hogmanay Melchett but even more bushy and carrying automatic weapons.

I stood to attention as they approached (rude not to in the circumstances). "Come this way" the slightly larger of the two men said to me. I brought out my finest Hugh Grant impression and tried to explain that

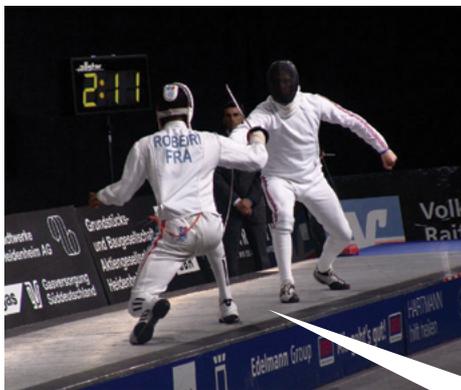
I was here for a sports event and that the very nice man at the desk still had my passport. "Come this way" insisted the man and as my polite protests continued. He pointed his gun at me with his finger on the trigger and repeated "THIS WAY!" My natural response was to fill my pants with a mixture of wee and fart before heading in the direction indicated by the man with the waving of his firearm.



Victory

We entered an interview room where I was directed to a seat at a table. The two gentlemen sat across from me on the other side of the desk. They briefly conferred in their native language before the more senior looked at me and said, "Why are you here?" A simple question with a simple answer I thought. "I'm here for a fencing competition," I exhaled in relief, sure in the fact that this little misunderstanding would be sorted out very soon. Sadly the two men didn't seem to know what I was talking about. "Why are you here?" he repeated. "I'm here for sport, there is a Fencing World Cup competition starting tomorrow, I'm a fencer." This length of sentence seemed not to aid their understanding as to why a British guy was trying to access their country. "Why are you here?" was once more repeated but louder and in a distinct tone of impatience. Running out of ideas I said the word 'fencing' in every language I knew, "Fencing... Fechten... Escrime..." I also made the international hand signal for fencing and pointed my finger at him and demonstrated a few moves. Not impressed





Final

by my sixte, quarte, counter-quart, sixte simulation, the now visibly angry man leaned forward and shouted, "WHY ARE YOU HERE?"

I was now starting to worry. What was going to happen to me? It was less than 3 years earlier that 15 British Navy personnel were detained by Iran sparking an international incident. As special as Mummy Willis always tells me I am, I doubted that the British Government or Performance Director at the time would have made much effort to come and rescue me.

As I sat there regretting a few life choices, including my quest for some easy World Cup points and resigning myself to life in an Iranian jail, the door opened and a lady walked in. She was dressed in a smart blouse, Armani jeans, high heels and a yellow headscarf. She looked at me for a split second then unleashed a tirade of shouting and finger wagging at the two men sitting opposite me. Not understanding a word she was saying, I imagined it was something like "What are you two idiots doing? Do you not know who this is? This is Jon Willis, world class epee fencer and international jet-setting playboy. How dare you treat one of the self-styled best fencers in the world like this?" My initial hope quickly turned to panic as I

realised she could just as easily be saying "What are you two idiots doing? I told you to kill the infidel and bury the body!"

Both parties then entered into a less heated conversation before the lady turned to me, placed a hand on my shoulder and said "Don't worry, I'm Sophie, the lady you arranged your travel and accommodation with. Are you OK? You are very pale?" "I'm fine" I answered, "I'm from Manchester, not much sun up there." This response seemed to excellently hide the fact I was as scared as a sabre fencer taking an IQ test.



A short time later I had been fingerprinted, photographed, and my passport returned. I was taken out to the transport bus where I was greeted by my annoyed travelling companions who felt they had been made to unfairly wait for me just because, as they put it, 'no one likes the British'. This was the end of the first part of my quest for easy World Cup points, but far from the end of my eventful trip to the 'Beautiful Island Kish'.

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MIND MATTERS: GETTING PSYCHED WITH DAN, JOHNNY AND KARIM



Johnny

Given the pandemic is leaving us with a little bit more mental baggage than usual, we check in with how Dan, Johnny and Karim suggest unpacking the Lockdown mental suitcase. Their credentials take in all aspects of the sport. Dan Kellner is a 2004 USA Olympian, Owner of Brooklyn Bridge Fencing Club, British Fencing Performance Coach of the Year and Coach to World Silver Medallist 2019, Marcus Mepstead. Johnny Davis is a 1988 and 1992 Olympian and now British Fencing Olympic Team Manager and Karim Bashir is a former fencer, sports journalist, commentator and Editor of The Sword.

to be nice to yourself.” Dan chimes with this sentiment, “That’s especially the case for athletes who’ve all had a season taken away from them. Some have missed out on goals that they may never get to achieve because of that. Athletes need to be wary of being too harsh on themselves.”

Karim raises the role of therapy in better mental health. “There should be no stigma in talking to a therapist or a sports psychologist. However, it’s not one-size-fits all. You can find therapy in talking to your neighbour or anyone else. I find talking to my dog therapeutic because it’s calming for me. It takes me away for five minutes and then I’m refreshed and recharged.” Johnny is of the same opinion, “Everyone has got to find a new positive safety valve. Everything has changed and we’ve got to find new ways and new habits ... it’s key to find a way to release.”



Dan

Karim begins with the acknowledgement that the pandemic, as for many, put a kibosh on pretty much everything. “I was so used to travelling”, he says. “But once I’d recognised the significant changes the restrictions were having on me, things got a lot better.”

Johnny and Dan agree that recognising the situation at hand is vital; the next step being to accept it. “My business ground to a halt”, adds Johnny, “but I’m always optimistic and have the greatest job in the World as Olympic TM. It’s given me the motivation to get up every day.”

In therapy himself, Dan is also a fan, “I think talking to somebody is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself. Athletes have narcissistic tendencies so what’s better than paying someone to listen to you ... and not judge you?! It can be one of the most freeing things.”

In their chat, Dan, Johnny and Karim go depth and breadth with what can challenge our thinking during times of difference and change. If you, in all confidence, would also like to talk to someone about how you are feeling, then visit the [NHS’s Every Mind Matters website](#).



Karim

In New York, it’s the same for Dan. “I run a business too and at the beginning I fell into catastrophic thinking. But instead of going down that rabbit-hole I accepted an invitation to talk with other coaches about fencing. During the conversation Ralph Bissdorf (2000 Olympic silver medalist, now coaching in New England, USA) suggested coaching via Zoom. And I thought, “well I’m going to do that”.”

The consensus emerges that emotional challenges should make their way onto everyday ‘to do’ lists. “It’s about controlling the controllables”, asserts Dan. “If you make a list of things to do, you are responsible for the list. It makes concentrating on your actionable items much easier. It’s easier on stress.”

Meanwhile, Johnny returns to the role of self-recognition. “Understanding what’s “normal” about not being happy and when you are going off the scale is important”, he says.

For his part, Dan is matter of fact that everything can be a positive: “It’s ok to stop if you don’t want to fence anymore. It’s ok to go harder, if that’s what you want to do. No matter which of these choices you make, you will be fine. Everything will be ok.”

Johnny endorses this approach, “I’m a big one for lists and a big one for self-discipline in the sense of having a plan. But in the current climate there’s also the need

Their full conversation can be found on British Fencing’s YouTube channel [here](#).

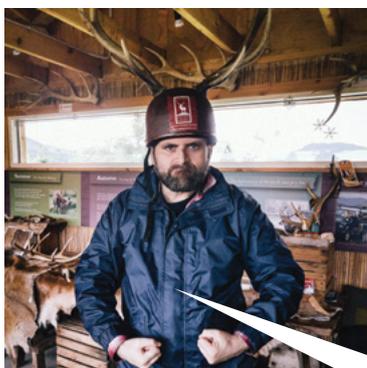
WHO'S THE GREATEST?



THE SWORD

With competitive fencing suspended since March 2020, The Fencing Podcast team of Gav McMenemy, Kate Daykin and Sean Walton have had plenty of time on their hands to consider that recurring question in all sports: who is the Greatest Of All Time? Several factors come into play when trying to come up with an answer: Olympic and World Championships titles won, the length of career, the development and globalisation of the sport, the video evidence (there's a disappointing lack of YouTube footage from the 1930s!). Here are their thoughts.

Gav's Stab at Epee



Gav McMenemy

When I started thinking about the greatest epee fencer of all time, I confess to some anguish. Men's epee has been an "official" fencing discipline for a very long time with much written about the various athletes. On the other hand, women's epee only became an official Olympic discipline in 1996. We know that women fenced with epees before then but there is almost no detail out there.

Where to begin? With the great Eduardo Mangiarotti. Over the course of his career, he won more medals in epee and foil than any other. In fact, it is unlikely that his record will ever be beaten because we live in a completely different age. Fencing is faster, more athletic and needs a level of dedication that makes the chance of succeeding at multiple weapons very difficult. So, while many consider Mangiarotti THE unbeatable great, I decided to restrict myself to the modern era where I would feel more sure of the fencers I was considering.

Over the years I've come across many fencers that people talked of in hushed

tones: Phillippe Riboud, Eric Srecki, but a fencer I almost considered was the Hungarian Győző Kulcsár. He was undoubtedly brilliant, winning individual Olympic gold, three team golds and two individual bronze medals. More than that, he was also a brilliant coach: the head coach for the Hungarian team who produced Timea Nagy, Emese Szász-Kovács and Krisztián Kulcsár. Sadly, Győző died in 2018.

However, the fencer I genuinely believe is the greatest epeeist of all time is Pavel Kolobkov. Pavel has probably won more medals at any level than any other modern male epeeist; twenty-six spread across Olympic, World and European Championships. With Kolobkov there was always the suspicion he was psychic. He seemed to know what you were going to do and when you were going to do it. Famously, in 2008 in a semi-final against Benjamin Steffen he was 8-11 down with 5 seconds remaining and still won. Kolobkov had a singular style, appearing relaxed without any blade contact. I don't think I've ever seen his way of fencing successfully emulated and this adds to his uniqueness.

In women's epee, with fewer results to consider, my choices came down to two epeeists, Timea Nagy and Laura Flessel-Colovic. I've mentioned Timea Nagy before. She was coached by Győző Kulcsár. Timea was a two time (back-to-back!) Olympic gold medallist and a World Champion. She was a great fencer. Despite all that, I believe the greatest women's epeeist was Laura Flessel-Colovic. Nicknamed "the wasp", Laura's speed and agility were astounding. Her ability to strike from just about any position made her incredibly dangerous on the piste. I remember seeing her take a lesson at a ferocious pace - so quick it was hard to follow. She managed to win at every level: individual and team Olympic gold, six times a World Champion and plenty of other medals. Looking at her record I'm unsure when she will be eclipsed. A few epeeists have come close. None have surpassed her.

Sean Engages Foil

Despite the, no doubt, valid claims for Nedo Nadi (Olympic champion 1912 and 1920) and Christian O' Oriola (Olympic champion 1952 and 1956) to be considered the greatest men's foilist of all time, I'm going to limit my discussion to fencers



Sean Walton

who competed in my lifetime. And that presents the first problem in picking out the greatest. Nobody since D'Oriola has won more than one individual Olympic title, and several of those champions would have to be considered surprise winners. Only four fencers have won more than one individual Olympic medal (Revenu, Kamuti, Romankov and Cerioni). Although Olympic gold remains the ultimate prize in our sport, World Championship victories must also be considered a great measure of a fencer's status. So, with all these things in mind, I have a shortlist: The Soviets Alexander Romankov and Vladimir Smirnov, Sergei Goloubitsky of Ukraine and Germany's Peter Joppich.

Joppich's four individual world titles cover a period of significant change in how the weapon was fenced. A ferocious competitor with a sharp tactical brain, Joppich has been the star of German fencing over the last decade and a half. He will be competing in Tokyo where he probably has one last chance to add an individual Olympic medal to his tally. It is the glaring omission from his record.

Goloubitsky won three successive World Championships from 1997 to 1999, to add to the Olympic silver medal he won back in 1992. He really was the dominant foilist of the 90s, displaying a sense of distance and timing that separated him from the rest of the field.

Smirnov's tragic death at the 1982 World Championships in Rome was the catalyst for huge improvements in safety standards for fencing equipment but it is worth remembering that he was reigning World & Olympic champion at the time of his untimely death at the age of just 28. Who knows what he might have achieved?



Vezzali (#BizzTeam)

Romankov won his first of five individual World titles in 1974 and his last in 1983, he collected an individual Olympic silver in 1976 and added two bronzes in 1980 and 1988, finally claiming Olympic gold with the Soviet Union team, in 1988 - to go with 5 team World titles. It's a massive record. He was an outstanding technician, tactically adaptable, innovative and a fiercely passionate competitor. For me, this level of consistency over so many years makes Alexander Romankov the greatest of all time.

In women's foil, picking the greatest of all time is much more straightforward. Italy's Valentina Vezzali's incredible record of 3 Olympic individual titles (plus a silver and bronze,) 3 Olympic team golds and 6 individual World titles makes her not only the greatest women's foilist of all time but also one of the greatest Olympians in any sport. I could have thrown in the names of Ilona Elek of Hungary, Austria's Ellen Muller-Preis and Helene Meyer of Germany either side of the Second World War - Meyer's story as a Jewish athlete in Nazi Germany is truly remarkable - or West Germany's Cornelia Hanisch in the 80s or current World and Olympic champion Inna Deriglazova as alternatives but sheer weight of numbers points squarely to Vezzali. A genuine phenomenon.

Kate Cuts Through Sabre



Kate Daykin

When talking about the greatest athlete of all time, the initial reaction is to look at the results, numbers and medals. A valid analysis but the difference between a good and a great athlete isn't defined by medals. It is something more. Let's start off with men's sabre and I give you Aldo Montano (ITA). Perhaps a surprising choice, given the current rankings and performance from people such as Oh (KOR) and Szilagyi (HUN). However, I don't think there are any fencers on the men's sabre circuit who don't know who Montano is. He comes from a dynasty of fencers, the third generation to win an Olympic medal, which he did in Athens in 2004, coached by Christian Bauer one of the most successful sabre coaches. And he did a front flip when he won!



Montano (#BizziTeam)

Montano is no shrinking violet and you can clearly see this if you watch his fencing. (I recommend [Sydney Sabre's epic compilation](#)). He is driven and passionate and has a never given up quality. One that I really admire. Notably at the 2011 World Championships in Italy when he injured the tendon in his ankle but still went on to win gold. Also, at the Beijing Olympics, Italy won bronze in the team event, which came down to Montano's win against Stanislav Pozdniakov - a pretty formidable opponent - from 44-42 down. His determination is what makes him a great fencer. His impressive career in fencing spans over 20 years and he is still going, while giving back and coaching the younger generations.

For women's sabre I have picked Mariel Zagunis. Where Montano presents himself to be passionate and extroverted, Zagunis shows herself to be focused and methodical. It's important to note that women's sabre is relatively young as a competitive sport in comparison to the other weapons. In 2000 she was part of Team USA at the senior World Championships where they won gold - she was just 14 years old! In 2004, she only just missed out on qualification for the Olympics, despite a strong season leading up to the Games both in Juniors and Seniors. She has said that it was really challenging for her. She had put all her hard work in but missed out. Nevertheless, she

did eventually get a spot on the team and despite entering the competition as the underdog, she went on to win gold. The first American fencer to do so in the history of the Olympics. She followed this with another win at the 2008 Olympics and she says that the 2009 season was probably one of her best. I believe that she not only set the standard for women's sabre in the US but also internationally. Even Olga Kharlan has described her as "fencing like a goddess".



Zagunis (#BizziTeam)

Fast forward to 2017 when she gave birth to her daughter, Sunday. As a woman and as an athlete, there are social pressures to either be a full-time athlete or a full-time mother but I think Mariel has shown that you can do both. She came back in 2018 and achieved an 8th and a bronze medal at the Seoul and Moscow Grand Prix, respectively, and she won the last World Cup in Athens before the current suspension of competitions.

On a more personal note, Mariel Zagunis has always been my fencing idol and her fencing started my love of sabre. There is something about her fencing that just captivated me. When I was younger, I didn't know anyone on the fencing circuit nationally or internationally, but I knew who Mariel Zagunis was.

From trophies to temperament, there is a lot that makes an athlete but for me it's grit. It's the never giving up attitude and not letting anything hold you back that makes both these fencers the greatest of all time.

So, there you have it. The voting is in from The Fencing Podcast jury. It's almost certainly not going to settle the debate and we look forward to a time when we can all get together in person to discuss it again and in more detail.

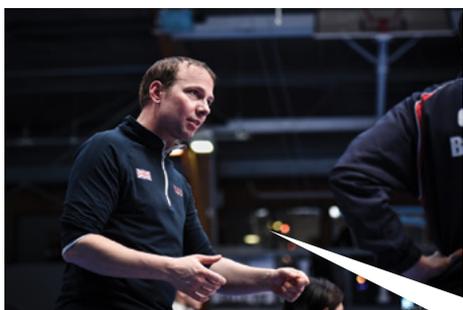
COACH PLAYBOOK - FOIL

Chris Galeslout

We caught up with Lead ADP Foil Coach, Chris Galeslout amidst his lockdown roles as house renovator, husband, club coach, father, school teacher, home-schooler and head home chef ... (Did we mention he is ADP Foil Lead?) ... Multitasker much?

My overriding motivation is 'One Team'. I love this idea. My central belief as a coach is that being part of a team to become the best we can be drives us to do this sport. This concept has guided me through life and, most recently, through lockdown.

As a young fencer, I was always more about team than individual. After being very successful nationally, I stopped fencing aged 19 when I suffered a knee injury. It took five years before I picked up a weapon again. But then it took me no time at all to realise that, to compete at senior level, was the stuff my dreams were made of and I threw myself into that dream: fighting to be part of one team.



I fenced for The Netherlands; the eldest on the squad. At senior World Cups, I would end up being the mentor, looking out for my team-mates and keeping the team together. I eventually started coaching Dutch foilist Sebastian Borst full-time. He was my team; I was his. Working together not by what we did, but by how we did it - infused by that one team spirit - made it work so well.

These days, of course, my 'One Team' is GBR Foil. As one team, sharing one mindset, British Fencing can show that we appreciate our GBR athletes and GBR fencers. All of us are behind this dream to get the best out of ourselves. The way the ADP sessions respond with a defined purpose, especially in lockdown, help keep

this dream alive, and help keep fencers engaged, motivated and equal. It has been so rewarding to see everyone engaging with online activity. During one webinar on tactics, we ran out of time but everyone wanted to keep going, talking it through to its natural conclusion.

It's impressive how quickly we all adapt and connect with what is possible. Bi-weekly ADP team meetings and merging ideas and activity across all weapons has created a greater sense of community and strength. As a coach, the online sessions mean that although I may not have physically seen a lot of people for almost a year, I've stayed meaningfully within their reach and they are within my scope, inspiring me to reach out and help in new ways.

This is crucial. What I would say to all our fencers is that if you meet people in your life who are willing to help you, then accept it. Accepting help is never a weakness, and it enables you to reach higher levels of yourself.

One particular kind of help I always seek is inspiration. At the London 2012 Olympics Japanese national coach, Oleg Matseichuk took a huge risk by playing the team reserve, Awaji Suguru in the final. By Awaji fencing in this match, he would not be denied an Olympic medal. Oleg told me afterwards that Awaji had been the reserve because he'd been injured and was not 100% match fit. That said, it had only been because of Awaji that Japan had qualified for their team spot in the first place. So Oleg felt his coach's approach had to be that they lost as a team or won as a team but whatever happened they were one team. Awaji fenced like a warrior. It brought a tear to my eye to see that individual giving his all for the team, with a breath-taking level of camaraderie and trust. Trust



energises the fencing. Fencing becomes the connection. Fencing is life itself.

Those much-fought-for moments can reassure us, allow us to know what our fencing future looks like beyond lockdown. Cadet and Junior fencers who've missed out on scheduled championships will benefit from other more beautiful, purposeful moments. I am 100% convinced that when you keep going, when you refuse to be a victim, you will always meet that moment of reward. Often the later that comes, the sweeter it is.

I pay tribute to all Cadets and Juniors in this peculiar era. I applaud them for staying with it. We know that we are empowered enough now to move on from fear and doubt, and park up the difficulty of frustrated ambition. I am very positive about the future we can still achieve. Together.



GOING PLACES

A Fencing Travelogue: Volume II - Dominique Szokolovics

In our second travelogue, Dom tells us there's no place like home.

Places are never end destinations, I have found.

I used to travel to Cadet, Junior and Senior A-grade competitions and championships at home and away from the age of 14. In the movie of my life that somebody is eventually, definitely, without doubt going to make, this particular chapter will be a cool graphic of planes dashing round the globe. The plot intensifies with a quick and slick montage of swords clashing in Eastern Europe, armed snipers on the roof of the hotel and a police escort to a competition in Sicily (true - not added by the producer just to spice up the screenplay), and training at Tauberbischofsheim. There's an entire scene dedicated to the World Champs in



Foggia (#BizziTeam)

Korea in the billion-pound hotel with a different theme to every floor, where the glamour did quickly fade when I ordered an omelette for breakfast on the morning of the competition. It came undercooked. I sent it back. A fresh one came - undercooked. I sent that back. The third time, even I didn't fight it, eating the runny concoction. When I got in the lift, the eggs took their revenge and I projectile vomited, which I discovered you rarely do one time only.

At 16: injury. There's nothing like one word to stop the great big adventure that is your life. I suffered a tear to my anterior cruciate ligament that put me out of fencing for 7 years. Putting me out of fencing also meant firmly placing me at home in Rickmansworth and as much as I loved



Dom in Tauber

growing up there, it is the kind of location that had made travelling elsewhere quite appealing.

When I was 23, Professor Liam Harrington asked me to coach at the local club in Rickmansworth. Coaching made me put my kit back on, inspiring me to fence once more. As I gradually took responsibility in bringing on young fencers, I rebuilt my confidence and re-discovered my love for the sport.

By now there was an obvious title emerging for my blockbuster biopic: it would be called 'The Comeback'. The dream was taking shape. I started to medal at Senior Satellites, I won Senior Nationals, I felt it was starting to come together. All I needed was a venue for the scene where the audience is in no doubt that I am back - in a blaze of glory.

I chose St Maur.

This Senior World Cup event was the first time I didn't have an entourage. No matter. I was writing my own script. I could do it and I did. 4 up and 2 down in poules, I would surely have a decent draw. I drew Shanayeva. Not the Shanayeva who was a distant relation of World and Olympic Champion fame, Aida Shanayeva herself. No, Aida Shanayeva herself. No matter that she had world-class coach Stefano Cerioni and the entire Russian team at the end of her piste; I had the support of a brown plastic chair with metal legs that I could rest my piste bag on.

That day Shanayeva wasn't coping. I landed my attacks confidently and thought, 'Wow I am going to win this'. We all know that tempting fencing fate always ends up in disaster. I lost 13-15. But that in itself was a win.

I was happy everything was going in the right direction. Then one day I experienced a weird nigggle. An MRI revealed a torn meniscus. 3 days later I was undergoing surgery. It was Groundhog Day. Surgery plus time out from the sport - this wasn't helping my comeback, I thought. So I rushed my rehab and returned to fencing within 4 months.

Now for 'Dom: The Comeback Part II', and the Senior Grand Prix in Turin.

I'll fast-forward for you. I lost all my 6 poule fights 4-5. Yep. All 6.

24 hours later and I was at club training on the Monday, coaching the kids. From around the world back to Hertfordshire, and the realisation that I had actually made my comeback. You can travel anywhere, do anything but how you see yourself in these places is what really allows you to travel. Now - when Covid-restriction free - I go all over the show with my fencers to Cadet and Junior competitions. It is such an amazing experience to take them to places I fenced in my day. They ask me which is my favourite place. "Anywhere" I reply, "As long as it's with you lot".



Multiple National Champion

BF RECOGNISES YOU

As a coach and as British Fencing Head of Pathways, I am aware that, within any programme, dreams are made and dreams are shattered. We're talking about young people giving their best years to fencing, and we must do our best for them. They may only have one chance; as coaches we will have more. We must remember that!

Since February last year there has been no competition. My last memory was the exceptional hard work by team managers, coaches and parents to get everybody home from the Cadet and Junior Europeans in Porec.

Since then fencers have adapted to virtual training environments, remaining upbeat, positive and always hopeful of getting back to fencing and competition, looking to achieve those goals of international competition for the first time, or qualification for major Championships. We do not underestimate your aspirations. We value them.

Indeed the staff at British Fencing and the ADP Team feel it is important to recognise these missed opportunities.

We have therefore created two lists of fencers: those we expected and hoped would achieve something at international level, from attending their first EFC event or finishing their last major Championships before moving to the senior circuit. The other list is those who, via the ranking list would have been in line for selection or move to a selection position this year, and those that have attended 80% plus of the ADP training camps, showing dedication and commitment to improving - embodying the traits of successful athletes.

A list by its nature will satisfy those it includes and disappoint those it doesn't. At this point, at this time, we have made our best attempt to get this as accurate as we can.

To fencers, parents, coaches and the BF team, thank you for your persistence and resilience to keep active in the here and now. I often refer to the quote below when, on the fencing front, days seem tough.

"You will fail at some point in your life. You will lose! But here is the thing, to get something you never had you have to do something you never did, because the chances you take, the people you love, the faith that you have, that's what's going to define you".

I'm excited for the future and getting back to fencing competitions, and all that will bring us, as it has done before. Take care.

Steve Kemp

ABRAM-MOORE, Bea
AKINYOSOYE, Folayemi
AL-MOHSIN, Ali
ALBERSMEIER, Vanessa
ALLEN, Morgan
ALLEN, Samuel
ANDREWS, Ben
ANDREWS, Millie
APPLEBY-PRINCE, Celena
BAILEY, Asher
BARR, Jacob
BAXTER, Elliott
BEARD, Maddi
BEARDMORE-ESTEBAN, Sebastian
BEARDMORE, Emily
BEAUTYMAN, Cador
BLACK, Abagael
BLACKLEDGE, Eleanor
BLAIR, Joseph
BLAIR, Samuel
BOORNE, Samuel
BOUCHER-ROWE, Sarah
BRIERLEY, Bethany
BRIGGS, Jamie
BRINCKLOW, Alexander
BROOKE, Alec
BRUIJN-YARD, Rudi
BUCKLEY, Ellen

BULMAN, Imogen
BURY, Arthur
CALIPA, Aurelio
CAMPBELL-OKOLO, Omari
CAMPBELL-YATES, Indio
CARON, Julia
CARUS BIRD, Martha
CASTILLO-BERNAUS, Katie
CHAUDHARI, Aarav
CHENNELLS, Poppy
CLEMENT, Alex
COLLINS, Tom
COLVILLE, Eurig
CONCHIE, Martha
COOK, Jaimie
CORCORAN, Erin
COURTNEY, Jack
COX, Sam
CRAWFURD-BRUNT, Claudia
CRAZE, Lexie
CROFT, Liam
CROMIE, Max
CULKIN, Alexander
CUPPER, Alex
CURWEN, Becci
DANFORD, Thicke
DANIEL, Dylan
DAVIES, Ava

DE N'YEURT, Tabitha
DICKSON, Oliver
DICKSON, Charlie
DOBSON, Philip
DOLAN, James
DON, Edward
DONAGHUE, Joe
DONATI, Stella
EDGECLIFFE-JOHNSON, Frederick
ELLIOTT, Megan
EVANS-REEVES, Sebastian
EVANS, Cameron
FERGUSON, William
FIDLER, Nathaniel
FIELDING, Dana
FIELDING, Hannah
FORSE, Jessica
FOULSHAM, Jacob
FREEMAN, Sam
GALAZKA, Dylan
GALE, Madeleine
GARDNER, Georgia
GIBSON, Harry
GOLDEN, Eve
GOSLING, Louis
GOUGOULIAS, Olympios
GRANT, Lucy
GRANVILLE, Bronwen

GRAY, Harry
GREEN, Jem
GREEN, Tom
GREGSON, Daniel
GUENNOU, Louis
HAYNES, Luke
HEATH, Thomas
HENDERSON-ROE, Maia
HIYAMA, Ryuki
HO, Ian
HOLDSWORTH, Darcy
HOME, Amy
HOSSAIN, Sofia
HOWES, Georgia
HYDE, Bronwen
IRELAND, Henry
JACKSON, Zachary
JACKSON, Ellie
JANE, Melissa
JARVIE, Lachlan
JEAL, James
JOHNSON, Isabella
JONES, Hal
JONES, Maxwell
JONES, Rachel
KAMSTRA, Leo
KAYE, Guinevere
KEW, Ethan
KEW, Liam
KLOSS, James
KLOSS, Nathanael
KOLAS, Shalang
LARBI, Rayhana
LATTANZIO, Charlotte
LAWAL, Amari
LEBOR, Hannah
LEES, Lucia
LEES, Verity
LEVER, Rachael
LINDSAY, Lucie
LIU, Zara
LLEWELLYN, Elsie
LONSDALE, William
LOUIS, Avery
LUMINEAU, Juliet
LUMINEAU, Tristan

LUTHER-PAYNE, Salvador
MALTMAN, Heather
MARTIN, Henry
MCCORMACK, Maisie
MCGHEE, Calum
MCGLONE, Theo
MCLELLAN, Rory
MEURISSE, Scarlett
MITCHELL, Georgina
MITCHELL, Jacob
MORRISON, Dylan
NEWTON-HUGHES, Phoebe
NORRIS, Roman
NURSE, Jacob
O'REILLY, Hannah
PARMAR, Ellie
PAUL, Lucia
PEACH, William
PEAT, Sophie
PEDLER, Erin
PENMAN, Callum
PERKINS, David
PHENNAH, Stephanie
PLASTOW, Luca
PLUNKETT, Robert
POTTER, Crinan
PROSSOR, Woser
PURDIE, Scarlett
QUELCH, Abigail
RAIYAT, Henna
REN, Ian
RESTON, Eva
RHYS POLLITT, Rafael
RICE-KNIGHT, Hendrix
RICHARDS, Marcus
RICHARDS II, Julian
ROBBINS-WILKINSON, Ellen
ROBBINS, Charlie
ROBERTS, Ruby
ROBERTSON, Ewan
ROCCATO, Francesco
RUSSELL, Amelie
RYDER-GARCIA, Lauren
SADLER, Louise
SAMPSON, Dominic
SAMPSON, Verity

SAUNDERS, Nicole
SCOTT PAYNE, Edward
SHAHENSHAH, Carlotta
SHERRATT, Amy
SILK, Georgia
SIMMONDS, Benjamin
SMITH, Amber
SOSNOV, David
STENBECK SCHIAVO, Dario
STEWART, Alex
STEWART, Emma
STRANGE, Oliver
STUTCHBURY, Carolina
TAIWO-WILLIAMS, Louis
TANG, Lauren
TAYLOR, Eleanor
THOMAS, Ellie
THOMPSON, Holly
THOMSON, Catriona
TRUUVERT, Alexander
TSANG, Amelie
TSANG, Sophia
ULFERTS-KILPATRICK, Nye
WALL, Evie
WALMSLEY, Joseph
WESTERMAN, Matthew
WESTWELL, Amy
WHEELER, Christopher
WHITAKER, Rosie
WHITLEGG, Aimee
WILLIAMS, Nicholas
WILLIAMS-HOWE, Sydney
WILLIAMS-STEWART, Teagan
WILLIAMS, David
WILLIAMSON, Lucy-Belle
WILSON, India
WILSON WAN, Neo
WILSON, India
WOOD, Molly
WOODWARD, Zachary
YAVUZ, Atakan
ZAZO, Ethan
ZHU, Cheney
ZHU, Osborn

BLAZING A TRAIL

The Double Life of Epeeist and Firefighter Katrina Smith Taylor



When I get up, my first thought is how much time I have to get ready. I snooze my alarm four times. If it is my pager going off at 3am, that thought is intercepted by the more straightforward questions of, where am I and what am I doing? I head to the shower where I feel as though I can start the day. I am fresh and I am ready. If I am asleep at work with the bells blaring, then it's just eyes open and shot awake. From a resting fifty-ish heartbeats to pumping a straight one hundred and eighty. Then on to the blazer.

In my line of work, a blazer is a house fire. A big one.

From day one of my firefighter training, I have learned not to underestimate fire. It is my opponent - a living breathing entity: its own phenomenon when it escalates. There was at least one time it could have cooked me into a baked potato. We were tackling a house blaze and needed to get to the occupant upstairs. The downstairs fire was raging, yet contained and starved of oxygen but when the windows had broken on the ground floor, the air boosted the fire into an inferno. The person on the first floor had thankfully jumped to safety.

What these kinds of situations teach you is that you have to deal with things,

sometimes there and then. Don't bottle it all up. Talk, spill, share, laugh and cry - and that is what me and my crew do. I would be dead without this team. I rely on them for everything. Our motto is: "I got you". It says everything. We are brothers and sisters and 'I got you' is all that is needed to resonate with that bond.

Being open for me is the only way and I am very forward with how I feel. My dad was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy as a helicopter pilot. He also worked on the front line flying Sea Kings for the Cornwall search and rescue team when it operated out of RNAS Culdrose (RNLI). He had seen a lot of bad stuff but lived in a 'put up and shut up' kind of age. I saw his PTSD develop and eventually his drinking killed him. I now refuse to close myself off like he did. I refuse to let my crew close off to me. We are a unit and we all know when someone is not ok. We are like-minded people in that crew and we have a drive to be the best we can be as individuals and as a team.

My fencing coach, Atanas Atanasov (yes, so good they named him twice!) was the one who handed me the recruitment leaflet to become a firefighter in the first place. I don't know if he foresaw how the work would impact my fencing for the better. It certainly has, making me humble and a lot more receptive when things go wrong or



not according to plan. I may be exhausted from a shift, turn up for a lesson but Atanas will say, "Not today" because he knows I am physically just not up to it. So we do competition reflection or something else.

Reviewing your performance with honesty is crucial. The last time I competed for GBR was the Budapest Grand Prix in March



Thurstaston Common (c) Colin Lane

2020. I was fencing really well and all up in poules until my final fight. I froze. I wasn't mentally ready for that moment. I lost 5-4, missing my second day place by one hit. I had to look at the mechanics of what I did wrong. My breathing wasn't right, my distance was off, I felt the pressure... You have to fix those things within yourself. If you're not honest, you won't improve. If it is not you - if you always lose because of a teammate or coach or a dodgy call from the referee every time - how can you ever properly look at yourself and get better?

That in itself was another breakthrough for me: to learn that I had the confidence to say things how they are and to engage my on and off switches. I used to be at a fencing competition and experience a real dip when I reached the Last 8. It was because I thought I had to stay fired up all day. Now I recognise that I only need to fire up when the trigger is pulled. The bells at the fire station, screaming that somebody needs your help or the tap of the epee guards on-piste: that's game time; I don't have to keep standing to attention in between.

People seem to assume that just because I have such high pressure in my job, it means



Barcelona World Cup (#BizziTeam)

I don't feel the pressure in fencing. I do. In the fire service, we do Heat Barrier training where you walk around a building where there's a room burning with a contained fire until you start showing signs of heat exhaustion - the kind of confusion where $2 + 2 = 7$, where you get fuzzy vision, where you could potentially start making life-changing decisions ... it's a form of stress response and I get such a response - albeit in a different way - when I compete. My solution is to step back. I will sit with a towel on my face, listen to music or a podcast, or do my cross-stitching - it's about being able to push above and beyond and that sometimes just means taking a 10 or 20 minute break. At the Senior Europeans in Düsseldorf I went for a walk and got a top 20 result. It works.

Also I try to set realistic expectations and goals. If I aim too high too fast, that is when I get down and want to quit. When I remember that I fence because I love it, then my fencing gets better. Therapy has helped me recognise destructive patterns and behaviours and to catch my brain before it spirals down. In Lockdown, it was a case of setting myself a routine every day to try and maintain a sense of control. Routine of course helps with my fencing, especially with competitions, I religiously do weapon control the night before, for example. In firefighting, our kit has to function properly. You are going out to save somebody's life. If your breathing apparatus does not work, then you are not fit for purpose. It's the same in fencing. Why come off after your bout blaming your weapon for losing you the fight? I can turn up to a tournament absolutely exhausted from the job but if I have got my epee tip at the perfect weight to get the perfect flick to wrist, I'm happy.

Where there have been times when I'd feel overwhelmed, I used to write the word, 'strength' on the back of my non-sword hand. I would look down and just see that word. It was a simple prompt to think myself strong and I used it to get through



My Crew



Team Europeans (#BizziTeam)

tough situations. I remember it is the little things that get me through, and I am thankful for them. They all build up to make the bigger picture, and create the best space for me to be in.

Our underlying feelings are not too small or inadequate; they are what makes us human. I believe that they can make you a better fencer for sure. Feelings show we

have passion, and sport is all about that. I remember travelling to compete in Qatar in 2015 when one of the Italian team coaches, Oleg Pouzanov had died a day before the Doha Grand Prix. The Senior Epeeists were grief-stricken, just blown apart. Mara Navarria entered the room wearing a black armband. But she won that tournament. I have never seen anything like it. She was up there on the podium, with a gold medal, her coach's name written on the palm of her hand. She took what could have left her down and out and transformed it into a victory.

I am 29 and my overarching ambition is to be happy and healthy, and to enjoy life. I would love to get back to fencing, do another set of Euro, World and Commonwealth championships but I don't over-determine any specific achievements. If I ask myself where I feel truly good, it's in the fire house - the garage where the fire trucks are. It smells of carbon and I can hear the crew scrubbing down the kit after a job, having a laugh. They've all got nicknames. Woolly and Molly are there (don't ask), Kev, whose real name is Lee (again, don't ask), and Tommo because Emily is way too normal. And there's me: I'm just Kat, and I am happy with that.

GROUNDDED

We all know the sacrifice of fencing. The long trips, the expense, the logistics, the preparation, crammed studies, missed social events, time away from family ... It's a life that GBR Junior Men's Foilist, Cameron Evans knows all too well. From 100,000 annual air miles to lockdown, he explains how he's stayed on target. Here's his story.

I was born in Greenwich, Connecticut to British-born parents. Although I was on track to qualify as part of the Cadet USA squad, I wanted a different experience plus an opportunity to explore my British heritage. It was the right choice. My life since 2016 as part of an international athletic team has certainly broadened my horizons.

Each year I do in excess of 100,000 air miles. That takes in UK competitions, FIE Junior events, and Zonal and World Championships. I participate in Domestic USA national competitions for training purposes, to come up against as many opponents as I can.

I've visited about 17 countries - some of those multiple times, trying to get the most out of every trip. For example, I can now associate Poland with the amazing fencing memory of making the quarter-finals at the 2019 Cadet World Championships in Toruń and, on another occasion, with visiting Auschwitz. Both impactful.

This life does entail scheduling that makes some people feel kind of dizzy. Each school-day is 7:45am until 2:45pm. I then travel onto my club. Amusing, as I cross between two US states, but in reality just a 40-minute journey. I warm up, take a continuous lesson with my coach, Anna, then I do S&C, footwork and target practice. Twice a week is practical sparring with my coach, Renal, and about the same sparring with my club mates. Saturday is on repeat. Sunday is my day off from training.



T-Minus seven days from a competition finds me midweek working with my school to plan a minimum two-day absence. Also midweek, I bring my kit home, packing my uniform, mask, glove, sneakers, socks, warm up gear, GBR tracksuit, spare grips, body and mask cords as hand luggage, with blades and foils in my checked luggage. Thursday is 'travel day'. If I'm lucky, I do a full day in school minimizing the amount of catch-up needed later. I take the red-eye flight with my Mom. The journey to the airport is variable as we're talking about New York, but we try to arrive 2 hours before take-off. Now for Operation Wind Down. After boarding, the goal is to sleep. It is super important for my competition prep to try to get 4-5 hours of shut-eye during the flight. With a 7-9 hour flying time plus a 5-6-hour time difference, it is hard to feel ready to compete without this amount of sleep. By the time the wheels are up, my sleep mask is on and my head is down. If we're lucky, we can take a direct flight to the competition destination but more often than not a connecting flight is involved.

We keep our fingers crossed the onward

flight is on time and our luggage makes it. After landing, the next goal is to combat the unavoidable jet lag. Power naps help; so does powering through until a reasonable bedtime. I do weapons check the night before to preserve extra sleep time on the morning of competition. Saturday is individual competition day and Sunday is team. I don't eat full meals before or during competition, so my first port of call afterwards is food - typically, some form of protein. After team meetings I try to relax, then sleep. We usually need to stay another night as international flights from Europe to the USA tend to leave morning or early afternoon. I always keep optimistic about our chances, never booking a flight on competition day. Monday: we are homeward bound and I start catching up on missed homework and assignments. I can now flex the skill of being able to work anywhere, submitting papers via airplane WiFi. Missed tests are sat Tuesdays, before school, at 6:30am. The sweet spot for sleep on catch-up days is about 3.5 hours - any more rest and I'll not catch up to accommodate my next absence, any less and I feel I've been hit by a Mack truck. Tuesday I start the routine again...



With Coach Anna Katkova



...or at least I did.

In the run up to the 2020 European Championships, news of Covid-19 was starting to cast its shadow. Returning from Croatia the impact of this virus was beginning to be felt. However, at this time, I was still able to train for the upcoming Senior Men's Foil event in Anaheim. It was as I prepared to leave for California, that the enormity of the pandemic became evident; the event was cancelled. It was the beginning of a new global reality. Instead, I accompanied my family on our spring break vacation to Florida. The virus raged in the New York metro area and my family made the decision to delay our return home. I would stay in Florida for the next four months, moving then to South Carolina. It would be close to six months before I returned home and to my fencing club - Fencing Academy of Westchester. During the first phase of lockdown, I did not have any of my fencing equipment with me, so I was grateful for the warmer weather making it possible to run on a nearby trail and keep fit in the back garden and on the beach. I kept in regular contact with my



Going to Duke

coaches, Anna Katkova and Renal Ganeev, who would text me fitness and footwork routines and keep me informed as to what they were learning that other fencers globally were doing to keep in shape from their international coaching counterparts.

The Salt Lake City World Championships were cancelled; lockdown continued. Finally, some restrictions were eased as summer began but still there was no access to fencing. During the summer, my coach was able to come and visit and bring my fencing gear with her. Early morning beach drills were fun and gave the morning walkers and runners something new to ponder. Not having held a foil for over four months meant that for the first few days I was rusty and sore but, I was super happy to get back to my lessons, so this almost made the muscle pain worth it! On a positive note, a hand injury I sustained during the 2019 Guatemala JWC that I had been undergoing regular physical therapy for seemed to have fully healed while my hand was rested, so that was an unexpected bonus.

September I returned home and - with a lot of new protocols in place - was able to return to my fencing club for lessons and sparring. Wearing a mask while fencing a 15-touch intense bout with my club mates and my coach, Renal, was definitely an adjustment. I was happy to get back to some level of normality, and mentally it really helped to be able to start seriously training again despite the ever-moving resumption dates for competitions. Unfortunately, this return to training was short lived after my Dad got Covid-19 which meant that our whole family was in quarantine for a couple of weeks. Thankfully, he made a full recovery and no one else contracted the virus.



So far, weekly testing at school means that along with social distancing and mask wearing I have avoided further periods of quarantine. I have been able to touch base with some of my fellow GBR foilists via text and social media. This has helped knowing that in spite of everything that is going on we are all trying our best to take things in stride and continue to cobble together training plans that keep us focused and motivated. Although the time difference makes it difficult I have also been able to take part in a couple of the ADP online sessions. Being geographically displaced, it is the small things that help with feeling connected and it was great to do a recent Zoom check in with ADP Foil Lead Coach, Chris Galesloot about where I am training-wise and what I am able to do.

2021 is now underway and I feel very lucky that I am still able to fence and work out daily at my club. The support of my coaches has been amazing, and we are all concentrating on making our best attempts to be ready when British Fencing and the F.I.E are able to reopen our sport for competition. As they say in these parts, "We're All In This Together". #NewYorkStrong!

Overall, the juggle and the commitment has definitely been worth it. I feel privileged to be part of British Fencing and, staying focused on my studies has secured me a place as a recruited fencing athlete to study at Duke University from Summer 2021. I live by the maxim that, "I survived because the fire inside burned brighter than the fire around me."

COACH PLAYBOOK - SABRE

JON SALFIELD, ADP SABRE LEAD COACH

Finishing up a difficult exercise with a 12-year-old fencer, I said, "That was 90% right - let's come back to it next time".

"It was 10% wrong then?" they replied.

So we carried on.

My raison d'être is to win Olympic and World medals as a coach. Everything I do drives towards that objective. There are several factors that have led me to this ambition but overall I believe in setting ambitious, achievable goals which are meaningful to the squads and athletes I work with. I know that we can get to that level in sabre.



Algiers World Cup (#BizziTeam)

To do that as a coach though, I realise the importance of learning. For everyone. We can say that lockdown has given us all time to develop a learning mindset. We have had the chance to start using different muscles - mental ones - to develop the skills we need. From coaching on the ADP with the GB senior team, and at club level, I have had to accelerate my own learning, putting purpose and meaning into coaching fencers in an entirely different way, and using new and different platforms as a means of fencer-coach contact.

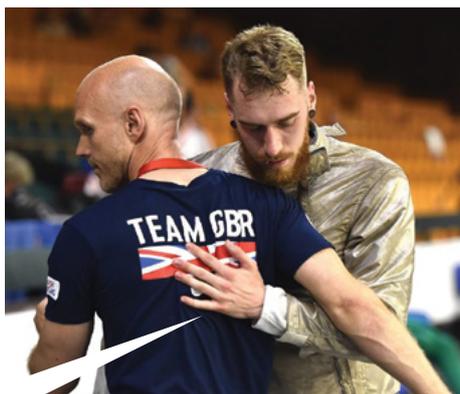
One lightbulb moment was the requirement for us all to change the way we view outcomes. Before, fencers often came out of training thinking if they had won all their fights then that was a great session, and vice versa. When that direct sparring experience isn't possible, you have to adopt more of a learning mindset: what can I work on and what can I improve? It is a shift from having a 'trying to win'

mindset to a 'trying to improve' mindset which ultimately will lead to winning, transforming the competitive fencer into a medal-winning fencer.

The reason why this learning now is so vital is that we're human, and humans make the best fencers. You can programme a robot and hone their every reaction. But a robot cannot deal with unpredictability, an unlearned situation, in the moment. A human is creative enough, unpredictable enough and instinctive enough to harness the obstacles and experiences to express their tactical and technical reflexes in an individual way in unique moments. It is like playing music. You can play the guitar with technical perfection, but it's in the soul and the expression of the music where you find the truly great performances.

One of the beauties of fencing is that it is an open-skill sport rather than a closed one. Whatever you are trying to do, someone else is trying to prevent you or outwit you. The key things to consider are the ability to learn from defeat and failure, and how to figure out a new way. That's what will give us an advantage; how we manage to see the opportunities in seemingly entirely negative moments. Usually, defeats and disappointments hold more valuable lessons for us than victories.

Remember that as a fencer, using your learning and harnessing it as strength helps you be your own guru - your own best coach. What, or rather who, has taught me the most as a coach are the ambitious and dedicated fencers I have worked with. You the fencers improve your coaches, and your coaches can return that improvement back to you. The learning is two-way, and it never ends.



With James Honeybone (#BizziTeam)



With GBR #1 Caiti Maxwell (#BizziTeam)

The impact in the last year of coaches learning and embracing new methods, new media, and new ideas, is that we have been working so much more closely together, within and across weapon groups and complementary disciplines, such as sports psychology and strength and conditioning. We have found ways to deliver some forms of training which may stay with the sport forever. If I'm honest, I feel we have become more of a GBR team at all levels, and in all weapons, than we have been in my fencing lifetime.

That said, I do recognise how you feel. If, as adults, we are to think about it, a 10-year-old has already spent 10% of their life under significant restriction, a 15-year-old 7.5%. It has taken away the Championships that many Cadet and Junior fencers had been working towards ...

But the message is this: keep learning how to adapt and re-adapt and improve. You will recoup the experience you need. I believe - we all believe - that you will perform in the future at the highest level, and possibly even more than you ever would have done, because of the resilience that you have shown.

I can't wait.



Celebrating Euro Medal

GOING PLACES

A Fencing Travelogue: Volume III - James Williams

Raising your Heart Rate: Tales from the First Fencing World Championship in South Africa-Cape Town 1997

Anyone who has taken the slightest interest in politics and global affairs will surely be familiar with the impact that Nelson Mandela had on transforming the country of South Africa and indeed the attitudes of the world. Mandela was a former political prisoner who served 27 years in captivity in the infamous Robben Island prison and who went on to become South Africa's first black president in 1994. But this is a fencing travelogue, right? So I know you must all be asking what has Nelson Mandela got to do with my story? Well the simple answer is that - because of the apartheid policies in South Africa - the country had effectively been banned from playing host to any major international sporting events. However following the election of Nelson Mandela, the country's status quickly changed. South Africa successfully bid for and was awarded the hosting of the Senior Fencing World Championships in Cape Town in 1997.

For anyone that has not visited South Africa (other than on the internet!) it is a wonderful place. All of us in the fencing community were excited to get there but unfortunately, at the time, it was a country undergoing huge transformation. It is honest to say the years of international sanctions due to apartheid and the ensuing lack of investment had caused significant financial hardship among the people, and this is where my story starts.

Getting to the World Championships from the UK was one of those logistical challenges you dread. We had to fly into Johannesburg from London, stay overnight



With Audley Harrison, Rowley Douglas & Louis Attrill - Sydney 2000

at a hotel airport, then take a second flight to Cape Town the next day. It is fair to say that Johannesburg then and, even now, was not the safest place in the world. Crimes such as car-jacking and house invasions at gunpoint were rife. But as we were only staying for one night at the airport, we thought what could possibly go wrong?

Our flight arrived safely. We were welcomed (and I mean welcomed kindly), and then processed by customs. Waiting for our bags we had a fine view of the



aircraft being unloaded. To our relief, the fencing bags came off first. Great. Not so great was that two hours later they were still to come through. When we were finally reunited with our luggage, it was clear it had all been ransacked and some stuff had been stolen. I was none too pleased. Gadget Man here had a brand new, pride and joy heart rate monitor in his bag and the receiver had been taken. You would all laugh though, as it was the old style (not at the time, of course) Polar monitor. Picture a smart watch then work back several generations, and then some ... In those days the one I had only showed heart rates. It had been whisked away by the light fingers of some poor chap who must have gone on to be puzzled as to why his 'watch' did not work ... but back to the main story!



Teammates Ian & James

The delay in waiting for our bags had meant that it was really quite late when we managed to get to the airport hotel, which was a sort of chalet style structure with a labyrinth of corridors. The hotel manager gave us our keys and duly sent us to our rooms. Thank goodness for some rest, I thought to myself when I heard a massive commotion emanating from Nick Fletcher's room. He dashed out and said there was someone in there. Ian Williams and I were in no doubt as to the gravity of the situation, This was Jo'burg after all! We quickly sprinted to the front desk and the hotel manager grabbed a long club from under the counter and sped off to Nick's room with us in tow. The nefarious intruder turned out actually not to be an intruder at all - simply in fact a drunken guest who had collapsed into the wrong room. The adrenaline meant I did not get much sleep that night, I can tell you!! Anyway, the people of South Africa (other than our first night!) could not have been more welcoming. I do however often think of that poor chap who had helped himself to my prized possession so he could brandish such a fancy 'digital' watch.

I bet he was always late.



With Team Captain Lindford Christie & Robin Reed - Barcelona 1992

RELATIVITY

Fencers fight with their families ... usually though in tow. We ask Cadets and Juniors, along with their closest relatives, about their support network.

Tina Black - Epee Mum

Abagael is a natural athlete and her sporting passion is fencing! Fencing appeals to her physicality and her brain. I realise I don't need to understand it. I just need to do all I can to support her dreams.

A huge benefit is the sense of family that fencing and Plymouth Fencing Club brings. Abagael has known her coach Peter Barrett for 9 years; we feel fortunate that he is a constant in our lives and a great mentor.

We've enjoyed lots of memorable trips - not because of individual results but rather because of progression and learning. One to stick in my mind was Klagenfurt when she travelled with club mates Ben Andrews and Steven Macpherson who have been her trailblazers. The girls in GBR1 were so nurturing, and the sense of camaraderie and inspiration was fuelled further by the boy's team who were on fire.



Abagael and Tina

Abagael Black - Junior Women's Epee

My Mum has always supported me in everything I do, especially with fencing. I know it has been challenging for her to take a step back and let me handle things whether it's wanting to be alone in a minute break or letting me organise myself on a trip.

As I progress into the older age groups and turn 18 in September I can be more autonomous; her support will naturally continue, encouraging self-management, organisation, getting the lowest flight prices whilst still being my biggest cheerleader! I have confidence in her that if I ever need her she will help me, no matter what.

Back to Tina for a Quick-Fire Questionnaire

What do you respect most about Abagael?

Her resilience

What would you rather not say about your fencer but you're going to say it anyway?

Her ability to sleep on long journeys - she doesn't know what the M5 looks like and we live in Devon!

What was the most surprising thing that your fencer took responsibility for?

Disappointing results due to not fencing well - she owns it!

How did your fencer discover the 'team' in their 'work'?

Abagael is a natural team player and always ups her game.

Would you trust your fencer to carry the Olympic torch?

Yes! She did a dummy run with a Mr Whippy ice-cream at London 2012 and it went without a hitch!

Bridget Green - Epee Mum

It has been amazing to watch Jem follow his passion for fencing over the past few years and to see the success that his hard work has brought. He also has a fencing 'family': an amazing club and wider network. There are lots of lessons for life - being disciplined and training hard brings achievement; managing the emotional rollercoaster of winning and losing and

moving on to the next goal; developing confidence in your own ability...

I'm tempted to pick Copenhagen as our most memorable foreign trip as that was Jem's best result, but we spent a week holed up in a Copenhagen apartment as he came down with flu. So I'll pick Grenoble instead where Jem had a great team and it was lovely to watch them work together and support each other. They came up against some good Russian and American fencers and watching Jem hold his own against them was gratifying.



Jem and Bridget

Jem Green - Cadet Men's Epee

Mum has always been there, willingly driving me around to training and competitions, exchanging weekends of relaxation for long days in bright, noisy fencing halls. Though I'm sure that will change when I pass my driving test.

Her support has meant that I've been open to learning many lessons, both within sport and life in general. In Bratislava when I won all my poule fights but still managed to get knocked out in the second round of the DE's, taught me that no matter how well something has gone previously, you always have to maintain focus and maximum effort to ensure success. This is an excellent outlook to apply to other areas of life outside of fencing.

Quick-Fire and back to Bridget ...

What do you respect most about Jem?

He's dedicated to training and committed to his goals.

What would you rather not say about your fencer but you're going to say it anyway?

I sometimes wish Jem could apply the same focus and obsession he has with fencing to some other areas of his life, like GCSEs.

What was the most surprising thing that your fencer took responsibility for?

Processing his own emotional baggage.

How did your fencer discover the 'team' in their 'work'?

At his club where they have fostered a 'team' mentality from the very beginning.

Would you trust your fencer to carry the Olympic torch?

It would be a great honour but they might have to fit it with a pistol grip first!

Philip Bird - Foil Dad

Fencing has brought Martha many things: a sense of belonging to a community, an opportunity to demonstrate and develop her athletic ability, huge achievements, discipline that translates to all areas of life, obviously a tremendous amount of fun and friends for life.

I am committed to supporting her in every way I can because I know how important fencing is to her - it contributes so much to her sense of identity.



Martha and Philip

Martha Carus Bird - Cadet Women's Foil

My Dad's unconditional support contributes heavily to my mindset and my approach to fencing. Knowing he will always be proud of me and that he trusts me to take control of my own sport and training has meant that I have never felt any pressure to succeed for him. I fence for me. He has always been very firm that the best I can do is give my all, meaning that I never go onto the piste worried about disappointing him - I know that he will be proud of me

whatever happens. And obviously, I have him to thank for the logistical side: I'm not quite sure I could do it without him.

Quick-Fire Questions for Philip ...

What do you respect most about Martha?

Her work ethic and commitment to being the best fencer and athlete she can be. She carries this drive and keenness to improve into all aspects of her life.

What would you rather not say about Martha but are going to say it anyway?

She probably won't want me to say it...but I think she's achieved so much and I am very proud of her. (Or, like any athlete Martha gets nervous before competitions; and that she's very unhappy when she loses!)

What was the most surprising thing that Martha took responsibility for?

Getting up early to ensure she is never late for a tournament!

How did Martha discover the "team" in her "work"?

By listening to her coaches, asking them how she can keep on improving and by being captain of GB CWF team at international events!

Would you trust Martha to ever carry the Olympic torch?

Absolutely!



Keith Watching Jaimie

Keith Cook - Foil Dad

Fencing has given Jaimie purpose and direction and shown that if he wants to achieve then he has to work hard for it. It's not just as a parent, but also as a coach, where I'm happy in those moments when

my fencers become so tired they want to quit but don't. Seeing their determination to come home from school being "too tired" to go to club but going anyway, is rewarding for me because I know ultimately how much it helps them.

For Jaimie to have such discipline in his life, and to be treating others with respect, humility and empathy, to have the opportunity to travel round the world doing what he loves surrounded by his British Fencing teammates, his family and friends is an unrivalled privilege.

Jaimie Cook - Cadet Men's Foil

I have a great relationship with my dad who also acts as my coach. He has experience at the highest level as a fencer and is able to pass on his knowledge of the highs and lows to help my learning curve always feel paced and not pushed.

He's taught me to deal with disappointment in a constructive way, realising that it's ok to make mistakes because you can't do one without the other. Whether I win or lose he has also taught me to do so with humility, and still respect my opponent, eliminating any sense of hatred or spite.

Wait for it Keith...

What do you respect most about Jaimie?

His humility and good genes.

What would you rather not say about your fencer but you're going to say it anyway?

Constantly complaining on FIFA, especially when I beat him.

What was the most surprising thing that your fencer took responsibility for?

His sore back from carrying the old guys in the team at the Senior 5 Nations.

How did your fencer discover the 'team' in their 'work'?

He knows "If everyone is moving forward together then success takes care of itself".

Would you trust your fencer to ever carry the Olympic torch?

Jaimie carrying a cup of tea makes me nervous spilling it everywhere, never mind carrying the Olympic torch.

Bertie and Darcy Holdsworth - Sabre Bros

Father and Son, Mother and Daughter, Mother and Son, Father and Daughter and now for GBR Sabreurs, Bertie and Darcy Holdsworth. These Brothers in Arms have grown up in a family of seven - living together, fighting together and sometimes fighting one another.



Darcy Gets Gold

Why did you choose fencing?

Darcy: My brother was already fencing and he was really enjoying it. I was interested in many sports at the time and really liked the physically and mental side of fencing.

Bertie: I too was trying different sports but fencing was the one I enjoyed most. Watching films with fencing in like Die Another Day (James Bond) definitely contributed to me wanting to try it out.

How often would you train each week under normal conditions?

Darcy: Four times a week.

Bertie: Now I'm at university, twice a week plus three fitness sessions.

Why do you like fencing?

Darcy: It is mentally and physically demanding as a sport.

Bertie: I think it is because it is constantly changing as a sport. I also love the competitive nature of it. I just adore doing competitions - the waiting, the planning between fights and the tactics involved in preparing for an opponent.

How has lockdown affected your fencing life?

Darcy: I have been extremely fortunate because Truro Fencing Club have offered a strong programme of online sessions on Zoom. It has however been hard not seeing friends and actually competing either here or abroad. I had been expecting to go to Budapest, Boston and Sochi in 2020.

Bertie: Both my university and fencing life have mainly been online for the last year. The World Champs in Salt Lake City was cancelled and I wasn't able to travel to the 2020 Cadet and Junior European Championships in Croatia either.

How have you dealt with these disappointments?

Darcy: I'll be honest ... I have just got on with it ... there is nothing any of us can do about it.

Bertie: I was very upset at first but it really just reminded me how lucky I have been competing internationally previously, and hopefully I will be able to travel to competitions like these in the future.

Have there been any plus points to lockdown for you?

Darcy: I have been able to become much more physically fit and have a good pre-season preparation.

Bertie: I have focussed a lot more on my fitness too, and being home together during lockdowns has probably brought us closer together. We have been able to train together. We have been running a lot together and have even built a home gym.

What is it like to have a brother that also fences?

Darcy: Pretty good, because I always have to push myself so I can be better than him. On a more serious note, it is nice to talk to him about fencing because he actually understands how I am feeling as he has been through the same experiences.

Bertie: I enjoy talking to my brother about fencing and I am proud of what he has achieved to date. I'm also happy to be there for him when doesn't achieve exactly what he wanted.

What are the qualities that make your brother a good fencer?

Darcy: He's fast, has good technique and is strong.

Bertie: He is naturally very talented and trains very hard. It helps that he is also very competitive - he wants to beat me at any opportunity!

What fencing achievement by your brother are you most proud of?

Darcy: I would say when he and the British Team came 4th at the Team World Championships in 2018.

Bertie: When Darcy came in the top eight at Meylan, having beaten some of the best young French and Spanish fencers to get there.



Bertie in Action

How many times have you had to fight each other at competitions and how do you deal with it?

Darcy: Only a couple of times and I prepare the same as I do for any other fight and with the same goal: to win!

Bertie: We have fought competitively twice. The first time we met was at the Under 20s in London - and he beat me! I try to approach it in a similar way to any other fight. It helps to forget that he is my brother.

Last word: What really annoys you about him?

Darcy: He can be argumentative and sometimes a pain if we are sharing a room

Bertie: He underestimates himself sometimes.

THE WAYS OF THE SWORDS

What do you do when you are good at more than just fencing? It is a question that 15 year old Ryuki Hiyama has asked himself since the day he discovered that there is more than one way to wield a weapon. Following in the footsteps of a father who is a world-renowned martial arts exponent of the ancient discipline of Kendo, Ryuki has still managed to pursue the art of sabre.

Now the dual swordsman looks set to burst onto the international fencing scene for Great Britain, whilst still being tipped for the top in his father's world of Kendo.

By day, father - 46-year-old Yasuyuki Hiyama - is a product development engineer in the UK automotive industry. But by night he is one of the leading practitioners of Kendo in the country - one of only a handful of individuals in the UK to ever be granted the prestigious 7th Dan accolade - the highest level available here. When you think that a 1st Dan (Shodan) in Kendo is equivalent to a Black Belt, it is easy to see the lifelong dedication that Yasuyuki has applied to this combat discipline.



Ryuki and Yasuyuki Doing A Demo

Yasuyuki started learning his craft at the age of four in Japan, and he trained all his young life - at times for up to six days a week, winning many honours along the way. Since coming to the UK in 2001 with his job, the honours have kept on coming. He is a three-time British Kendo Champion and he currently coaches the GB squad.

Son, Ryuki was set to tread his father's illustrious path and began Kendo at the age of five in London. He is already a 1st Dan and, before the pandemic struck, he



Ryuki Hiyama

had been selected for the European Kendo Championships in Norway in 2020.

And then, of course, there's fencing. When Ryuki started at King Edward School in Stratford, he joined the Shakespeare Swords. He has quickly proved to be a talented sabreur ranked 1st in the LPJS and 13th in Cadets, before Covid and ensuing restrictions brought everything to a standstill. He has represented England twice at The Challenge Wratistavia and GB at the Cadet internationals in Godollo and Eislingen.

It is easy to see the attraction, and the mutual compatibility, of the two separate disciplines for Ryuki. Kendo is a modern, yet still steeped in tradition, Japanese martial art descended from the swordsmanship (kenjutsu) that use bamboo swords (shinai) as well as protective body armour, known as bogu. While technical definitions describe fencing as a pure sport, Kendo is defined as a budo - or combat art that is practiced to improve oneself.

"I love Fencing and Kendo," Ryuki explained, "and I hope to be able to carry on both for as long as possible. Kendo has been a massive part of my whole life and it connects me not only to my father but to my Japanese heritage and culture. It has also provided me with great skills that I have been able to bring to the piste."

"Fencing has however opened up a whole new exciting world to me. I love the adrenaline rush that competitive fencing gives me. I love being part of the fencing community, meeting new and interesting people from all sorts of backgrounds across the world. I also feel that it is mine - something that I own for myself."

Ryuki's articulate and proportionate view demonstrates how much benefit he gains from each sport. For his father, Yasuyuki, however, thoughts turn to the possible crunch time when it might be a case of Kendo versus Fencing. He echoes the concerns of many a parent, admitting, "I'll be honest. I did not think that it would become such a big part of his life and at times it is difficult to balance all the demands of both along with everything else in our lives."



Ryuki and Yasuyuki in Japan

He added: "I would be really disappointed if he ever gave up Kendo as it is such a huge part of Japanese culture and is something for life. But I am also intrigued to learn about this new fencing discipline and see just what the contrasts and similarities are between both."

And this is a predicament that may occupy Yasuyuki for some time. Just to add to the family dilemma, there is another Hiyama not far behind. 13 year-old Yoji. Ryuki's younger brother is now at Shakespeare Swords too whilst still keeping up the Kendo family tradition.

NEXT GEN

We've all been making plans, adapting them and then adapting them some more in recent times. Here are six of your stories about how you've coped and what you've been doing to prepare for a return to action. We think they highlight how you are not just our next generation of British fencer but also the best prepared.

Emily Beardmore is Cracking On

I started fencing when I was 4 years old, refusing to do ballet and preferred manically charging about with a foam sword. My brother and sister fenced and as the third of three children, I was not missing out on the fun they were having. My first competition was when I was 6 and my mum made me ask Linda at Newham if I could compete as she knew it would be harder for Linda to turn that sweet little face away.



Emily

For a dozen or so years I trained and competed, competed and trained and then ... Lockdown. That was a pretty big shock. I was actually in Los Angeles at the time for a competition and I had to fly back home. Luckily that third kid of three thing worked in my favour as Alex, my brother and Kate, my sister were there for the competition too. So it wasn't so scary rebooking travel and packing.

As Lockdown set in, I took a couple of weeks off just to figure stuff out. Then my dad built me an outdoor fencing piste and a makeshift gym out of concrete slabs and stuff. I took a lesson off my brother almost every weekday and sparred with my sister. Again - there's that third of three thing kicking in again ...

I decided my main thing about Lockdown was to keep a schedule, maintaining the routine of training. I also did lunchtime

yoga with my family. Nothing too complex - just a 20 minute video yoga session off YouTube screened through the TV in our sitting room. That yoga helped me stay in the moment. I couldn't fret about the future or the now as I was too busy meditating on my feet or my hands.

The other thing to keep stable and under good management was my sleep. I made sure I shut off my phone each night, went to bed and got up at a set time. It's not that I find it hard to get to sleep; on the contrary, after years of nomadically attending competitions all over the world, sleep is one of my superpowers. But I needed to keep everything working, everything constant and level. The reason for this is what my dad calls, 'smart lazy'. In the long run, I am the kind of person that never wants to give myself more to do if it's not needed. If I cannot keep cracking on and just keep going then I am going to allow myself to get knocked down and give myself an impossible mountain to climb to come back. I will not let this virus become the reason I get knocked down. I would rather keep slogging it out.

To have this approach helps take away the disappointment of no prospect of Junior Euros and Worlds. I went to Euros as a Cadet and loved it. It was amazing - one of the best things I have ever done. With fencing and particularly women's fencing, it is hard to find a sense of occasion like those Championships. The sense of place. The sense of representing one's country. Being GB. The feeling of being an athlete.

But I'll keep going. Training. Working out. Sparring where and when I can. Cracking on. Because there's always next season, the season after that, the season after ...

Alex Culkin - Choices Equal Changes

As a person and as a fencer, I am not fond of change. Good job then that I hadn't been banking on my last year as a cadet, comfortable with going with the flow; my folks helping me enter competitions,



Alex

getting me there, sorting out logistics and getting me back to club training and all that on repeat with my results progressing to a point where selection for Euros and Worlds was looking promising and ...

Oh, hang on a minute.

Lockdown was a sharp and sudden shock. I had been steadily competing for years at home and abroad, trying to create gains, generate wins and it had worked, giving me a love for the sport and a desire to progress. Without aims and structure, I felt frustrated. But then I realised that goals are not an end in themselves but a discipline to live by. I chose to make myself ready, whatever happened; and to be ready, I had to keep fit. We'd been focussing on accountability at ADP: "I do what I say I will do, and I take responsibility for the outcome." So I invested in a really good pair of running shoes and lined myself up to run 5km in under 20 minutes.

Having significantly improved on my time, it has dawned upon me that the changes you make are the choices you take. The author, JK Rowling said, "It's our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities". When restrictions were

eased with a return to 'Covid safe' fencing, I made the choice to move clubs. This reinvigorated my focus on fencing with an emphasis on fitness and longevity in the sport, making me feel much more like part of a team.

Another choice and another change was stepping forward to volunteer at St Albans City FC (The Saints), where I've helped to repaint the stands, ready for the new season. In September they invited me to join the small volunteer ground staff, which means I now get to watch every home game. As the Saints are currently top of the National Conference League South and playing well, it's been a very rewarding time.

I won't now get to go to Euros and Worlds as a Cadet but Covid has given me other gains, showing me the importance of making choices for myself. I chose to take up running. I chose to volunteer. I chose to change clubs. And those choices and changes helped me not to get defeated by Lockdown and to stay fixed on the road ahead.

Barney Halliwell - Refocused

Barney talks about dealing with the disappointment of a dream being snatched away at the eleventh hour ...



Barney

I began fencing at 10 years old. There have been so many highlights: getting to the semi-finals in the World Junior Championships team event in Verona. The disbelief and ecstasy of beating favourites Germany 45-44 in the quarter-finals remains ingrained in my memory and will do forever. As will taking individual bronze and team gold at the Junior Commonwealth Championships shortly after.

A gap year to train full time meant spending four months in Guernsey to train with coach Chris Buxton. Next stop... Budapest, Hungary. 18 and "alone" in a foreign country but training alongside my fencing idol - double Olympic champion, Aron Szilagyi. It paid off. My results improved significantly, reaching a top 16 in the Budapest Junior World Cup and qualifying once again for both the Euros and Worlds, with still another year to go in Juniors.

To aid preparation for 2020 Worlds in Salt Lake City, I travelled to Plodiv for a World Cup competition and managed my best result to date: a top eight - only knocked out by the world number one. All the years of hard work had been worth it. I was ready for SLC.

Then Covid, and the Worlds were off! I was distraught; no other way to describe it and I struggled to deal with the blow. But slowly, I started picking myself up again, finding the motivation to do home workouts and runs. Restricted fencing later in the year was a much-needed shot in the arm to begin to look forward now that I'm a senior.

A year on, and I am still upset not to have gone to Salt Lake City but I am determined that this is not the end of my international career. It helps for me to picture that ten-year-old boy picking up a sword for the first time. I wonder what he would have thought if he had known what was to come: The fencing and life skills I have learnt, the friends I have made, the countries I've travelled to, the people I have met, the times I've had the honour to represent my country. All this has shaped the person I am.

Rachel Lever's Mental Map

Rachel talks us through the cartography of her Lockdown and the best routes through it and beyond it ...

Part homing pigeon, part migratory bird, Lockdown 1.0 definitely found me in home-bird mode. Fencing since I was 9 years old, competing internationally since I was



Rachel

12, had been challenging yet rewarding, with me competing at the highest level but also qualifying to study for an MSc in Pharmaceutical Science at Nottingham University. As you can imagine though, I had never taken a break. So nearly a fortnight's rest just before the 2020 Cadet Euros in Porec was revitalising. The Lockdown that followed shortly afterwards then extended my chance to reset my mental map and reconnect with stuff that had fallen off my radar.

I loved staying at home. After reading for hours on end and cycling for miles on end around parts of the local countryside that I never even knew existed, I discovered that taking a break is not just what you do when you have an injury. It is a key part of an athlete's regime that should be applied, so you get time to re-energise and banish any feelings of exhaustion and resulting low motivation. More relaxing maybe, but there was no sense of taking it easy. Cycling 20 miles at one stretch with my legs burning while tackling a steep hill or doing online fencing training at least three times per week kept me in the real world. It was just that I had few very different, very welcome physical and mental horizons to invite the balance back in.

This 'refresher' has also re-awakened the desire to see new horizons because one of my biggest fears is that I will live a boring life. I am terrified of the mundane. I know that I can wait patiently but one day I will need to fly away. The catch is that if I am to make this adventure fest work, I'll need to nail down my inner GPS as I have dreadful sense of geographical direction. Thankfully though I do have a good mental map. Fencing and competing and travelling for so many years have given me that. I am ready to get going. Just tell me where and when.

Caitlin Quinn - Stronger Than Ever

Advancing through adversity is what Scottish sabreur, Caitlin Quinn - has to do, lockdown or not

I was a blue baby, born starved of oxygen due to a heart condition called Tetralogy of Fallot. I've had eight operations in total now, including open heart surgery when I was two and again when I was eight, without which I couldn't have made it past



Caitlin

my 10th birthday. If you add in the time I pulled out my stitched-in chest drains, and the time that I suddenly started haemorrhaging when recovering from open heart surgery, it has been challenging to say the least.

One day my cardiologist recommended exercise. I've tried Irish dancing, taekwondo, swimming, football and cricket - but they've all fallen by the wayside over the years. I stopped swimming because I simply did not enjoy it. Taekwondo got lost in a house move somehow. And I gave up football and cricket because of the bullying from other children.

My life changed forever the day I joined a taster fencing class. I really enjoyed myself, and after a while, I was invited to train at the salle. In the beginning I was terrified but everyone was so lovely. I had finally found somewhere that I could have fun, keep fit and improve myself without having to worry about people being horrible. The salle has continued to be a safe haven for me throughout.

Encouraged by my coach to do some local competitions, I did pretty well in them - well enough to get a place on the Scottish youth team to compete at Challenge Wroslavia in Poland. It was all rather scary for someone as quiet and shy as me, being

part of this huge international event, but I did it and actually really enjoyed the whole experience.

In the meantime, things have changed for me in that I am now at college studying for an HNC in animal care. Who knows what the future will bring? I can't wait to get back on the Cadet circuit and I know at some point I will need more surgery. But with the love and support of all my fencing friends I know I can deal with it and come back stronger than ever.

Louis Taiwo Williams - Volume Control

Louis talks us through what kind of music is on his Lockdown playlist.

I live for fencing. I live for sport. I always have. For years, I did four sports competitively - swimming, triathlon, pentathlon and fencing. It meant that I always had to match the athletic with the academic. And I did. To me, this wasn't a pressure. It was just everyday life. Then



Louis

Covid arrived. Given this was supposed to be my last season as a Cadet, I'd wanted it to count.

What I couldn't do to myself was to just give in and do nothing but the only problem was that there seemed very little to do. I decided to switch off from that void, fill it with my own stuff to keep going and to give myself a wider perspective. I didn't seek out any particular clever idea or big philosophy. It was more a case of getting back to basics. My basics.

I have always used music at a competition as a way of getting my head where I want it and I followed the same principle in Lockdown. I'd listen to jazz to chill, or tunes that could get me into the mindset I needed to be in. Music has always had the power to amplify how I feel. It has always helped me to step back and find the bigger picture. You can find the music pretty much in anything and everything in life. It's a case of hearing a beat there or the rhythm here. You just have to tune in and keep re-tuning and fine-tuning until you're in the right space.

So I studied when I needed to. I would play basketball to stay active. If I couldn't play basketball then I would watch it on TV. With my friends - who are like brothers to me - I kept in touch in different ways. Whatever it was, I turned the volume up on some things, and turned it down on others, staying focussed on what I could work on, not on what I couldn't.

I just kept aiming to be on the right wavelength. Like in epee, I kept on moving - only to my kind of music, instead of the sounds of a fencing piste.



LOCKDOWN WINS

Tough times often bring out the best in people. It certainly has in the British Fencing community as this magazine has already shown! Here are three more triumphant stories that you may not have heard.

Innovation is the Mother of Invention

In every struggle there's an opportunity, as Junior Men's Foilist and Astrophysics Student, Louis Guennou found when considering how to improve his fencing during Lockdown. His approach was to transform necessity into invention, and to turn his sport into a spreadsheet, so he could carry on gaining, even when there were no competitions.

The effects of Covid-19 on everything in my life were huge. From a fencing perspective however, I looked at how I could actually be grateful for the lockdowns, and use them in a profitable way. Generally speaking, being stuck at home meant I had more time to look at aspects of my training and preparation that I previously hadn't had time for. These included nutrition, sleep and video analysis, as opposed to our more accustomed and accepted training methods, such as sparring, footwork and strength and conditioning.

Video analysis came to my attention in the summer of 2020 when reading and learning about successful athletes and coaches, primarily Kobe Bryant and tennis player turned coach Brad Gilbert and in particular his book "Winning Ugly" (1994), which focuses on the mental part of tennis. Both individuals used video review as tools to maximise their performance and minimise their opponent's advantages.



Eden Cup © Niki Buckner

| Match comments | Score | Me | Attempts | Off-target | Scored | Use rate | hit rate | Success rate | Opponent | Attempts | Off-target | Scored | Use rate | hit rate | Success rate |
|--|-------|----------------|----------|------------|--------|----------|----------|--------------|----------------|----------|------------|--------|----------|----------|--------------|
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| | | Attack '2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 25 | 100 | 50 | Attack '2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| | | Counterattack | 1 | 0 | 0 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 | Counterattack | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| | | Attack on prep | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Attack on prep | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Possible improvements: | | Parry riposte | 2 | 1 | 1 | 25 | 100 | 50 | Parry riposte | 3 | 1 | 1 | 27.2727 | 33.3333 | 33.3333 |
| | | Remise | 1 | 1 | 1 | 12.5 | 100 | 100 | Remise | 1 | 1 | 1 | 99.9991 | 100 | 0 |
| | | Line | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Line | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| | | Total | 8 | 4 | 4 | | | | Total | 11 | 4 | 4 | | | |

A key element to using video analysis is then how to interpret it. Sometimes we think that the more convoluted and sophisticated the technology we apply to such matters, the more effective it has to be. Often, however, the solution is a much more straightforward and everyday option.

For this reason, I created a spreadsheet where I could input which actions were attempted during a fight, along with the hit and success rates, both for my opponent and me. The aim being that, upon the return to fencing, I could analyse what my opponents were doing to score on me, but also how I could avoid getting hit and increase my own chances of scoring.

The spreadsheet works alongside the actual recording: you play the video and look at the smallest details of a fight, such as body language after a hit or rituals fencers might have before a point. At the same time, you input the actions into a table as they are happening, one successful direct attack for example.

This tool is the numerical translation of what is happening on the piste: it only exists to see trends and patterns in my own and my opponent's fencing. For example, if my opponent had a high success rate on defensive actions, I might want to lure them into attacking me, pulling them away from their A game and making them try to beat me with their B game: one of the principles described in "Winning Ugly".

Another benefit is to pinpoint areas where I can improve. That then enables me to establish future training "themes", where I can focus on certain aspects of my game and practice them separately during target practice, footwork, or within a fight.

The obvious danger of this tool is excessive use. I feel there will always be areas I

can improve in; hence it is important not to overload and confuse myself with the multiple things I could be doing better, but simply look at making one correction at a time.

It was enlightening though to get other fencers early views on my creation and I presented my work to my club, Fencers Club London via one of our online training sessions. My coach and strength and conditioning expert, Pawel Osmanski's verdict was that it was very impressive, with my club mates echoing what he said. They fed back to me that the self-sufficient formula that I had established removes a lot of the tedious work normally associated with video analysis and therefore makes it accessible to all fencers – who do not otherwise have the time or experience to do it. They were also taken with the adaptability of the formula which can be improved or changed depending on the fencer who wants to use it, and who could tailor it to achieve a greater level of learning and understanding from reviewing their fights, and who then can perhaps form a way ahead that will specifically help them as a fencing athlete.

I would certainly recommend this practice to any fencer who wants to better their performance. That's not to say it will magically win you competition, but it will help you clarify who is doing what to whom during a fight and how to harness that to your advantage.

Allez Halt! The Covid Diary of a Welsh Fencing Club

Fran Russell from Russell Swords kept a tab on how her fencers have made a lot out of very little in the Covid year ...

April-June 2020.

Spring has sprung but so has Lockdown. Suddenly, Zoom sessions and self-led training are needed to keep fencing. One-to-one lessons are replaced with virtual group sessions. Weekly challenges are set,



Fran's Socially Distanced Lesson

including plank buckaroo, toilet-roll catch, a 300 hit challenge and a plank-off with a family member. Everyone is so keen and ready to work hard. Trial and error give way to solid routine.

It's a hard time for me, with the loss of my Dad to cancer in early April. Diving headlong into online training keeps me sane. Recording demonstrations to use in Zoom sessions so I can watch and give feedback as well as seeing my fencers embrace this new training while still getting together and having a laugh provide my driving force to keep going.

July-August 2020

Summertime. Rules allow for a return to training (yay!): only at 2m apart and outdoors (oh). Two long-standing club members put in long hours to help. Resident hitting-dummies, Garry and Larry, once left almost forgotten in the corners of the Salle, seize their moment as they're dragged out into the Welsh sunshine. Finally, we are getting to work face to face - albeit with a shed-load of new precautions in place! Thank goodness it's not raining. Wales can be quite wet!

Training becomes moving up and down a few sections of piste in the Salle car park - hitting dummy at the end, and the coach always 2m away. Everyone's so happy to have space bigger than a lounge or garden. They've all grown a tonne and are now much taller than me.

September - Mid Oct 2020

Back in the Cardiff Academy Salle at last. Coaching one-to-one gets a new look with the introduction of 'Lance' the sword stick. Focus within the groups has shifted to fitness and fun.

But with every step forward ... Travel outside of your county is declared against the rules, so all our fencers from outside Cardiff aren't permitted at the Salle. Six living in the Vale area set up a mini-training

group in a local park, led by Erin Corcoran. So great to see them take initiative and responsibility for their own training. It's what we need at a time like this.

October "Firebreak" Lockdown

And back to Zoom we go. Erin lifts the gloom by organising a virtual Halloween party where S&C bingo, a pumpkin competition and best costume awards provide respite and fun.

November - December 2020

All change; it's back to the Salle. As everyone is missing competitions (usually they would be at one every weekend at this time of year), we're looking at how to bring a sense of competitiveness back to training. I introduce weekly challenges where fencers complete four tasks each week to earn ranking points. These vary from fitness, coordination, the ability to improve, problem-solving and pushing to the limit! Our records include an 11 minute plank, 120 burpies in 5 minutes and 220 jumping squats, also in 5 minutes. It definitely works and gets very competitive - I even go out to buy trophies and medals for the winners. How rewarding to realise that their drive is still there and the need to win is still strong.



Larry - The New Coach

A tense evening ensues when Pete borrows the club's dodgeballs for a uni session and forgets to return them. Extreme actions require extreme measures. Foil-hitting dummy Garry is held to ransom until their safe return. Never - and I repeat, NEVER - mess with a sabreur's right to play dodgeball!!

Happy New Year - Happy New Lockdown!



Halloween Social on Zoom

Did I say. 'All change'? I must have done. We're back to Zoom again! New Year 2021, and new ideas are needed. Cue: yoga with Henry Talbot. We're also teaming up with Salle Ossian for weekly online training, and with the True Athlete Project for some mindfulness. We're starting the year as we mean to go on: hard work and maximum effort. Lockdown Part 3 will not break us ... My fencers have proved they are tough. I want them to be so proud of themselves, I am proud of every single one of them. What we'll take with us is that we've learned to adapt and to go with the flow - whatever that flow may be.

Building Up Hopes - Extreme Fencing Salle Lockdown Makeovers

Lockdown did mean shutdown for a many fencing clubs, but some were able to use enforced closure periods as an opportunity to break out the tool boxes and carry out some quite radical DIY.

Salle Ossian Fencing Club in Perthshire, The Manchester Fencing Centre (TMFC) in Oldham and the Paul Davis Fencing Academy (PDFA) in St Albans took a tea break to talk us through their redevelopment projects which they believe will enable them to hit the ground running with greatly improved facilities.

North of the border, Salle Ossian has doubled the size of Scotland's first ever



Salle Ossian - A Dream Coming True

dedicated fencing centre with one mighty flunge: its business park home, next to the River Tay in Perth, has expanded from 2,500 to 5,000 square feet with the addition of an adjoining unit. This move has enabled the club to increase the number of pistes from six to nine and install a gym as well as a club room.



Salle Ossian Hard at Work

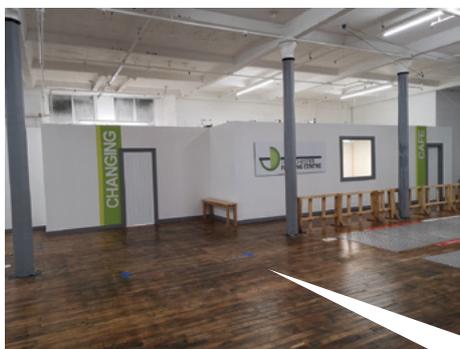
Head Coach, Phil Carson said, "We took lockdown as a opportunity to upgrade everything we could including the club website, online coaching, coaching materials and to introduce a club room, a gym and disabled facilities. We are now ready for bigger and better once we get back to fencing."

Meanwhile, in England, the historic home of TMFC has been undergoing the latest transformation in its 168 year history. The centre is housed in what has to be one of the most interesting places to fence in the

world - Osborne Mill was built as a cotton mill in 1853, and is one of the few mills still standing in Oldham.

The big advantage of such a building is space - TMFC boasts an incredible 17,000 square feet - with its pistes running along the same orientation as the original spinning machines.

But historic buildings bring their own unique challenges and are not always suited to modern day needs. TMFC's team has had a long list of "to do" jobs since opening in 2015. Lockdown 2 provided a perfect opportunity to get stuck into it with the installation of new showers, changing rooms, reception, gym, armoury, spectators area and kit shop. There is also a proper cafe that not only services the club but also other companies that operate out of the mill.



Manchester Fencing Centre Refurbed

One unique feature is a new raised DT stand that provides competition organisers with uninterrupted views over all pistes and comes fully equipped with fencing programmed computers and PA system. But, for those who know TMFC, the best news is that there is now heating on site - hooray!

For Director Mike Swiffin, who has been doing much of the refurbishment works himself, it has been a labour of love. "For years now it has been my dream to turn TMFC into a world class centre of excellence for fencing. The facilities we have put in over the last few months mean that going forward we are a lot closer to that goal. We would never have been able to tackle such a huge project if it had not been for the lockdown."

He added, "Fencing has now been without domestic and international competitions for over a year and it is my hope that with the provision we now have we can put on an extensive range of competitions across all weapons during the rest of 2021 to make up for some of the lost time. All fencers are craving for competitive fencing."

"And if all else fails," he said, "I have learnt an awful lot about plumbing, electrics, carpentry and decorating, so now I will never be out of work."

And things have been just as busy down south at PDFA where they are making the finishing touches to their new purpose built HQ. The Hertfordshire Combat Centre in St Albans has seven pistes, toilets, changing rooms, showers, a viewing gallery, cafe, a footwork, fitness and blade-work area, a classroom and parking.



PDFA - New Home Nears Completion

Paul Davis said, "We are so excited about the technology that we are incorporating into the build. There will be wireless scoring boxes and the floor, which is black, is controlled by a phone app.

"You can select from over 100 programmes and the floor lights up accordingly. You can pick the colour of your piste and how the lights react when you score. It also allows you to keep the score on the floor or on your phone, so there's no need for wires, paper or clipboards. This is a new dawn."

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

This issue of The Sword magazine has reminded us that for each and everyone, 2020 will be a year like no other. Many of our best cadet and junior athletes (and their parents and coaches!) will still remember how the start of the pandemic disrupted travel plans in and out of the Cadet & Junior European Championships in February 2020. As the extent of COVID-19 became clear, the Cadet & Junior Worlds was first postponed, then cancelled and our lives changed in ways we could not have imagined.

What this issue also shows is how when the going got tough, the toughness in us all got going. Since March 2020, I have been continually impressed with the resilience of our athletes and the support they have had from the fencing community. Our athletes have committed time and energy to keep training, learning and developing despite the restrictions and barriers they face. For those athletes missing their final year of Juniors it has been especially difficult, and credit must be given to those who have recovered from this disappointment and refocused on U23, University Games and Senior goals. Coaches have adapted too, seeking innovative ways to support athletes as they prepared for an international competition restart that time and time again was pushed just beyond their reach. Impressively a significant number of clubs managed to put in place the necessary processes and procedures to open and provide training opportunities when restrictions allowed. Parents have had arguably the hardest role in dealing first-hand with the emotional stress caused by announcements of postponement and cancellations. I salute you all.

All this to a back-drop of cancelled school exams, home schooling, furloughing and working from home. Like many organisations BF, our staff and our volunteers, have faced significant challenges, but we took the decision early on that our role in supporting our community was needed more than ever – and adapted quickly to a different way of working and communicating with each other and our members. The Athlete Development Programme (ADP) has continued throughout this period providing a range of learning and development



opportunities to help our athletes through this time and build skills and knowledge for the future. There have been numerous examples of athletes who have stepped forward to help in this period, to support others, to share their expertise and to help shape the direction of the programme, bringing to life our principle that 'Better People Make Better Athletes'. I have had the great pleasure of seeing so many of our athletes, parents and coaches in various ADP sessions over the last 10 months and there is no doubt that we will look to continue online sessions to keep as many people involved as possible. It's not been easy for any of us but our shared passion for fencing and our shared vision of GBR success has brought us together.

It is important to recognise that not everyone has been able to keep their involvement with the sport up. The varied restrictions that have been in place across the country, combined with the challenges of coping with the changes and pressures to school, home and work life have meant that some have understandably stepped away to focus on other things. And that's OK. Fencing is a sport that takes a long time in which to become truly World Class; stepping away for a year or so does not mean the end of that journey.

At BF we will continue our work, to support those athletes with dreams of future Olympic Games and support those coaches and clubs who play such an important part in our athlete development pathway, so

we can be ready to support the return to fencing. In doing so we look forward to a time where we can welcome all our 2020 athletes back to continue their unique and different journeys in our sport and as part of our community, whether that's as part of the GBR team or simply for recreational fun.

When restrictions lift, we will continue to provide our community with the latest guidance and updated resources, ensuring that clubs and competition organisers have what they need to return to activity in line with the latest government guidance. In turn this will provide our athletes with the vital training and competition they need to prepare for when the international calendar starts again.

In the meantime, I hope that you have enjoyed reading this issue and celebrating with us the 'Class of 2020'.

And one final word from Karim: This special issue, even more so than usual, has been a truly collaborative effort by so many people. Particular mention goes to Siân Hughes Pollitt who proposed the initial concept for the magazine and continued as my right-hand throughout the process. My thanks to her. I am also grateful for the contributing content from Flair Gougoulia and Jacqui Lever.

IMAGES FROM THE HEART OF LOCKDOWN



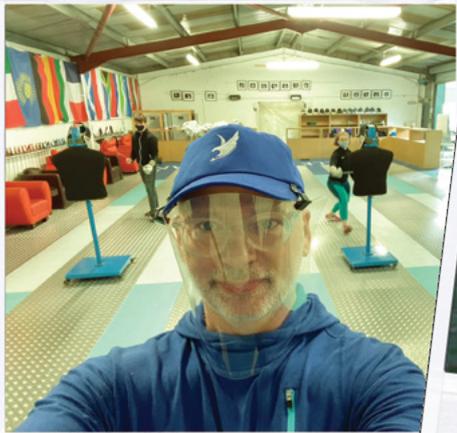
Fortress Attack



Who let the dogs out?



The Boss



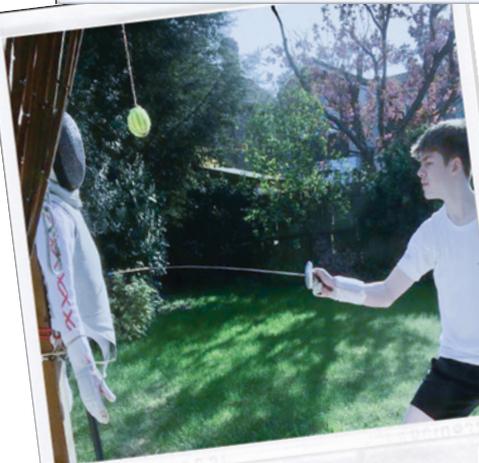
Behind The Mask



Park Life



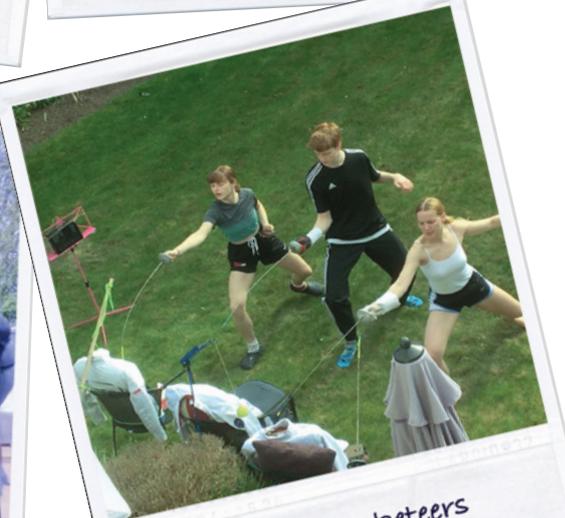
Brotherly Volunteer



Target Practice



Fight Like A Mannequin



Three Musketeers

