

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
APRIL 2021



**MEPSTEAD
SECURES
TOKYO
QUALIFICATION
SLOT**

OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION UPDATE P8
BF COMMUNITY AWARDS PP10-12
TOP TEN MOMENTS OF THE DECADE PP18-19

**BRITISH
FENCING**

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WELCOME TO THE SWORD



4 ON BOARD

with Yashmin Harun

6 COMMERCIAL

A Financial Perspective

8 INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Green Light for Marcus Mepstead

9 NEWS

British Fencing Image of the Year 2020

British Fencing Community Awards 2019-2020

IOC Statement on Gender Equality in the Olympic Movement

UK Sport Confirms 1 Year Investment of £418k into Fencing

16 FEATURES

Fencing Women

My Top Ten

20 DEVELOPMENT

Spotlight On Funding

Crown Hills Ahead of Schedule

The Stories Behind the Numbers

Working in Schools

27 CLUB

Club Spotlight

28 FEATURE

Diary of a Fencer

30 BOOK REVIEW

32 OBITUARIES

David Anthony Heaton

David Kirby

Beryl Goodall

34 LETTER TO THE EDITOR

35 RESULTS

IMAGE OF THE YEAR

P9

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Mepstead qualifies for Tokyo Olympics.
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Next deadline: 7 May 2021

ON BOARD

With Yashmin Harun

We recently spent some time getting to know Yashmin Harun who has been on British Fencing's Board as an independent Director since 2018. Here is what she had to say.

Tell us about your journey to the Board of British Fencing.

When I began my journey into the sports industry, I never had any long-term plans or direction of where I wanted to go. I began as a volunteer because I really missed playing sports. But the glaring under-representation across the industry from participation, coaching, volunteering and at leadership level was astonishing to me. As I began attending more and more networking events, I began using my voice to raise my concerns about the lack of representation and how the sports industry should be changing mindsets to engage with communities they classified as 'hard to reach'.

In 2017 the FA approached me to attend their 'On the Board' programme. This was a six-month certified course to make you 'Board Ready'. The course covered subjects such as the role of a Director, Governance, and the Sports Code, as well as other aspects to prepare you for being a board director. The course took place in Birmingham which meant I had to take time off work and commute there every month to attend. We had a wonderful tutor who made the course interactive and fun and we had a great cohort of people who contributed so much to each session. We all learned a lot from each other as we saw everything from different perspectives as we all came from different backgrounds in the sports industry. The exam took place at St George's Park which is the national training ground for the England Football teams.

Luckily I passed and I was eager to start looking for a role straight away. However, I was still very unsure whether I was doing the right thing. Although I had passed the exam and I was running my own association, I was still not sure if I was 'Board ready'.

I applied for another role first. It had been a long time since I did an interview and

I entered the room and saw three white female faces staring back at me. All older and all much more experienced than me. I came out of that interview and knew I had not prepared myself enough for the questions or done enough research into the organisation I had applied to. No surprise, I did not get the role.

Soon after, the role at British Fencing came up for a Non-Executive Director. I had been working with Virginia and the team for a while and together we created a female only level one coaching course to engage more diverse women into fencing. I felt confident that British Fencing were an organisation who were pushing the boundaries and thinking outside the box to grow the sport to become more inclusive, to increase ethnic diversity and female diversity. I decided to contact Mark the Chair and discuss the role and have an open and frank conversation about why I



wanted to join and what I could bring. My application was then proposed to the Board and I was invited for an interview. This time there were five interviewers but I had prepared myself better and I came out of the interview feeling more confident. The rest, as they say, is history!

What is your role on the Board and what does that involve?

As a non-executive director my role is to check and challenge the other Board members and the Executive team. As a Board we also set the strategy for the Executive to work towards. The papers for each meeting are sent in advance for review and for any questions to be prepared for the meeting. As a director you should check and understand the papers that are sent so that you are fully prepared for the meeting. This can involve several papers such as the Risk register, the financial statements, policy reviews and strategy update.

I really enjoy the discussions we have - because we have such a diverse Board, not just ethnicity, but also age, experience, and cultures. So the discussions are always interesting and varied with different insights. Each board member offers a different perspective and at first, I would be really reserved and quiet, just assessing and reading the room. It took me several meetings before I found my confidence to fully engage but I am glad to say this is not unique as many new board members feel the same.

As a director you can be asked to also be involved in other committees. I am also a member of British Fencing Sports for Social Change group which specifically looks at how fencing can engage a diversified audience. I really enjoy being a part of this small group as I feel this is where I can offer my strongest insights.

The MSA is a fantastic organisation that has seen rapid growth since launching. Can you tell us more about the objectives and goals of the organisation?

Muslimah Sports Association (MSA) was set up in 2014 and got its charity status in 2019. The aim of the charity is to engage Muslim and diverse ethnic females into sports and physical activity either through participation, volunteering or coaching. The charity has only three trustees who are all volunteers.

Since its inception we have grown the organisation to offer over fifteen weekly sessions across a range of activities including fencing, engaging over 150 females. We have also run many level one coaching courses in football, badminton, tennis and fencing as well as increased the number of volunteers. MSA supports our participants to get involved in volunteering and social action opportunities outside of our own communities to break down barriers and perceptions. We love working with partners and in collaborations with NGBs and other organisations to increase what we offer and that has contributed to our huge success.

COVID has had a significant impact on our community and participants. The safe haven we provided, where participants could keep active had suddenly stopped. We responded by keeping open communications and encouragement via our WhatsApp group and setting the



CouchTo5k, Go Walk challenges, and a six week learn to cycle course. We have also been able to move some sessions online, such as fencing fitness, with the support of British Fencing and Maslaha. We have recognised the importance of mental well-being and have run weekly Positive Minds workshops to address low morale and to keep the community engaged. We also ran Mindfulness and Art Therapy sessions. Those who found isolation particularly difficult, found these sessions to be a very helpful way to express themselves.

And how does that influence your thinking when dealing with your role at British Fencing?

MSA has been hugely successful in engaging the females from diverse ethnic communities. These communities have high levels of inactivity rates. This experience and insight have been valuable for me and British Fencing when setting strategy and influencing decisions in the boardroom. I believe my views are very different and unique from others in the room. My lived experience is very different from someone who perhaps has never worked in or engaged with different communities. I use my lived experience and insight to influence

my thinking and contribution in the Boardroom. I have learned that for a Board to be successful it has to have diversity of thought rather than all thinking the same and speaking the same. I constantly push the agenda of opening the sport up to the wider communities. The sport has a unique history and is perceived in a particular way from outside of the fencing community. Fencing is a brilliant, intelligent sport and the opportunity to try it at a social level especially, should be available for all. I think that is very important to me as a Director, that we open fencing up to as many communities as possible for them to experience this exceptional sport.

What are the biggest challenges that you face as a Board Director?

My biggest challenge, which may sound clichéd, is having imposter syndrome and the feeling that I am not experienced enough or educated enough to have that seat at the table. However, as I started to grow in confidence and contribute more to discussions and offer my insight and perspective, I began to feel valued and more deserving. I realised my lived experience, my achievements through my professional work and MSA justified my place at the table and I did not have to self-doubt all the time. Georgina, Mark, and all the other Board members have made me feel very welcomed and I hope I have become a respected member of the Board.

Clearly you have a busy life but when you have downtime, how do you like to spend it?

Unfortunately, I am not a fencer. I have two sons aged 21 and 16 who are relatively independent now but we do enjoy hiking and going on walks together. I am a huge football fan, supporting Manchester United and enjoy a lot of banter on fans forums on social media. I also enjoy music and visiting art galleries. During lockdown I rediscovered my love for running and completed the CouchTo5k app. I now enjoy running regularly when I do not have back-to-back Zoom meetings!



A FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE

David Moseley - British Fencing Finance Director

The past 12 months have been challenging for people and businesses across the UK and British Fencing has been no exception. The dramatic change to the way we all live our lives has forced many to adapt and evolve to accommodate the ever changing social and economic landscape. In some cases, this has meant closing things down and waiting the situation out, whilst others have found innovative new ways to deliver what they offer.

At BF we have also had to change what we do and how we do it. Fencing has been halted throughout the UK from clubs and competitions to schools, leisure centres and activity providers. This enforced national torpor has resulted in a considerable drop in membership income, whilst revenues from competitions and commercial activities have almost completely ceased. However, despite this sharp fall in revenue across the organisation, BF has continued to focus on providing a service to the sport.

Communication has increased significantly as we have worked to engage with our community and help support them through the situation in as many ways as possible. We have also lobbied Government, advocating for the sport and pushing for flexibility wherever feasible, while working with our Home Nations and funding partners such as Sport England and UK Sport to ensure that fencing is open to as many people as possible, when and where activity is allowed to resume.

Focusing on finance and governance; one of the biggest challenges we have faced has been around budgeting. It is fair to say that no one, from Government down, had any idea of the impact this crisis would have, both in severity and duration. Therefore, budgeting accurately has been, and continues to be, a significant challenge. When the crisis began, several budgets were drafted based on multiple assumptions, attempting to plan for a range of scenarios. However, the focus was placed on the 'worst case' scenario, with the intention to plan for the worst and improve things where possible. This made for grim reading as we prepared for a sharp



decline in revenue across multiple areas of the organisation.

One of the main challenges faced was around cost reduction. Over the last few years, BF has undergone several rounds of cost review, to ensure that maximum value for money is being achieved across the organisation. This has required many difficult decisions for BF, as we have had to question all areas of expenditure to decide what is strictly necessary to provide the best service to members and the sport. The result of these exercises is an organisation that is very lean with minimal costs that are not directly related to delivery. This is a good place to be, as maximum value for money is an area that BF strives for excellence in. However, it does not leave much room for further cost cutting during difficult times. BF has reached a point where a material level of cost reduction would require cutting of staff, which in turn reduces the service provided to fencing.

The BF Board continues to be committed to the ongoing financial aim for the organisation to operate at break-even. This safeguards the reserves of BF and ensures we are operating in a way that is sustainable over the long term, whilst also ensuring that any material surplus generated is re-invested back into the sport. Mindful of this, and having undergone the cost reviews detailed above, BF has (prior to COVID) focused on increasing revenues, with particular attention on developing our commercial offering, making our competitions more sustainable and expanding our membership network.

Revising our expectations for the 20/21 financial year to account for the situation with COVID, it was clear that commercial activity would slow considerably. Many

of our commercial partners were in the process of closing their operations and furloughing their staff, as they prepared for a difficult period. As the needs of our partners changed, we decided to use the opportunity, and existing ring-fenced Sport England funding, to further review and develop what BF could offer commercially to support them during and after COVID, as activity restarts. We undertook a review of all the products we offer with the aim of ensuring we had everything needed to make a strong commercial recovery once direct delivery and partner activity could resume. This ranged from reviewing and improving internal process to redesigning marketing collateral that better communicates the services that BF has to offer. We also took the opportunity to consult with the education sector to ensure that the BF products designed for schools catered to their needs.

This did not mean that we lost sight of commercial income generation. With direct delivery no longer an option, we used the opportunity to develop an online version of some of our coach education products. A grant from UK Sport enabled the production of an online Core Coach course, with an Introduction to Coaching Fencing (ITCF) following close behind. These added to the Safeguarding and Protecting Children (SPC) course already live, resulting in three online products. This not only allows us to generate revenue without direct delivery, but also allows BF to continue to develop grass roots coaching across the country and make the sport available to more people. It also helps ensure that as many people as possible are aware of safeguarding and its importance within the sport.

Membership income remains a significant concern and will be vital in accelerating the safe restart and recovery of our sport. Membership income is of enormous importance to BF and underpins much of what we do as an organisation. Members paying their annual fees, not only pay for their insurance and The Sword magazine, they also contribute to many areas across the sport such as coach and referee development, competitions, safeguarding & welfare and work with international federations, as well as supporting our grass roots programmes

and athlete development programme. As a result, without the contribution from our community, much of the work BF do could not exist. This means that it is vital, not only to BF but to the sport, that people who are fencing are also members.

Historically (pre COVID) not all clubs have followed the BF membership requirements for individual fencers. Coming out of COVID it is important that the cost of providing services to members and supporting the return of fencing is shared by all, who should not subsidise those that chose not to become members. Creating enhanced membership offerings to support clubs in meeting membership requirements will be an area that BF and the Home Nations will continue to work on.

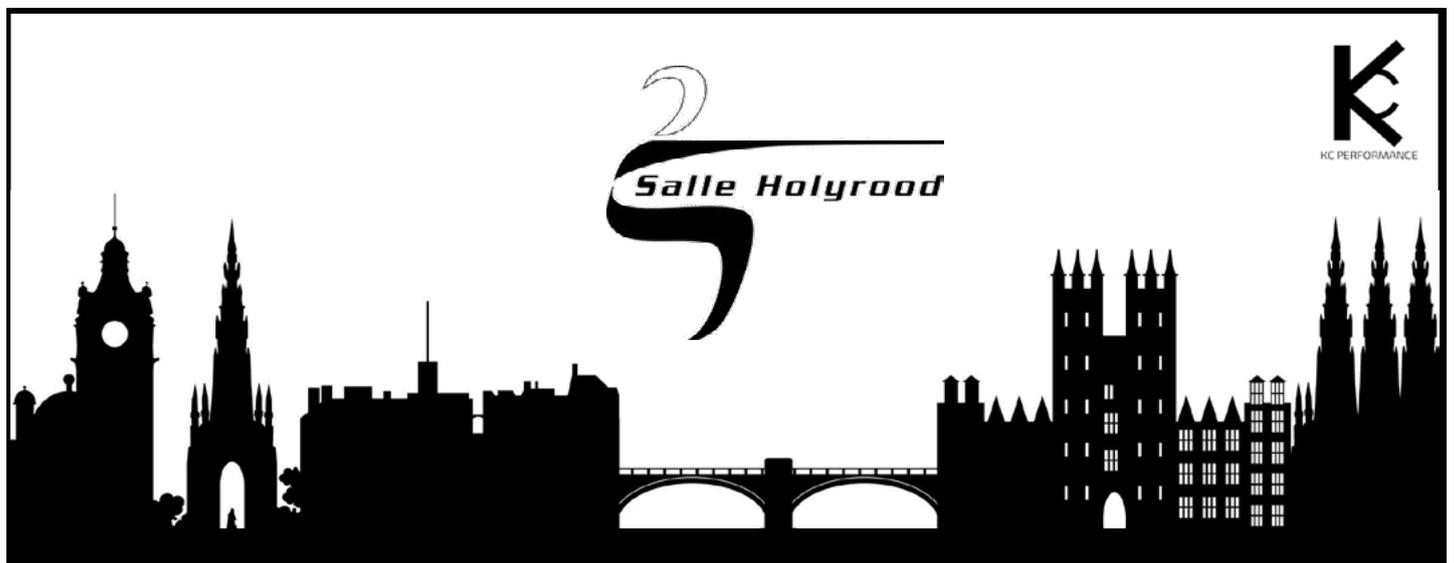
As of 31 January 2021, membership income had fallen by 40% for the current financial year, which constitutes a fall in income of approximately £125,000. This is a significant fall in income for any organisation, but for one the size of BF it represents a threat to the ongoing existence of the organisation in its current form. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to BF that we make a strong recovery from the current situation and regain the members that we have lost during the COVID crisis. The Board have stated that they are prepared to authorise

a combined loss of £150,000 over the financial years 20/21 and 21/22. This would constitute approximately 1/3 of BF reserves, further highlighting the massive importance of a strong recovery from the current situation.

These difficult times are also hitting fencing clubs across the UK. It is clear from the contact we have had with many clubs that this has been an extremely hard time. There have been many examples of clubs that have said the current situation has forced them to close permanently. This is sad in every case but particularly so when it is a club that has been in existence for many years. At BF we have tried to provide as much support to clubs as we can. We have held a number of community discussions with clubs, allowing for those involved to discuss their issues and share any solutions they have found. We have also developed a marketing pack for clubs that is designed to help a club make as many people aware of them as possible and support a strong recovery when fencing resumes. We have signposted funds available to support clubs from external organisations (such as Sport England), run webinars and provided support on completing funding applications and with the help of support from the FIE set up a BF fund to provide small grants directly to support our clubs. It is clear the

recovery of clubs is hugely important to the sport and BF will continue to engage with them as much as possible and offer support wherever we can.

Moving forward we are all, inside and outside BF, waiting for further guidance from Government about when and how we can resume activity. As mentioned above, this is vital to BF financially, but it is also vital for the sport. Many members have expressed a strong desire to return to fencing and clubs are keen to have people fencing in their clubs and competitions again. Fencers across the country are eagerly waiting for international competition to resume so they can continue their journey to represent GBR at the highest levels of the sport. Many of our partners are preparing for the chance to get started again, ranging from social impact and community projects to residential activity camps and direct delivery into schools. In every case, BF has prepared carefully so we are in the best position possible to support stakeholders across the sport. All this will not be possible without the ongoing support of members like you, which is massively appreciated by everyone at BF.



Salle Holyrood

SALLE HOLYROOD SPARRING CAMP 2021

What better place to be this summer than sparring with Cadet, Junior and Senior Foil GB team members to give you the best possible start to the season?

📍 St George's Girls School Edinburgh

📅 August 2nd-6th ⌚ 9.30am-4pm

📞 Bookings: www.fencingfun.co.uk

Limited places available

GREEN LIGHT FOR MARCUS MEPSTEAD

Marcus speaks about inspiring the next generation and finding a new way to fight as he turns his sights towards Tokyo.

Marcus Mepstead has a big smile on his face, even from behind the black face mask he's wearing on a video call from his hotel in Doha. It's the first morning he's woken up knowing he has secured a qualification slot for the Tokyo Olympic Games. There is an official process to go through in order to be announced as actually qualified, but at this point, Marcus has done his bit. It's taken a while. With the last competition of the qualification period cancelled in Anaheim due to Covid-19 in 2020, Marcus has had to wait until late March 2021 to secure his European qualification slot.

He is hitting the ground running and is full of enthusiasm about using his position to inspire others. "It's a great thing to be able to do, to share how this journey is going and for other young fencers to be able to see it." He also speaks about how grassroots fencing can be reinvigorated with a new wave of interest as we head to Tokyo, "Nobody has been able to fence. The clubs have all had to wait. It's like we've been holding our breath and now we can restart, let's go for it."



Marcus Mepstead silver world medalist
© Niki Bruckner



Marcus Celebrating

The journey has been memorable. Marcus had his breakthrough season in the run-up to Rio 2016. Three consecutive top 16 finishes in international tournaments and the 2016 British National title cemented his place on Team GB for Rio. Following the closure of the BF World Class Programme in 2017, Marcus moved to New York where his hard work and determination resulted in him winning individual silver at the 2019 World Championships. Before Covid paused all fencing across the world he was poised for a European qualification slot for Tokyo. He's bullish about the future and looks on the last few years as a challenge that he has risen to, along with BF, "We lost funding, but there's a new story now. We're coming through it. As athletes and as an organisation we're continuing to grow and learn. We have won two World silver medals, one a year for two years running, from myself and Richard (Kruse). I want to embody this and continue showcasing there's a new way to win, a more sustainable way of thinking."

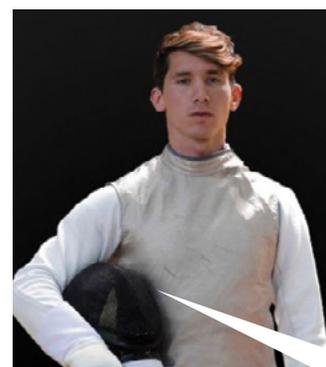
He's serious about sustainability. As an ambassador for Trees for the Future and a passionate campaigner for the environment, he offsets his carbon emissions from his athlete lifestyle and wants to help others find ways to do the same. He takes a holistic approach to sustainability. "Yes, it's environmental. So, I look at how to offset my travel with Trees for the Future. It's also about having a sustainable approach to life as an athlete and as a person. So, mental health and wellbeing is key. I want to get a gold medal but embrace the challenges and mistakes that come with pursuing it. It's about finding a way to grow as a person and as an athlete."

Johnny Davis, Olympic Team Manager is with Marcus in Doha and has supported him through the journey so far. They're both keen to share how Marcus can share his story to inspire others. Apparently, Marcus ate a different breakfast today to the ones he had on fencing days and Johnny picks up on this detail as something that perfectly illustrates how specific tactics lead to success, "He plans - he thinks ahead. I've had the privilege to see how he operates and it would be great to show that to others."

Marcus will travel back to New York for a period of self-isolation after Doha. With current travel restrictions still in place at the time of writing, the next few months will demand some flexibility and an adaptable approach. There is still an official process to complete before he can celebrate and look forward to the whole experience of Tokyo. The Games are going to be different this year but he is excited about the journey.

Looking ahead, Marcus is hoping to share more about his experiences through videos and interviews. From his passion for the environment and planting change within himself and the World around him - how he sleeps and what he eats, to his training routine and workouts. As a personal trainer he's also keen to inspire others to get active. With a new wave of interest in sports on the horizon due to the Olympic Games, he sees a great opportunity for a return to fencing. "Let's get everyone back into the clubs. Let's get everyone fencing again. I started in school and there are young people out there waiting to be inspired. Let's show them what we can do."

Follow Marcus' journey on BF's social media and BF TV, as well as exclusive members' only content on the [BF website](#).



Marcus

BRITISH FENCING IMAGE OF THE YEAR 2020

Evie Millar - Head Office & Events Administrator

Now in its third year, the British Fencing Image of the Year competition welcomed fencers and photographers of all ages and abilities to submit their images in the bid to be crowned #BFimage2020.

As in previous years, the images submitted were entered into three categories of 'Fencing Fun', 'Inspiration' and 'Teamwork'. After the judging panel had considered all of the submissions, the winners were chosen in each category. With the image, that best summarises BF's motto "Be You. Be Different." taking the prize as the overall winner.

In this, very different year for fencing, many of images submitted provided a snapshot into how the community has had to adapt to the changes. From drills in the garden to outdoor training sessions!

Category Winner: Fencing Fun



Photographer: Prof. Phil Carson

Speaking about his winning entry, Prof. Phil Carson explains, "The image was taken during a break in one of our primary school classes. This particular class is full of characters and they have gelled together after a short time. I hope they'll all be back after lockdown!"

Category Winner: Inspiration



Photographer: David Barbour

Explaining the story behind the image, David says, "The top image was taken of Salle Holyrood fencers Rhys Barbour and Jaimie Cook at the Bristol foil cadet event in 2017 with future successes unknown. Roll on to the bottom image which was taken at last season's Bristol cadet event by which time they were teammates competing with the GBR cadet foil squad at international events in Europe. I can't count the number of competitions they've travelled to together in the UK and abroad, but they've certainly both grown up in a fencing hall".

Category Winner: Teamwork



Photographer: David Barbour

David explains the background to the image, "This shot was taken of competitors at the Foundation for Scottish Fencing Youth Development Series (YDS) event on 8 February 2020 in Edinburgh. The morning foil competition had just completed with medals presented, and the afternoon Sabre and Epee was about to start. The

Foundation for Scottish Fencing had just been presented with the "Sword of Merit" by Scottish Fencing for outstanding contribution in supporting youth fencing in Scotland. I thought who better to show off the "Sword of Merit" than the fencers themselves, so I grabbed all the fencers I could, got them to hold the "Sword of Merit" and took the snap. It's a happy reflection of a great day but looking back now it's tinged with sadness in that the February event was the last event held by the Foundation due to Covid, and our lives and the world has changed since this picture was taken."

Overall Winner: Be You. Be Different.



Photographer: Graham Cormie

The image, by Graham Cormie, was taken in Elgin, Scotland. Graham explains, "I was out with my wife and granddaughter one afternoon, when I spotted the two gentlemen fencing. It's not often you see this happening in Elgin!"

Thanks to Pulseroll, our competition supporter, all category winners will receive a prize. With Graham, the overall winner receiving a £60 electronic voucher for Nikon School UK online photography workshops.

Thank you to our 2020 competition judges:
Hanene Basson
Kate Beardmore
Lucy Keyte

Thank you to our competition supporters:
Pulseroll
Nikon School UK

Are you interested in fencing photography? If you always capture the action at your club, or have experience in event photography, you're welcome to volunteer at British Fencing events. Please contact eventsadmin@britishfencing.com

BRITISH FENCING COMMUNITY AWARDS 2019-2020

Evie Millar - Head Office & Events Administrator

In December 2020, winners of the British Fencing Community Awards 2019-2020 were announced.

The annual awards are a celebration of the fencing community in the UK, recognising the achievement, good practice and the contribution of those involved in the sport.

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

Over 150 nominations were made from across the fencing community by fellow fencers reaching many parts of the UK, recognising the hard work, commitment and dedication from volunteers, coaches, athletes and clubs.

An independent panel selected the shortlisted nominees and winners and noted the amazing achievements and outstanding contribution to fencing and the wider community shown by the nominees. Each announcement is supported by an excerpt from their nomination.

Fencing Personality of the Year

The Fencing Personality of the Year Award is the only award to be decided by public vote. Once the shortlisted nominees of Chris Howser, Gillian Aghajan and Matt Cooper were announced, voting opened for BF members to vote. Hundreds of members voted for their Fencing Personality of the Year, taking to social media to share their support for their chosen nominee.

Once voting closed in early December, the votes were counted, and Gillian Aghajan was announced as Fencing Personality of the Year 2019-2020.

Results of the 2019-2020 Awards

Performance Athlete of the Year
Sponsored by Pulseroll



Winner: Marcus Mepstead



Marcus Budapest 2019 #BizziTeam

“Since achieving silver at the World Championships in July 2019, Marcus’s performance has gone from strength to strength as he has established himself in the world top 16. One key reason for the success Marcus has achieved is the leadership and the development of Team Mepstead. A collaborative team working to challenge Marcus to step up another level in his fencing. With his coach, Dan Kellner, he has developed a deeper understanding of the sport and of being a world class athlete. His behaviour on and off the piste is of the highest standards - what is expected of a true performance athlete, without losing the human side where he gives his time to chat and talk with some of the younger aspirational fencers.”

Young Athlete of the Year (Junior/U20)

Sponsored by Pulseroll



Winner: Teagan Williams-Stewart

“Teagan is a positive role model to many young female fencers especially the youngsters at Newham Swords. Teagan’s passion has seen her getting more and more involved with BF as she wants to make an impact on children like herself. She takes her fencing seriously and manages to balance completing her training, supporting her teammates and her studies.”



Teagan Williams-Stewart

Wheelchair Athlete of the Year

Winner: Piers Gilliver



Photo Credit: Yuka Fujita

“He is an outstanding fencer, World Champion and world ranked 1 at Category A epee, and World Championship bronze medallist and world ranked 3 at Category A sabre. After the gold and 2 x bronze medals at the World Championships Piers followed up with gold in epee, and a bronze

in sabre at Amsterdam in November 2019, and again at Eger in February 2020. He is a true diplomat when he is abroad on international duty. The junior fencers look up to him and he always has time for them. At international competitions he looks after them, giving them encouragement and offering advice. He is always striving to improve the sport and is respected by athletes and officials from other nations when he makes suggestions."

Shortlisted Athlete Nominees: Alec Brooke, Benjamin Andrews, Carolina Stutchbury, Marcus Mepstead, Piers Gilliver and Teagan Williams-Stewart.

Performance Coach of the Year

Winner: Dan Kellner



Nominated by Marcus Mepstead, he commented how Dan has "helped me really understand the sport, allowed me to play the game rather than just participate and given me a lot of confidence in how good I am and how good I can be. I work endlessly to get every bit of knowledge I can out of him because I know when I use it all, I have a real chance of being an Olympic Champion."

Development Coach of the Year

Winner: Chris Howser



In Chris's nomination he was commended for his "absolute enthusiasm, professionalism, and dedication to the sport of fencing, from the youngest to the eldest, and everyone in between."

Community Coach of the Year

Winner: Paul Davis



Paul was commended for his vision of the sport and the role it can play in having "a positive impact on the individuals and community around them beyond just taking part."

Shortlisted Coach Nominees: Anthony Klenczar, Chris Howser, Dan Kellner, Ian Lichfield, Neil Bromley, Paul Davis, Pierre Harper and Tamas Kovacs.

Outstanding Contribution by a Referee

Winner: Jennifer Sancroft



Jennifer was nominated for her "professionalism and sportsmanship" and is held in high esteem by her refereeing colleagues. "A largely self-taught referee, Jennifer has displayed an outstanding level of commitment to self-improvement which has culminated in her being awarded an international refereeing licence by the FIE."

Shortlisted Outstanding Contribution by a Referee Nominees: Jennifer Sancroft, Patrick Jennings and Phil Elliot.

Outstanding Contribution by a Volunteer

Winner: Viv Mills



For many years Viv represented GB internationally and after retiring from competition she has worked tirelessly to grow and develop British Disability Fencing and is a "true fencing stalwart with a heart of gold!"

Shortlisted Outstanding Contribution by a Volunteer Nominees: Gillian Aghajan, Jacqui Lever and Viv Mills.

Performance Club of the Year

Winner: Newham Swords



Development Club of the Year

Winner: Paul Davis Fencing Academy



Community Club of the Year
Sponsored by Playwaze



Winner: Bristol Blades



Shortlisted Club of the Year Nominees:
Bristol Blades, Crawley Sword, Fencers Club London, Knightsbridge Fencing Club, Newham Swords and Paul Davis Fencing Academy.

University Club of the Year

Winner: University of Kent



Shortlisted Nominees: Durham University, Lancaster University and University of Kent.

Fencing Personality of the Year

Winner: Gillian Aghajan



An excerpt from Gillian's nomination for the award: "Since 2014, Gillian has diligently served as the voluntary Chairperson of British Veterans Fencing and is standing down after 6 years of service in November 2020. During her tenure, she has been instrumental in the development of the British Veteran Fencing community as a friendly and welcoming environment for all...Gillian has been a phenomenal source of support to the fencing community and her dedication to the veterans' community, in particular, is second to none."

Shortlisted Nominees: Chris Howser, Gillian Aghajan and Matt Cooper.

Viveca Abrahams Memorial Innovation Award

Supported by Paul Abrahams

Winner: Street Swords
(Beth Davidson/Stewart Watson)



Street Swords, is a programme targeting young people that has enabled "fencers to continue being enthused and engaged about our sport, not only from the Yorkshire and North East Region or anywhere in the UK, but from all over the world!"

Shortlisted Nominees: Shield of Endeavour (Paul Davis Fencing Academy) and Street Swords (Beth Davidson/Stewart Watson).

Lifetime Achievement Award

Sponsored by Sport80



Winner: Peter Jacobs

Shortlisted Nominees: Gillian Aghajan, Johnny Davis, Peter Jacobs, Pierre Harper and Professor Sue Benney.

Thank you to our independent panel members, Esther Jones from UK Coaching, John Jones from London Youth and Navjeet Sira from The Change Foundation.

Congratulations to all the winners and shortlisted nominees

Our thanks to our sponsors, Pulseroll, Playwaze and Sport80 and all those who took the time to nominate.

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

karim.bashir@catchsport.com

IOC STATEMENT ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

Source: IOC

Inclusion, diversity and gender equality are integral components of the work of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Over the past 25 years, the IOC has played an important role in promoting women in and through sport, and it will continue to do so by setting ambitious targets. In the challenging context we live in, now more than ever, diversity is a fundamental value that we need to respect and draw strength from.

The recent comments of Tokyo 2020 President Mori were absolutely inappropriate and in contradiction to the IOC's commitments and the reforms of its Olympic Agenda 2020. He apologised and later made a number of subsequent comments.

Besides Mr Mori's apology, the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee (OCOG) also considers his comment to be inappropriate and has reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality.

As the leader of the Olympic Movement, we are committed to our mission to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, as stated in the Olympic Charter.

On the one hand, the IOC has a strong record on gender equality (see below), and will continue to build on this. On the other hand, we stand ready to support the OCOG and other organisations in their desired aims within their spheres of responsibility.

The IOC's decisions, achievements and commitments in this respect include:

1. *With female athlete participation of almost 49 per cent, the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will be the first gender-equal Olympic Games.*
2. *The IOC is requesting all 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) for the first time ever to have at least one female*



and one male athlete in their respective Olympic teams.

3. *The IOC has for the first time ever allowed and encouraged all 206 NOCs to have their flag carried by one female and one male athlete at the Opening Ceremony.*
4. *The Chef de Mission of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team Tokyo 2020 will be Ms Tegla Loroupe, an advocate for peace, the refugee cause, education and women's rights. The first woman from Africa to win the New York marathon, she is also a three-time Olympian and a world record-holder for many years.*
5. *The IOC's First Vice-President at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will be Ms Anita DeFrantz, an African-American bronze medallist at the Olympic Games Montreal 1976, who is a trailblazer for women's empowerment.*
6. *At the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the athletes will be represented by the IOC Athletes' Commission (AC), the majority of whose members are directly elected by the athletes themselves. The IOC AC consists of 11 female and 6 male members. The Chair of the AC and member of the IOC Executive Board is Ms Kirsty Coventry, a five-time Olympian and winner of seven Olympic medals. The Vice-Chair is Ms Danka Bartekova, a three-time Olympian and bronze medallist at the Olympic Games*

London 2012, who has also already qualified for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

7. *Based on a Memorandum of Understanding, the IOC is closely working with UN-Women on the advancement of gender equality. The IOC President has been appointed by UN-Women as a HeForShe Champion in recognition of the IOC's contribution and commitment to gender equality.*
8. *Today, female IOC membership stands at 37.5 per cent, up from 21 per cent at the start of Olympic Agenda 2020.*
9. *Female representation on the IOC Executive Board stands at 33.3 per cent, versus 26.6 per cent pre-Olympic Agenda 2020.*
10. *Women account for 47.8 per cent of the members of the IOC's commissions, compared with 20.3 per cent pre-Olympic Agenda 2020.*
11. *Female employees represent 53 per cent of the IOC administration.*

For all these reasons, the athletes, all Olympic stakeholders and the general public can rest assured that the IOC will continue to deliver on its commitment to gender equality, inclusivity, solidarity and non-discrimination.

UK SPORT CONFIRMS 1 YEAR INVESTMENT OF £418K INTO FENCING

As part of an indicative four year award of £1.6m, UK Sport confirms a one year £418k award to support long term Olympic success in fencing.

UK Sport has awarded a one year investment of £418k to support the long term success of elite fencing in the UK. The funding is part of an indicative four year award totalling £1,672,485 to create a pathway to Olympic success in 2032.

From UK Sport, "UK Sport has today signalled its intent for the UK to become successful in a wider range of sports and build a high-performance sports community which reflects the diversity of British society.

The shift is supported by a plan for investment of £352m into an increased number of sports (43) in the build up to the postponed Tokyo Games, through to the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games and beyond."

BF is one of seven Olympic and Paralympic sports to be awarded a 'Progression Funding' investment. Progression Funding is a new initiative from UK Sport designed to support the long-term medal potential of sports like fencing.

Georgina Usher, BF's CEO said, "At the heart of UK Sport's new strategy is the ambition to pivot the UK's high-performance system so that, over time, the UK becomes successful in a wider range of sports, that can have an even greater inspirational impact on society. We are delighted that Fencing will have the opportunity to contribute to this strategy.

The Progression investment will enable us to focus on improving the system and structure to develop athletes and coaches for long term Olympic success. A significant area of this work will be supporting the development of a cohort of fencing coaches who, by 2028, will be able to train and support an expanding squad of Olympic level fencers in the UK. We have also been successful in securing one funded Podium athlete place, which is key to supporting our short term ambitions to Tokyo and beyond."



Steve Kemp, Head of Pathways at BF said, "The process of submitting the bid involved a substantial piece of data analytics and research, much of which is reflected in the publication of the first Fencing Pathway. This investment will enable us to bring the model to life, through our coaches and athlete development activities, providing the platform for future World Class Programme funding and 2032 Olympic medal success. We will be meeting with UK Sport in mid-January to discuss the details of the award and more information will be shared following that meeting".

BF's Chair, Mark Lyttle said, "This is extremely exciting news for sport and particularly for the future of fencing. Our mission is to deliver a sustainable and inclusive athlete development system that enables our best athletes to

access a high-quality pathway that fulfils their potential - as people and performers. Thanks to the National Lottery and the Government, this investment will allow us to accelerate our work on vital improvements to this system to support future Olympic success. At this time of economic uncertainty we appreciate the faith shown in us and we remain committed to contributing to UK Sport's vision of a successful and diverse sports community."

The full UK Sport press release can be found [here](#).

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FENCING WOMEN

The Beth Davidson Story

Wonderful fencing stories, inspiration and adapting to change all featured heavily when British Fencing sat down for a chat with Beth Davidson.



Beth's 1st Competition

Tell us a little about your fencing story.

My name is Beth Davidson. I was born and am based in Darlington in North East England. My many fencing 'hats' have included North East Regional Development Officer, Member of England and British Veteran's Fencing Boards, England Team Manager, U20 GB Sabre Manager, British Fencing DiSE Assessor and coach for Laszlo's Fencing Club and Street Swords Fencing Hub. I have been licenced to brandish a fencing sword for over 25 years and it has been a bit of an obsession since I was working as a photographer in Lincolnshire, on a sports development project. A dear friend and colleague told me to put the camera down and try fencing – I have never looked back (fencer pun!).

At age 25 it turned out I was a late starter but my first club (Sleaford Sword Club) was great at helping me as I took my baby fencing steps – holding my hand and zipping me up at my first competition. I look so fondly back at those times, not only as the start to my journey but also when I am doing my fencing development work and

someone finds the courage to try fencing. Those initial experiences are so important to keep us all going.

Fencing fuelled my competitive nature, more than any other sport. I have done thousands of parry ripostes over my time but I haven't forgotten my first 'real' one in that first competition. I knew then I wanted to be better but I had a lot of catching up to do!

Living in Lincolnshire, with a club that met once a week wasn't going to make me a World Champion. So, I sourced my first sabre coach in Stamford, 40 miles from home. Ted Burke, with his amazing moustache, taught me how to hold and wield a sabre properly. To give me more training time I set up a fencing mask on my kitchen wall and spent an hour a day on fencing footwork and hitting my compliant opponent.

In 2002 I moved back North and started to work with Prof. Laszlo Jakab in Durham. His high technical demand, tactical deviancy and Hungarian sense of humour was a perfect match for me and we have become dear friends. Since then I have represented GB and England senior and veteran



European Silver in 2011

squads and achieved five National Team Championships and Millennium Champion in seniors and as a veteran, 8 x National Champion, 2 x Commonwealth Champion; 3 x European Team Champion, silver and bronze individual medals and 1 x World Team Champion, silver World individual medals & European Veteran Fencer of the Year.



London Olympics with Frank Mills

And what about your fencing memories?

Listing personal memorable moments are things that are very difficult, as they are so many and varied and involve so many important people on the journey, from coaches, teammates, training partners, partners and parents! They all helped, joining in the victory drinks and wiping away my tears when it didn't work out!

Being a Team Leader at the 2012 London Olympic Games was definitely a poignant moment as it was the competition I aspired to, worked hard for but it became an impossible dream because my age made every training day harder to recover from. Retiring from senior fencing was so emotional – like a death in the family! At the London Games I was able to be at the Olympics, to see and feel what it is like to be that fencer getting ready after four years of micromanaging life for just 5 or 6 fights! Meeting my fencing heroes and escorting them into the arena to fight for a gold medal was a lifetime ambition met.

How have you attracted people to the sport?

My experience as a Development Officer in fencing has taught me that it is not hard to attract people to the sport, it is keeping them participating! Clubs work incredibly hard to provide opportunities to start with equipment and cheap membership, taking away the 'posh' sport label. There are a lot of people who come to fencing because they dislike sport. Memories of being forced onto a cold school football pitch put them off activity later on in life but fencing didn't have that perception.

I knew something had to change in approach, removing barriers to experience that first parry riposte, and it was to make fencing simple! As children many of us used sticks as swords without coaching. So yes! It can be simple! To match and develop these skills I devised a training system of Movement, Attack or Defence or MAD for short. Depending on the age groups, each part of the system has a game or drill to help pupils learn the skills of movement, attack or defence with tactical connections, and a couple of rules linking them. Refereeing was drip fed at each stage, so participants felt comfortable saying "Attack touché!" and sticking an arm up. Then the group was split into threes and a score sheet was given out to each. The competition was happening before anyone had a chance to get nervous.

The MAD system evolved from part of my Street Swords Project (recognised by Prime Minister David Cameron's Big



Street Swords Big Society Award

Society Awards 2013 and the Sport and Recreation Alliance Innovation Award in 2014) using fencing as a tool to develop life skills and increase opportunity to have a go in areas of deprivation. It helped them to understand what, when and why to teach it. Supported by the Prince's Trust we visited primary schools to deliver hour-long fencing classes over 3 to 5 days. Time after time these Street Swords Leaders, all young adults from very challenging backgrounds, coached and refereed over 800 children.

Do you see yourself as a role model for women in fencing?

As a woman in fencing and especially in sabre you must be resilient! Back in 1995 there were only mixed competitions in the UK and whilst I thrived on beating up the boys it was very off-putting for many women. It is a great sport for women as it relies more on technique and tactics than physicality. So everyone can learn together. I have experienced much misogyny with women being treated as second class in coaching and competition - being awarded Best Woman trophies when winning overall in a mixed competition being one example.

As Development Officer I was able to work with a group of Muslim women in Newcastle and Teesside to lead fencing activities for their communities. We created something that was aimed to inspire other women and to challenge themselves, recognising their strengths and not weaknesses. And so On-Guard Sister was born! In 2020 we were successful in being awarded funding from Sport England for the 'This Girl Can' programme linking Muslim women from different areas to

share skills and organise a competition. The pandemic has put this on hold until 2022 but I am hoping to use the philosophy of On-Guard Sister to connect women from all over the world to take confidence in what they aspire to as fencers, coaches, in work and life!

How have you managed during the restrictions?

The pandemic has hit us all hard as fencers and coaches. I was sitting in the pub after coaching a session in March 2020 and a notification came though on my phone about the lockdown. I knew I was unemployed from that moment. Competition plans, selection for World and European Championships were all cancelled. Soon after, ideas for online classes started to take shape and my Street Swords coaching partner Stewart Watson and I started to run weekly sessions for our fencers but people from all over the UK and the World started to click our Zoom link to take part as well. It became more of a community, all desperate to keep fit and fencing but confined to their homes. Our Fencing@Home online programme grew and became the place for lonely fencers to maintain contact and enable us to keep coaching. We were honoured to be awarded The British Fencing Award for Innovation in December, nominated by our participants.

We are definitely not as popular as Joe Wicks but this has kept us sane, making new friends and anyway, Joe Wicks hasn't felt the joy of that first parry riposte.....yet!



Prince Edward presents Street Swords Award



Veteran World Championships Cairo 2019 with Jacqui Esimaje-Heath

MY TOP 10

Fencing Moments of the Decade - 2010-2019

Photos: Augusto Bizzi

Rob Cawdron - Project Officer (Pathways Development)

The start of 2021, with the country in another national lockdown, found the team at British Fencing in a reflective mood. So when Sophie (Media and Communications Manager) asked me what my top ten fencing moments of the decade were, I welcomed the opportunity to look back on the last 10 years.

I have been a sabre fencer since 2010 and a coach since 2011. So naturally my top 10 will reflect that but I have managed to find some space for foil and epee in this list as well. I have picked a selection that I felt were defining moments or periods of the time, either because they were moments of brilliance or they represented what I saw as momentous shifts in the sport. I tried initially to rank them by importance but felt that in many cases they weren't comparable. So instead I've decided to order them chronologically. I hope you enjoy reading through my top 10 moments. What were yours?

1. Aron Szilagyi wins individual gold in London - 2012

The roundhouse assault that Aron Szilagyi unleashed on Diego Occhiuzzi in the first half of the Olympic individual final was stunning, heralding the moment that a new brand of sabre fencing announced itself. The arrival of South Korea as a force in



Aron Szilagyi

the aftermath of the Beijing Games began the drive for increasingly athletic dynamic sabre fencing and dragged the traditional sabre nations kicking and screaming with them. This trend has only continued in the years since but this for me was the moment that it was brought out into the open.

2. Oh Sanguk bursts onto the scene with a bronze medal at the Padua World Cup - 2015

By the 2014/15 season, the entire sabre world had now accepted that South Korean sabre was much more than just a flash in the pan and they seemed here to stay. Gu Bongil, Kim Junghwan and Won Woo Young were the mainstay of the team that had won Olympic Gold in London and they looked at home in the finals of all major international events. However, in Padua in 2015 it was none of these that turned heads. It was a completely unknown 18 year old who arrived at his first competition and blazed a path to the semi-finals, leaving the giant of the sport Aldo Montano in his wake. Who was this guy? He was a physical giant and seemed to have a more complete game than fencers many years his senior. I think everyone who watched him then realised just how special an athlete we were seeing that day, and how we might be likely to see quite a bit of him in years to come...

3. The French Men's Epee Squad win 7 gold medals with 6 different athletes - 2014/15

Jumping weapons now, my third moment of the decade covers a whole season, rather than a specific competition. I remember the soul-searching that took place in French fencing after what was for them, a bitterly disappointing Olympic Games in London, and no team would have been more disappointed than Men's Epee - the jewel in the French fencing crown. Did 2012 mark a moment of decline as a fencing superpower? The Men's Epee team came out swinging. Of a possible 10 World Cup, Grand Prix and major Championships, France won gold at seven of them, with a total of six different athletes. It was an awe

inspiring show of force, one year out from the Rio Olympic Games and confirmed that France was well and truly back and a force to be reckoned with.

4. Park Sangyoung's comeback in the Olympic final - 2016

Epee is, I am told, a weapon where having the lead matters. A one hit lead puts pressure on the trailing fencer, two hits is the start of a problem, three hits is a mountain climb, four hits is Everest - four hits and your opponent is on 14, game over? This was the situation that Park Sangyoung

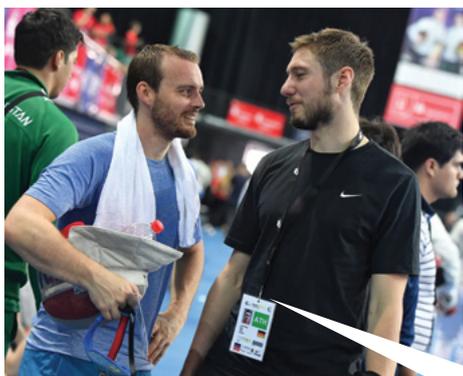


Park Sangyoung at the 2020 Budapest GP

found himself in at the Olympic final in Rio. The 21-year-old was staring down the barrel against the hugely experienced Geza Imre of Hungary, who led 14-10 with 2:30 left on the clock in the final period. All that the Hungarian war-horse needed to do was to draw from his deep well of experience and find one more light. 45 seconds later that lead was gone. Park had scored 4 unanswered points, drawing level with over a minute of fencing time to go. Geza was stunned. 4 seconds later it was all over. A decisive lunge from Park against a timid looking stop-hit from Geza. The turnaround happened so quickly that it didn't register the first time round, and it was only on repeat watching that I could appreciate just what Park had achieved.

5. Vincent Anstett's comeback against Max Hartung in the final leg of France and Germany's epic match at the World Championships - 2017

18-4. When the dust settled, that was the final tally in the 9th leg of the relay between Vincent Anstett and Max Hartung during the France vs Germany last 16 match at the Leipzig World Championships. Anstett came on for the final leg, down 27-40 against the home team Germany. If Park's comeback in the Rio 2016 final was implausible, I don't



Anstett - Hartung are still friends

have the words for what this was. Hartung scored his first after Anstett had scored 5, but still trailed by 8. Anstett drew level, finally, at 43-43, but when Hartung reached 44 immediately after, it looked like it could all be over. Anstett drew level the very next point, then took the win with a single light riposte the one after. The piste camera streaming the match doesn't do those final moments justice. To really get a feel for the moment, find the footage the French team took piste-side.

6. Liza Pusztai wins bronze at the Senior European Championships, age 18 - 2017

I did most of my competition coaching on the European Cadet Circuit and around 2016 I started hearing of this supremely talented Hungarian fencer who was coming through



Pusztai at the 2017 European Championships

and was poised to storm the international scene. Barely a year later, the storm broke on the Senior circuit too. Pusztai ripped through the field at the European Senior Championships in Tbilisi to make the semi-finals before falling to the eventual winner, Kakhiani. Since then, the storm has continued to rage and with Tokyo mere months away, the now 19-year-old Pusztai is 5th in the world.

7. Richard Kruse wins silver at the Senior World Championships - 2018

No top 10 of the last decade can fail to include Richard Kruse's history making silver medal at the 2018 World Championships in Wuxi. Watching Richard Kruse and James-Andrew Davis fight their way through to a quarter-final clash, guaranteeing a first World Championship medal in 58 years was an immense moment. Having grown up as a fencer, watching Richard Kruse's career the entire time, this truly felt like the crowning moment of one of the greats of the era.

8. Marcus Mepstead wins silver at the Senior World Championships - 2019

Like buses. Marcus Mepstead stormed to the final of the World Championships, including a demolition job on World Number 1 Alessio Foconi in the last 64 to start this career-defining day. On the way, Mepstead produced some incredible moments of Foil fencing and a highlight reel of touches, perhaps most memorably, that point in line touch in the semi-final against Son. You know the one I mean.

9. Olga Kharlan's dominant gold-medal at the Senior World Championships - 2019

Since her incredible performance at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, bringing home a shock gold-medal for Ukraine in Women's Team Sabre, Kharlan has been one of the most celebrated champions of the weapon.



Kharlan receives recognition from Katsiadakis and Usmanov

No mean feat in a sport that includes Mariel Zagunis and Sofya Velikaya. 2019 felt like the crowning moment of Kharlan's career. Facing down her long-time nemesis Sofya Velikaya in the final, it felt like watching one of the true greats of the game reaching their peak. Kharlan will arrive at the next Olympics (and possibly the one after that!) as the red-hot favourite to win and as the model for what great women's sabre fencing looks like.

10. The Men's Team Sabre final between Hungary and South Korea at the World Championships - 2019

I'm going to finish my list with possibly the greatest team match of the decade. The strength in-depth that both of these teams possess is nothing short of sensational. The South Korean team arrived at the final having won the previous two team World Championships. They were looking to make history and seemed certain to. However,



Korean Men's Sabre Team

in front of a passionate home crowd and in a positively febrile atmosphere, the two teams produced one of the great contests. The lead changed hands almost every leg, with the quality and intensity of the contest maintained at an incredible level. If you have not seen this match before, I can only advise you seek it out. If you have seen it before, treat yourself by taking another look. This will be the standard against which all future great matches are judged.

And with that, my look back at the decade has finished. As we go to print, it is April 2021, and I don't know what the world will look like, or if a return to competitive fencing is in sight. However, being able to take a look back at some of the great moments of the previous decade has got me looking forward to getting back to competition and back on the piste.

SPOTLIGHT ON FUNDING

Hannah Gavin - Development Officer-Clubs & Regions

THE SWORD
Development



After one of the most turbulent years for most of us, all efforts are now being put into reshaping sport and physical activity to fit a brave new world.

More than ever, as we adapt and move into a new time for sport and activity, it is essential that we work to have a more comprehensive understanding of the communities around us and how they will look to engage in physical activity. Following the recent release of Sport England's new ten-year strategy, **Uniting the Movement**, more emphasis has been placed on the need for local collaboration and the sharing of not just best practice but innovative practice too.

Yet, before we can jump back into action, attention needs to be paid to rebuilding our clubs and plans drawn up to aid us back into activity. Both existing funding pots and new ones being made available across the sector are changing. Importantly, they have refreshed their motivation, what they will fund, and also their application, how they will fund it. The remainder of this article will look to touch on Sport England's current offers, paying close attention to its flagship funding pot, **Return to Play: Small Grants**.

Sport England offer a variety of funding opportunities, all of which have been reviewed following the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect it has had on clubs and physical activity partners.

Smaller Scale Funding - What's Available?

Return to Play: Small Grants

This offer very much welcomes applications that have a focus on returning to previously established activity, which makes it perfect for any BF affiliated club looking to get restarted. It is especially helpful to those clubs who will have had to make significant changes to their services, like having to deliver in smaller group sizes or needing the correct safety equipment. Some fencing clubs have already seen success in applying for this grant.

This long running fund, supported by the National Lottery, concentrates on awards



Hannah Gavin

between £300 and £10,000, from a total pot of £10m. Its primary focus is to help sport, activity groups, clubs and organisations respond to the immediate challenges of returning to play in a COVID secure way.

Applications for this fund are open all year. There are no specific closing dates, but applications must include a start date for the project that is at least 8 weeks after its submission. However, any successful applicant whose project becomes affected by COVID restrictions will be granted flexibility.

BF has a specific guide designed to help when writing applications for this particular fund. If you would like to request a copy please get in touch by e-mailing hannah.gavin@britishfencing.com.

Return to Play: Community Assets Fund

This fund looks to aid clubs and sporting organisations to open up places and spaces for communities to return to activity safely. At the moment this pot has shifted its focus from approving general improvements to facilities, like clubhouses, and instead wants to address challenges that have arisen due to the pandemic.

The fund offers awards of between £10,001 and £50,000 from a pot of £5m for new applications focused solely on helping support clubs and

community groups through the ongoing pandemic to return to play.

Other Funds on Offer

Sport England also offer support on bigger projects.

Tackling Inequalities Fund

The **Tackling Inequalities Fund** has been set up to help to reduce the negative impact of coronavirus and the widening of the inequalities in sport and physical activity.

Return to Play: Active Together

Active Together is a crowdfunding initiative that has existed at Sport England since May 2020. The fund can match successful **Crowdfunded** campaigns up to £10,000 from a total pot of £1.5m.

How Can BF Help?

Funding can seem a difficult undertaking. However, BF is here to help clubs looking to support their members and expand the reach they have. There are a few things that we can do to aid anyone in the process of writing an application:

- We can help you review your objectives and proofread any bids to make recommendations
- We can write letters of support that will aid in the backing of your bid
- We can also provide data and evidence based qualitative insight to help position your application and demonstrate the difference it can make

More information on all Sport England funds can be found on our website - just search 'Funding'. If you have any specific questions or, would like access to BF's Small Grants Support Guide, please e-mail me.

PREPARE
to open

RESTART
your
activities

REBUILD
your club/
business and
build activity
levels back
up

CROWN HILLS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Their Journey from Beginners to Bronze

Kevin Anderson (The Story Edge) modified by
Marjorie Kuhne - BF Business Administrator



Sporting and academic excellence is at the heart of Leicester's Crown Hills Community College. They're proud to be a specialist sports college and are committed to giving their 1,200 pupils the best possible start in life. That means constantly exploring new opportunities to offer unique experiences to the school community. In 2019, they embarked on an exciting 5-year partnership with British Fencing - a new experience for both organisations and an opportunity to create a lasting legacy for a broad community of young people. This is the story of their remarkable journey from absolute beginners to national competitors.

When Crown Hills Sports Academy Manager, James Giling, was presented with the opportunity to partner with British Fencing, he knew that it was a perfect fit. "Offering fencing within the curriculum allows everyone to have the same opportunity and a fair chance of trying a new sport."

The college became an Official Training Partner under British Fencing's License Partner Programme (LPP). The LPP was developed in 2016 to give organisations the opportunity to deliver a range of fencing activities, coaching delivery and courses. James and his fellow staff members received full training and support to deliver a whole school approach to fencing and give everyone in the school the opportunity to experience the sport.



Fencing is in the PE curriculum for junior students. There's plastic fencing swordplay at lunchtime and afternoon clubs, and there are dedicated sessions for their gifted and talented students. At all times there's a real determination to create fun, accessible experiences for pupils, staff and the broader school community. James Giling and his team work closely with their Sports Academy pupils to build their fencing skills and confidence. This is only possible thanks to the Core Coach training they received from British Fencing.



Engaging younger members of their community is achieved through British Fencing's Primary School Resource Pack (PSRP). It's a complete personal development programme that is Ofsted aligned and goes beyond the PE syllabus to offer pupils of all ages and abilities a fun new experience. The resource pack includes 36 lesson plans aimed at pupils through Years 1 to 6. Top tips, fun facts, videos and the Explore Fencing App combine to give teachers a flexible way to introduce their pupils to learn core fencing and life skills in a fun way.

As well as using their coaching skills to deliver training to their own pupils, Crown Hills is accredited to deliver the PSRP and the Core Coach course to other schools in Leicestershire, offering the wider community a broad range of fencing experiences, and making the college a key player in the development of school fencing. Talking about the work with local schools James said, "We're fortunate

to have a fantastic network of primary schools which have come up for sports festivals where they've been able to experience fencing - which they've loved. The resource pack's themes of pirates and sword fighting is fantastic. It really encapsulates the fun element of fencing and is quite easy to take part in. It's a really good resource."

Until fencing was first introduced into Crown Hills, for the vast majority of students fencing was completely uncharted territory. There was a new language to learn. New unfamiliar equipment to get used to. And, of course, there was an unavoidable preconception. Crown Hills student Hamza said, "The initial reaction from my family when I told them I was going to be fencing was how posh it is." This is partly because it's more commonly associated with independent schools but also because of the high cost of the equipment needed to participate competitively. Another student, Khadija added, "Normally fencing is something that you do at a private school rather than a public school like ours. So, you wouldn't expect it. It's different."

But those perceptions were largely forgotten when Hamza, Khadija and other Crown Hills Sports Academy students were introduced to the sport during a taster session. During the session, the pupils had their first opportunity to see a demonstration from experienced fencers. Seeing the cut and thrust of fencing at





such close quarters grabbed their attention and created a new level of interest in this 'new' sport. Debutant Natalie said, "We got kitted up. Then we saw this guy do a demonstration and he did this really huge lunge. I'd never seen anyone do that before. I was so shocked. It was breath-taking and I was just like, 'whoa, that was just so cool.'"

From the very earliest stages of the programme the ambition was clear - Crown Hills wanted to give their students the best possible experience. And, for James and his colleagues, that meant competing at a national level. They knew that someday, taking a team to the British Schools Teams Championships would represent an important milestone in their fencing journey. To help make that happen and accelerate the fencing education of their Sports Academy Students, Crown Hills invested in a professional coach. With British Fencing's help, Chris Buxton from the Shakespeare Swords Fencing Club was brought into the school for a few hours every Monday morning. With Chris's support the opportunity to compete would come sooner than they'd think.

Up until this point, the Crown Hills fencers' experience was limited to what happened within the confines of the school. There was already a mix of excitement and nervousness about the prospect of competing at the British Schools Teams Championships in London. There was also an appreciation that it would be a big culture shock for the pupils. James wanted to create an opportunity to bridge the gap by arranging a visit to an established fencing club.

That club was Shakespeare Swords based out of King Edwards Grammar School in Stratford-Upon-Avon, Warwickshire. The club has an enviable reputation for supporting everyone from absolute beginners, right through to experienced competitive fencers. This was the first opportunity that the pupils had to see experienced fencers using a competitive

level fencing setup. Hamza's said, "I was pretty nervous when I went there because all these people that were in Stratford had already been doing fencing for a lot longer than we have, but I decided to take it as a learning experience and not be too stressed about it."

And it was also a first for James. "It was a great experience because it was the first time that I used proper electronic fencing equipment. It was a completely new experience for the pupils and was very different to the school environment. All of a sudden having a cable attached to you, and that feeling was very different for students. And, the experience of fencing against someone other than their peers was taken back into training at Crown Hills. The bar was raised and the performances started to increase because there was a lot of mimicking what they saw at the Stratford-based fencing club."

The leap to their first competitive accomplishment came only 6 months after first picking up a sabre, when in March 2020 two teams representing Crown Hills nervously made their way to London to compete in the British School Teams Championship. An under-13s boys team and an under-13s girls team would put their rapidly growing skills to the test against much more experienced competitors from across the country.

In order to compete, Crown Hills needed to secure competitive level equipment. Buying second hand equipment or borrowing it from a club were considered before help came in from British Fencing's Official Equipment Supplier Leon Paul. When they heard of everything Crown Hills had accomplished so far, Leon Paul provided significantly discounted equipment, with the school providing a small financial gesture, making it affordable to get new equipment for the students.

Doug Keast, Crown Hills Assistant Principal, sums up the expectations around the school's first national competition. "Today is just an amazing experience for us, because we never envisaged we'd be competing at this level six months ago. We thought the long-term plan would be quite ambitious to compete in a decent way and in 18 months' time. So here we are, one year ahead of schedule. It's a big experience for our students, getting them to look above the parapet type of thinking and really express themselves in this arena against schools from across the whole of the country. We've had massive backup from British Fencing. It's been great having

a British Fencing coach helping us kit the children out because there's quite a lot of kit to put on."

The eight sabreurs were noticeably quieter as they got suited up and prepared for their first competitive bouts. Hamza recalls how much more nervous he was in London compared with the visit to Stratford. "This time I'd actually be competing against people, some of them with much more experience. But I could see a lot of them were nervous as well so that helped settle my nerves a bit because if they can do it, then so can I."

They encouraged each other and the moment the first of their peers scored a point there was a sense of collective relief and joy. The nervousness was replaced by excitement. Remarkably, at their very first competitive outing the girls team returned to Leicester proudly clutching their bronze medal. In just six months they'd gone from absolute beginners to fierce and successful fencing competitors. Natalie expresses the team's general feeling. "Everything has been leading up to that and when you finally realised that, wow, you just won a bronze medal, it's really nice, because all of that work. It paid off. I think that if we were a little bit more confident, we could have done even better, but I'm happy with what we got". Khadija even had the chance to share that unforgettable moment with her mother, who went to London for the championship. "She was proud of me. She was cheering everybody on. She was amazed that the school is doing something like this because it's expensive and very different because you don't see people fencing every day, especially at a public school."

Crown Hills are still at the early stages of their fencing journey, but already the impact has been felt throughout the school and the broader community. The young people that have engaged in the programme have new fencing skills and, without knowing it, new life skills as well.





Not to mention some incredible life experiences the Sports Academy pupils have had and that will stay with them forever. "Fencing is a great way to spend my time", said Natalie, "because I'm making memories with my friends as well, which is really an important thing for me. Looking back as well, I realise I didn't just waste my time at home, I actually did something with my time and enjoyed myself throughout the last couple of years". Khadija added that, "The whole fencing experience has been amazing and just a bit crazy. Because you're holding a sabre, wearing the kit and you're fighting people. It's a combat kind of sport, and you wouldn't expect to play these kinds of games and it's just very different."

"The biggest difference that springs to mind is confidence", said James. "The Sports Academy pupils are more confident communicating with their peers and adults. They're able to articulate their feelings and what they're thinking. They've also had leadership experience by taking what they've learned and coaching younger children in the school. Seeing the confidence grow in the students has been really good. And, personally, it's given me the kind of freedom and the ability to provide new opportunities for our students. It's allowed time to create new experiences by bringing in the coaches and creating events like Stratford."

Despite the unavoidable disruption caused by the pandemic, everyone involved in the British Fencing and Crown Hills partnership is proud of what they've achieved. Working together, often in very difficult circumstances, plans have been adjusted and the programmes have continued to be delivered. That ability to adapt quickly is essential because no two schools or

partnership will ever be the same. The experience with Crown Hills proves that if there's a common goal and a shared vision, together you can accomplish great things. British Fencing shares this story in the hope that Crown Hills success will inspire others to follow in their footsteps and start their own fencing journey.



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BRITISH
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THE STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Our Proud Partnership With London Youth

**Ian Lichfield - Projects & Programmes Manager -
Education & Community**



As a Sport England funded project working in partnership with London Youth, since 2015 BF has been able to deliver fencing projects to young people across London.

London Youth is a charity that has been around for 130 years and has a network of 650 community organisations. Their network has enabled BF to reach out to young people in communities who would not normally be able to access our sport – often in the form of physical sessions using plastic swords and masks and delivered by youth workers, trained by British Fencing.

Through Sport England's Core Market funding, BF is able to deliver a portfolio of projects and programmes, with the focus for us being on taking fencing to communities and organisations that may not have experienced it before, as well as using our niche sport to get inactive young people leading more active lives. As with any funder, BF is required to report against various metrics to demonstrate the effectiveness of its projects, but for British Fencing and London Youth, it is more than just numbers.

'Impactful sport programmes that place young people and the needs of their communities as the central focus are needed now more than ever. It's why I'm delighted we are continuing our five-year partnership with British Fencing into 2021. Together, we've listened to youth workers. We've heard directly from young people and it's why we'll continue to drive our approach through trusted community youth organisations, using fencing to support young Londoners physical and mental wellbeing'.

John Jones - London Youth - Sports Development Manager said:

Over the last three years, 1158 young Londoners have engaged in some form of fencing activity through our partnership with London Youth:

- 785 participants have taken part in weekly fencing activity in their youth club, with 69% of these being retained and retention is based on participants attending at least 60% of the sessions
- 373 have taken part in 11 different events, ranging from creative fencing festivals and co-creation events, to experience days at the Leon Paul Centre, giving the young people the opportunity to try their hand at metal fencing and meet a number of our GB athletes



- Engagement and retention rates have improved year-on-year, with a retention rate in 2019/20 of 73%, compared to 70% in 2018/19
- BAME participants have accounted for over 60% of those engaged consistently for the last three years with a retention rate of 71%
- The target age group of 14 to 15 years achieved a retention rate of 86%. This is an improvement from 50% in the first year
- 41% of females engaged have been aged 14-17 – notoriously a difficult age group to engage with and importantly, 77% of those were retained in regular activity

Why fencing?

Fencing offers something very different from other mainstream sports, having the opportunity through the Youth Organisations and their youth workers to reach new communities, new environments and new access points. Some of these young people may never have had the chance to experience fencing. The holistic benefits of participating in sport and the value, the quality of the sessions run by the Youth Workers are some of the main factors to these projects being a success. Fun and enjoyment being at the heart of them.

Young people at Ham Youth Centre enjoyed regular fencing sessions. They were surprised by what a workout it gave them! Young people learnt the different terminology for techniques and the importance of strategy to defeat their opponents. Staff like the etiquette side of the sport with participants encouraged to acknowledge when they had lost a point to their opponent and to salute each other at the start of each match.

Ben Skelton - Achieving for Children said:

Young people have qualified through these projects with BF, and now teach new young pupils themselves. From a Youth Worker:

'I'd say I'm definitely more confident. It's not only the course developing my fencing, but I also like developing how you run a session and the safety around it. So yes, overall, it's been fantastic.'

Youth Organisations that operate within schools have found that being able to deliver fencing as part of their offer, alongside football or cricket, has increased their appeal.





John Jones said:

"I've been in community sports for over 12 years. And it's the amount of times that we've been just delivering against a contract or a set target to get our young people engaged without any focus on the actual quality of the work, because that's what the funding requires. This is a really refreshing example of targets needing to be met, and how we go about delivering that - we can be really creative in a way that works best for young people and youth workers and communities. And I think that's really refreshing."

BF and the Board are proud of these great stories about the impacts on people's lives that have emerged from these projects. Fencing is being used to teach discipline and respect, integrated into music



sessions, or combined with faith learning and even breaking down barriers to discuss knife crime.

What next?

The pandemic has halted any activity for now. However, some groups have been able to deliver limited online activity and maintain contact with the young members. BF is keen to broaden the reach of the sport across other London Youth organisations and similar national organisations. There are insights about the successes of these projects that traditional fencing clubs may wish to understand to help maintain and develop their beginners courses, to improve their retention rates.

For more information please contact [me](#).

Hear more about this fantastic story in [this podcast](#) and read more about it on the BBC News website [here](#).

Tyrone from Cray Wanderers Football Club:

'It's been that first experience for them, and most of the students or kids had no idea about fencing at all, like no clue whatsoever, and they are just keen and eager for it really.

It's changed the whole dynamics of our business, because we're allowed to now offer something that not many people are doing out there. You know, that we can do that; we can say to these new schools that we're approaching. When we do fencing, and they're like, wow, we want fencing? How can we access this? So for us, this really changes us, and it elevated our business in that sense as well.'



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WORKING IN SCHOOLS

Pitch Your Services With OFSTED in Mind

James Craig - Head of Commercial



Ofsted is responsible for inspecting a range of educational institutions and in September 2019 there was a shift in focus in the education inspection framework (EIF). Ofsted moved to an inspection model that introduces the “three Is” of Intent, Implementation, and Impact.

It is a great first step to be able to have a response to each one of these elements. BF's new Primary School Resource Pack (PSRP) went through this process and we hope that going through it yourself or checking your offer against this will help when we get back to delivering in schools:

- 1. Intent:** What is the intended outcome of the programme? What do you want students to learn? BF's intent was to have a product that highlighted that you can introduce the concept and build resilience from session one with fencing and the second intent was to explore a student's self-efficacy.
- 2. Implementation:** How is the offer packaged up? How is it sequenced? What model have you used to show that the sessions are part of the bigger picture and that the progression of each session is planned? BF has 36 lesson plans that have been sequenced using skill acquisition theory, teaching games for understanding principles and we have created a cross curricular model of how we would like coaches to deliver the sessions.
- 3. Impact:** previously there was a focus on data and results and although this is still present, Ofsted is shifting focus on the qualitative measures of impact too. BF's skill acquisition theory allows a coach, at the end of each session, to evidence to the lead at the school where each child and the whole class is at. All the lesson outcomes also clearly align to the BF Achievement Awards of MiniSwords and GO/FENCE.

The customers for the PSRP are teachers, from support staff to Headteachers and answering the three I's BF felt it necessary to go a bit deeper and we would encourage others to do so too, with these further questions:



James Craig

- Is the content sequenced to ensure that components of knowledge lead to conceptual understanding?
- Are there opportunities for pupils to practise what they know? Can students deepen their understanding in a discipline and was it built into the lesson plans?
- Is there layering of knowledge and concepts so that pupils can make progress in the curriculum?

BF took time out to talk with an expert on PE, school sport and physical activity focussed on Impact. Kevin Holland, Head of Child Journey at Premier Education Group, gave some wonderful insight that we wanted to share with you.

The 'real talk' in schools when discussing impact?

- An important 'P' word is making it Purposeful. In the past, people have talked about innovation and new ideas and new curriculum, but it needs to be really, really purposeful for each individual school and each individual child.
- Schools need to be able to see their external support - those wider aspects that are much harder to measure from a number and a data perspective. It is the feeling you get when you go into a school. It is the language you hear children use and the language your staff use that needs to be imparted back to the school.

The new Ofsted framework introduced in 2019 seems to be more around the qualitative pieces of work and evidence so what can you do?

- The data bit is never going to go away. That is an accountability measure. I think the focus around curriculum mapping, how the different subjects sit in their curriculum together, the learning objectives and the sequence in a learning journey that are key.
- The new inspection framework wants us to say, “How does this all work together? How does it build together?”

Application of learning seems to be important but what does this mean?

- The applied word is fundamental. I have spent too much time in schools, I guess, watching lessons. One of the first things you do as a new teacher is watch how other people teach and work with other children or coach the children, because then you can see how different people react. This is a great process for new coaches too.
- You see that a child will get taught something and then a different person teaches the same thing and they have forgotten they ever learnt it. They have not joined it together. The joining of the journey, of the learning is important. So, at the end of the lesson make sure you use a plenary as it is really important - that is ensuring that you review aims and consolidate the students' learning.

If you would like to hear more from Kevin Holland watch the full webinar by [clicking here](#).



Kevin Holland

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Lancaster University Fencing Club

Amy Freeth - Publicity Officer

Lancaster University Fencing Club is a highly successful student led club who promote inclusivity and highly encourage new people to try fencing. The club has around 50 members and 4 competitive teams in BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport). Training and organisation are almost entirely student run with an executive committee who help to oversee training, competitions and socials. A coach also helps with one-on-one training sessions for the more advanced members.



LUFC at Roses 2019



BUCS Northwest Individuals 2020

As a club, we've had some great results in the last few years, including being the highest scoring BUCS club in the university, multiple times and we are the only club from Lancaster to have ever had a team in the Premier League. On top of this, our members have achieved impressive results at individual competitions with members medalling at many competitions including at BUCS Northwest individuals, The Cambridge Open and Lancaster Open within the last few years.

One of the main goals of our club is to promote inclusivity, especially focussing on increasing the number of women in sport. Over the last few years, we have worked to increase the number of women joining the club which has been a great success and has led to the club introducing a new Women's 2nd team. The Women's 1st team has also had many accomplishments including winning the Northern 1A league in 2018 - the best result in Lancaster University that year - and winning Team of the Year in 2017.

Another focus of the club is to encourage new people to start fencing. We run a student-led beginner's course which helps

novice fencers to pick up the sport quickly. We also encourage all members to practise together after the first few weeks of the beginner's course have passed. This helps the novice members to learn from the more advanced fencers and makes them feel more included in the club. For team fencers, we have training weekends multiple times a year where we bring in high level coaches to run an intensive training course focussing on tactics and fitness.

The Lancaster Open is one of the highlights of our year. It is an open competition in all 3 weapons and is organised and run by our members. There are an increasing number of entries every year with over 100 competitors in 2020. This competition is run in our university sports centre which helps to increase the publicity and awareness of fencing to other members of the university.

As a club we like to help the community by completing fundraising for charities. In 2020 alone we completed two different fundraising events, raising over £1,000 for our chosen charities. These events not only helped raise money but also increased the fitness and morale of our members during lockdown.

An important part of the club are our weekly socials. These help the teams and club to become closer and also encourage new members to join. This includes events such as our three-legged bar crawl at the start of each new academic year and other more relaxed socials such as game nights.

We, at LUFC, pride ourselves on being a welcoming and inclusive student-led society whilst also working as hard as we can to achieve impressive results both in team and individual competitions.



Club Christmas Meal 2019

DIARY OF A COMPETITIVE VET IN LOCKDOWN

Lawrence Burr



Weeks 1 and 2

Now where to start? Firstly, I needed to gather together all of my gear and take an inventory of what I was missing after the last year's competitions. Funny how you seem to lose T shirts, trainers and the odd body wire so easily. I had been meaning to look for some new bits of kit in any event and now here was the perfect excuse to go on a legitimate spending spree. Crank up the old laptop and start scouring all those colourful online fencing sites - Leon Paul, Blades, PBT, Allstar etc. Wow! Such a glittering array of items and all of them being Covid free - I had visions of assembly lines of PPE clothed weapon smiths furiously spraying everything they touched with disinfectant. And what new ranges there were - who knew that what I really, really needed was a "Mag-Tec Zero Pistol Grip" with its associated hexagonal nuts and spanners, all carefully colour coded (to match my eyes no doubt) to achieve my podium dreams?! Click, click, click ... Suddenly came to my senses after the checkout basket clocked in at over £400.00; so, reached for my third espresso of the day and started again. But now I was on a roll and turned my thoughts to setting up my own training circuit in the house somewhere. So, back to our old friends from Leon Paul who were offering us enthusiasts their smart range of lunging pads, cotton face masks and X-Change liners - now that was more like it. Unfortunately, the world and his wife seemed to be ordering the same items, so delivery date was to be delayed somewhat. Therefore the intervening few days could be spent planning the circuit with my old stubby pencil and notebook. Decided that doing sweaty "jumping jacks" in our front living room might bring too much mirth and merriment from my nearest and dearest, so decided that it had to be the garage. Oh joy!

But before that could happen, it was time to tackle my kit that had been stewing gently in the fencing bag since the last BVF Nationals in Guildford. My wife looked suitably aghast as I voluntarily gave up my well sweated plastron to the hottest washing cycle possible - kills the bugs I said! Then, digging further, I uncovered that jumble of screws, tips, wires and plugs that

had commuted to the bottom of the fencing bag along with that a hastily discarded nutrition bar from the second round of the 2017 St Dunstan's Vets Competition, a suspicious looking furry pack of ageing glucose tablets and a partly drunk bottle of suspicious looking orange liquid with an unusual smell; so decided to consign that to the recycling bin. Then up into the attic for those blades that were always going to be given to Peter Huggins' armourers for a rewire at the last Open. Upon investigation, I decided that an extra dollop of superglue was all it needed for another year of competitions. Sadly, I then discovered that my last tube of glue had leaked onto the point tester box and that was bug...ed as well. So back to the laptop.... thank heavens for Amazon Prime, I sighed. Suddenly realised that time was passing. It was now time to grasp the nettle and start the new regime - tomorrow.

Weeks 3 and 4

Finally cleared the garage, parked the car outside, found a couple of discarded mirrors for the wall and drilled holes to hang past competition flyers, encouraging maxims and some faded posters from the 2012 Olympics. Then a few home comforts to ease the hours I would be spending in this new circuit gymnasium. A radio and CD player (come on - we are talking Cat 4 Vets here... none of this namby pamby phone based Spotify playlists for me,) pinched the fan heater from the bedroom, placed a comfortable chair at the end of the makeshift piste with a refreshment trolley alongside - great internal debate as to whether wine was a healthier option rather than plastic tasting water in a bottle - taped out some lunging distance lines at the other end of the garage and added the piece de resistance - a swinging tennis ball which I had pinched from my wife's tennis bag. That hero of British fencing - Bill Hoskyns - swore by the efficacy of practising with a swinging tennis ball and see where that led him - Olympic medals! If he can do it, so can I!

Now we are talking. My new Mecca of athleticism looks fantastic, but I am still awaiting the lunging pad, so cannot do anything until that arrives. Hark - is that

Well - how many keep fit videos did you Google in Lockdowns 1, 2 and 3?

In March 2020 the fencing world suddenly realised that with our clubs, gyms and leisure centres closing, it was time for us all to take a deep breath and find our own way to keep fencing-fit. After all, it was really important to maintain that competitive momentum we considered that we had all reached in readiness for 2020's raft of Opens and Nationals and the glittering prize of yet another week at the Vet Worlds in Croatia. As a Cat 4 Vet, I had been feeling well oiled (some of my friends might misinterpret the meaning of this word) and honed for the season ahead and I was not going to let a few Covid bugs stand in my way... fitness and a bit of personal coaching was all that I needed and, by jove, I could do this on my own. I would just need a bit of help from the internet and my trusty (1955 Edition) Army School of Physical Training handbook. Onwards into a strict training regime!

my next Amazon delivery arriving? I'll be back later after changing into my tracksuit. Tomorrow it all starts.

Weeks 5 and 6

Okay, so it was a little bit later in the week than expected. Everything is now in place. With a spring in my step and a song in my heart, I strode out to the garage dressed in my sparkling clean clothing and three working weapons (having discarded that trusty - rusty - old steam sabre at the back of the cupboard). Proudly walked around the garage a couple of times and practiced the odd lunge or two, flexed the blades on the lunging pad and then considered that what I really needed was a fitness plan; as it was now time for coffee and a bit of that Lockdown Millionaires Shortbread that Sue had perfected last night, it was back to my old friend Google to find some words of advice and encouragement from an online coach and/or personal trainer. Firing up the old computer again, I typed in those fateful words "find exercises for fencing". Now, that was impressive - what a selection and so many great videos from exotic sounding clubs and organisations such as "Fencers Edge", Redstar Fencing, Reddit.com, a fascinating Feedspot Reader site, Red Bull, FIE Training camps, Florida Fencing Academy, US Masters Academy and the Men's Journal(!). The list was almost endless. The next few days passed in a blur as I binged on watching healthy youngsters from all over the world stretching, lunging, jumping, skipping, bleep testing, jogging ad infinitum, taking notes all the while, of course! But - hang on a moment - British Fencing Latest News had told me about their new exercise feed called "BFTV"! Eureka! Problem solved.

So, having navigated the BF website I struck gold. A host of experienced fencers suddenly at my beck and call (some of them actually fenced épée!) and I could now lean back and let the likes of Ben Peggs, Lucy Johnson, Rob Bruniges and Susan Sica teach me how to get back on form, all from the comfort of my sofa. The icing on the cake was that I was then able to sign up to the weekly Athlete Development Programme Strength and Conditioning

sessions with my old friend George Morris (note to George - those shorts are definitely too retro; lycra is the order of the day...). On session one, I found myself in the exalted company of 78 other honed athletes - and Graham Paul - but was slightly worried that the first opening discussion was all about injuries; not totally reassuring! Needed another glass of wine to steady my nerves after that thought. But, I knew that I had found the answer to my new fitness regime. Armed with these skills, I knew that the time had arrived and I was ready to begin my fencing circuit training in earnest - tomorrow.

Weeks 7 and 8

The garage was too cold - who turned on the snow machine? Spent the time looking back at old episodes of Ski Sunday and bemoaning the fact that my favourite runs in Kitzbuhel were all closed to tourists. (Note to self; what happened to my last bottle of Austrian apple brandy?) Then made up notes on the videos I had watched. I just needed to have another coffee before seeing whether the temperature in the garage had got above freezing. Must avoid injuries at all costs (Maria Goriup's webinar presentation is very sobering as a Cat 4 Vet!) so training will begin - tomorrow.

Weeks 9 and 10

Overcome with a sudden rush of guilt. News that the Tokyo Olympics will be ON/



OFF/ON/OFF/Maybe/Perhaps/Definitely/Depends, has sent me into a frenzied burst of energy and a new determination to get the training started. After another caffeine boost, it was into the garage, move the car out again and start the lunges, aim for the swinging ball, jog on the spot, practice those reverse lunges, attempt the jumping jacks, decide that bench press-ups on the floor was a step too far and then did some fast footwork, all the while eyeing myself in the mirror to check my stance. Perfect! Decided after 30 minutes that it is all a bit too much and I needed to get fitter for fencing before practising my moves any further.... perhaps some time in front of the laptop watching Jo Wicks or Kelly Holmes should be just the ticket. After all, how difficult can it be to remind my body that it has been fencing for 60 years and just needs a bit of lubrication? Back to the laptop and click on "find fitness videos".

Ouch! Keeping fit is an evil government's way of ensuring that physios and keep fit instructors are never furloughed. All that stretching and contortion cannot be good for a man of my constitution. However, I felt that I really needed to persevere as my honed and well oiled body is looking a bit the worse for wear at the moment. I blame it on the lack of competition in the garage. Now, how can I persuade my wife to stand still whilst I practice my fleches? Ummm, maybe not, if we are to continue living together in this lockdown with a degree of harmony.

So, back to the drawing board. Tomorrow is another day. I will definitely put my carefully researched new training regime into practice then. Hold on though; Alexa has just told me that floods are forecast in the area. Garage could be too wet. What a shame! Now, where did I put that online order form for Majestic Wines? Can't let the Vets down now can I, otherwise it could really be my last gasp....

Lawrence Burr OBE

**We would like to showcase all aspects of our membership.
Please submit your "Diary of a Fencer" to the editor,
karim.bashir@catchsport.com**

BOOK REVIEW

“From Cool Runnings to World Superpower – The Rise of American Fencing” Author: Igor Chirashnya

Lawrence Burr

So, do you believe in coincidences? At Christmas, in the depths of my stocking from “you know who” (I am just a big kid at heart) there was a small book entitled “Scottish Fencing – Five 18th Century Texts on the use of the Small-sword, Broadsword, Spadroon, Cavalry Sword and Highland Battlefield Tactics” compiled by Maestro Jared Kirby. One of these texts described the formation of the first School of Fencing at Boston in 1769 by one Donald McAlpine, a Highland soldier who had come to Nova Scotia with the 78th Regiment of Highlanders as a Sergeant. After serving with distinction on the Plains of Abraham and at the capture of Montreal, he was discharged and moved to Boston where he announced in the local newspapers the opening of a new fencing school to the “Lovers of the noble Science of Defence”.

So, not knowing much about how fencing started across The Pond, I decided to re-read Richard Cohen’s magnificent treatise “By The Sword” which describes amongst its chapters, the history of duelling in the States. As I was doing so, through my letter box dropped a package from Amazon containing a US publication on American fencing. A true coincidence.

Written by Igor Chirashnya who co-founded the Academy of Fencing Masters in the San Francisco Bay area, this paperback documents the history of how the Americas came to embrace fencing to the extent that it now has now over 20,000 fencers and more than 750 clubs. It details the challenges that the US has had to face in trying to compete upon the international stage and then charts the changes that have produced its meteoric rise to the Olympic successes we have witnessed since the year 2000.

In many ways, this is a book written with passion and aimed at the new generation of American fencers who have

little knowledge of how much has been achieved in such a short space of time when compared to the European countries where swordplay has been at the very heart of its history since the days of the gladiators. Now, US teams of both genders chase Olympic Gold across all three disciplines and head the leader boards in World Championships at every age level from Cadet to Veterans. So, the purpose of this book is Igor’s attempt to answer the question as to how this all came about and perhaps to add a bit of historical flavour that underlies where the US now stands.

Now, a bit of background history. The first mention of a fencing school in the US seems to have in a manuscript in the British Museum dated 1675 with a later reference to a Dutchman, John Rievers teaching “fencing and dancing” in New York in 1754. Then, as the colonial wars swept across the States, they left in their wake a raft of European fencing masters who found willing pupils amongst the American meritocracy for instruction in swordplay. Whilst duelling in European countries was starting to become less fashionable over the years, it was finding a new reimagining in the New World where duels were commonplace and almost always ended in a fatality! Even US Presidents such as Jackson, Truman, Grant and Washington saw the need to learn fencing; one even had a *salle d’armes* and an Italian coach installed in the White House! (Thank you, Richard Cohen, for doing the research!).

Fast forward to the early 1900s and fencing was now being embraced as a sport rather than a method of settling affairs of honour. As the competitive nature of the sport unfolded in Europe, America was at an instant disadvantage due to its sheer size and the inability of fencers from one side of the continent to compete with the other. At the same time, there was no legacy of accomplished coaches who could train them. So, Europe continued to dominate the early Olympic Games until the 1950s, when world politics changed the face of our sport forever.



The author of this book, Igor Chirashnya, is an émigré from a former Soviet Republic and was one of the many Eastern Bloc coaches and fencers that sought a new life in America after the political upheaval in Hungary in 1956 and the later collapse of the USSR after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. As we all know, sport had been at the heart of the USSR’s political drive to demonstrate its superiority over the West in the days of the Cold War. Eastern Bloc fencers had been “employed” in the country’s uniformed services and thus could qualify as amateurs in the Olympics, even though they were actually full time athletes. Igor paints a very clear picture of how this difference in attitudes between the Soviet Bloc and the West created the USSR’s ruthless medal winning approach which dominated the Olympics for years. Much of this he experienced at first hand.

The result of this exodus from Europe was a flood of fencing coaches into the US imbued with the same “grit and determination” that had been the trademark of their countrymen from behind the Iron Curtain. They were now keen to show their appreciation to the country that had become their new home. This enthusiasm was linked, not only with their deeply embedded drive to show what it took to win at fencing, but also how the instilling of a deep sense of family and community could create strong bonds between the coach, his/her pupils, and

the club which they represented. One only has to look at the number of Eastern European coaches registered in Igor's club in San Francisco and their list of successful national and international fencers to see how this has worked so well. I counted at least eight coaches from as far afield as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and China!

As an aside, in 1960, an American candidate, Miguel de Capriles, was elected as the President of the FIE, much to the chagrin of our own Charles de Beaumont. Although there was great concern as to how the FIE could be run with such a geographical separation and with a country with limited international experience, the fact was that it was a great coup for the US and the real start of its hopes to engage on the world stage at last.

America was now on a roll and it began to show. By the year 2000, after this heady influx of talent from Europe, the results became impressive. A new system of USFA competitions was put in place with a hierarchical structure encompassing Local, Divisional, Regional and National tournaments, organised to ensure a comprehensive progression for all fencers from the age of seven and beyond. Personal development was also tied in with all the major Universities, many of whom now offered fencing scholarships and attracted renowned European coaches to run their clubs. The ease of international air travel from all over the US boosted participation in major World Championships and paved the way for American successes. Igor charts their medal progression with great accuracy and shows how he views the future of fencing in America as nothing but bright and full of potential.

I am pleased to see that he does draw attention to the same problems that we are facing today in British Fencing - that of creating a legacy of home grown coaches and maintaining the interest and commitment of our senior fencers. Similar challenges for both our countries lie ahead, particularly as regards equality and diversity. In the US, the Black Lives Matter agenda currently has especial resonance and this book takes up the inspirational story of Peter Westbrook, born in 1952 to a mixed race couple in New Jersey, coached by a Hungarian fencing master and immigrant, Csaba Elthes, who gained a place in the 1976 Olympic Sabre Team and was the first American, let alone a black American, to win an Olympic medal (Los Angeles 1984). Westbrook continued to be a dominating presence on the American fencing scene for more than 20 years, qualifying for six Olympics. Hailed by the New York Times as "the most influential fencer in New York today", he has become a symbol to many black fencers the world over of the changing face, not only of fencing, but of all sport. As our CEO, Georgina Usher says in her 2021 message to British Fencers, fencing ... "means being inclusive, helping people overcome the perceptions that they might have of our sport, so that everyone in fencing feels they can truly 'belong', irrespective of ability, age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion". Igor would applaud the sentiment.

This is an interesting book, written with passion, by one of the many émigrés who have added so much to the advancement of the American Dream. They are still a dominating force behind the drive to achieve a new generation of competitive fencers and produce new inspirational

coaches. Igor makes no apologies for pointing out that there is still a long way to go in building a depth of knowledge that will take America to Gold in the Olympics, but he is confident that the strong foundations and the legacy now in place with the youth and the club programmes will pay dividends. Do not be put off by the simplicity of this publication, this book contains a real "rags to riches" story that can inspire us all. Just watch out for the next American fencer on the piste - they may have read this book!



Lawrence Burr OBE

"From Cool Runnings to World Superpower - The Rise of American Fencing" is published by The Academy of Fencing Masters (<https://academyoffencingmasters.com>) and is available through Amazon in Kindle and paperback formats priced at £5.13 and £7.92 respectively.

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DAVID ANTHONY HEATON (1973-2021)

Jo Gilliver - for and on behalf of British Disability Fencing

David was born in Blackpool on 14th April 1973 to father Ken and mother Pat and was a younger brother to sister Julie.

David had been diagnosed with bladder cancer, a battle that he was courageously fighting and winning. David's wife Cindy wanted people to know that he was 'kicking cancer's arse!' but in December, David contracted sepsis and sadly, died of renal failure on 9th January 2021 at the age of 47.

In 1984 David was involved in a road traffic accident, which left him a wheelchair user at just 11 years old. He was fiercely independent and had his own car and flat aged 16. He loved driving! From here, David developed as an athlete and it was whilst playing league wheelchair basketball with Brian Dickinson MBE, that he discovered the sport of wheelchair fencing which he decided to give a go. He proved a natural.

Making his Paralympic debut in Barcelona 1992, aged just 18 years old, David won a bronze medal in the men's team sabre event. David went on to compete at the Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004 and London 2012 Paralympic Games.

In a statement made to IWAS, former British team manager and 10-time Paralympic medallist Caz Walton paid tribute to Heaton. "David was a popular figure internationally and a great



Dave Heaton courtesy of ParalympicsGB

ambassador for his country," adding, "David retired after London 2012 but continued to put time and effort back into the sport that he loved. He was a caring, humorous, and much-loved man and his passing, much too young, leaves a hole a mile wide in our hearts."

IWAS Wheelchair Fencing chairperson Pal Szekeres had also said in their announcement, "He was a friendly figure on the circuit for many years who helped inspire the next generation of athletes at home and abroad. It is no coincidence that Britain has some of the world's top wheelchair fencers. They follow directly in his footsteps and many more will do so in the years to come."

After retiring as a competitive fencer, David became chairman of the British Disabled Fencing Association (BDFA now BDF) and gave generously of his time before he retired in 2017.

David loved snooker and played on the Monday night Club League big table and was Captain on a Thursday night small table, where the team won quite a few trophies. He was also a supporter of Blackpool Football Club.

A well-respected sportsman, David was first and foremost a family man.

It was in 'The Brunswick' that David met his wife Cindy, who said, "I worked behind the bar in his local club The Brunswick and we started going out in 2005 and were married in 2009. He loved cooking and baking, music, films and holidays but the thing he loved most was being a family man, doing school runs, babysitting, sleepovers and chilling with sweeties and a good family film."

David and Cindy also shared a love of their little dog Bella who was also an important member of the Heaton household. David is survived by his mother Pat, his wife Cindy, their three children and seven grandchildren, ranging in age from 10 weeks up to 20 years and David's sister Julie, her partner Ged and their two sons Callum, 17 and Cameron, 13.

David's funeral was held on Wednesday 27th January 2021 with the service at Carleton Crematorium and with the current pandemic restrictions, a roadside send-off was welcomed outside the Brunswick Club. The family chose that any donations go to Trinity Hospice or Macmillan in lieu of flowers.

We at the BDF are saddened by the news that five-time Paralympian, wheelchair fencer, family man and generally all-round good guy David Heaton has passed away. From the many messages of condolence for David, whether sent to us, in the media or social media, as you can see, David will be very much missed by many.

Our thoughts and condolences are with David's family.



David and Cindy Heaton



DAVID KIRBY 1950-2021

Stratford Observer

TRIBUTES have been paid to fencing legend David Kirby who has died from Covid.

The 70-year-old former army Major was Head of Coach Development at Shakespeare's Swords - the renowned fencing club he established at Stratford's King Edward VI School (KES) more than 30 years ago.

Credited for introducing fencing to thousands of youngsters over four decades of coaching, he was regarded as one of the leading lights in modern fencing.

David lived in the Littletons near Evesham and leaves a widow Marguerite, three children - Philippa, Susy and Peter (himself an accomplished national and international fencer) - and five grandchildren.

David coached dozens to national and international glory - including local double Olympian Louise Bond-Williams. He was a trailblazer for women in sport and modern day coaching methods - not bad for someone who did not really "do sport"!

David was born in Westminster in 1950 to actor Max Kirby and wife Aurea. He joined the Royal Green Jackets from school as a Private and managed to get into Sandhurst at the second attempt in 1970.

He became an officer in the Royal Engineers and postings across the UK and Europe followed, including tours in Germany and Northern Ireland.

It was whilst commanding a company at the Army Apprentices College in Chpstow



in 1984 that he was charged with heading up the fencing club, as well as the College band, which he conducted whilst playing the flute!

It was this experience that led him to offer his services to KES during his final army posting to Long Marston in 1987. The KES boys did not know what had hit them with the arrival of this charismatic army Major.

Old Edwardian Adrian Bedford said, "The first thing he did was introduce the basic army warm-up. By the end of a term I'm not sure we were any good at fencing, but we were very fit!

"He taught us to climb ropes without using our legs or feet whilst regaling us with stories of how many mortar bombs you could put into the air at the same time. This last tale increased in number with each telling."

His efforts started to pay off and the club has been at the forefront of sabre fencing in this country ever since - often making up the majority (and sometimes all) of the British sabre teams at all levels - fostering a clutch of national and international champions.

Ironically, for a club based at what was then an all-boys school, David was at the forefront of the development of women's sport.

He trained female athletes in the art of sabre before it was even a proper recognised sport for women so, when it finally materialised, he had a host of world quality fencers ready to go.

Bond-Williams was among them and in 1998 she won bronze at a pilot World Championships. She went on to represent Great Britain at the 2004 Athens Olympics and then again at London 2012.

She said, "He nurtured a real team spirit. He encouraged training camps with everyone involved and worked hard at getting competing clubs to work together.

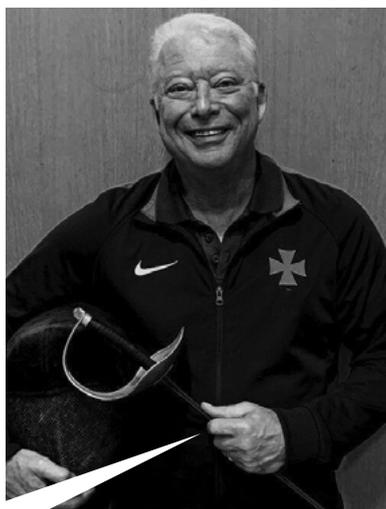
"He was a positive influence for everyone on the team, regardless of which club they came from, or whether he was their individual coach or not."

David held a number of other top fencing positions over the years, including at Eton, Birmingham University, Filton College and Sydney. Latterly, he focused on training the next generation of coaches including running courses in Stratford which attracted people from across the globe and across sports.

In 2013 he taught Shakespearean actor Jonathan Slinger to fence for his memorable portrayal of Hamlet at the RST in Stratford.

Chris Buxton, Head Coach at Shakespeare's Swords, said, "What David contributed to the world of UK fencing over the years is simply unprecedented. This, along with the direct positive impact he had on thousands of young lives, will be his legacy."

David's funeral took place on Wednesday, February 17, with a memorial service to follow at a later date.



BERYL GOODALL 1932-2020

Eddie Goodall



In 1948 Beryl joined the College of Adult Education Fencing Club, Manchester, as a pupil of Professor Zarloff.

When in the early 1950's Professor Crosnier started his tours, giving courses and appointing coaches Beryl quickly qualified as a Foil Leader [Coach].

An original member of the Manchester Coaching Panel she was assigned the task of organising Beginners Courses in North Manchester.

Having a natural talent, she was soon one of the leading fencers and had a notable victory at the Liverpool Open, beating Dorothy Knowles, who had been champion for many years. Later she was selected to fence for England in a Home International.

At this stage of her development it was advised to move down to London. Unfortunately, not having the means or suitable employment, it was not possible to fulfil that dream but she continued to go down for Ladies Team events.

Instead, Beryl concentrated her efforts to coaching in the Manchester area and in 1980 formed a club for local youngsters in her home village of Romiley.

During its 40 years, nineteen members fenced for England, six for Great Britain and one at the Commonwealth Games whilst gaining many British Youth Titles.

During the 1990's Beryl was a regular member of the England Youth Coaches at the annual Home International Team Championships. Not afraid to tackle the most bombastic of coaches who did not observe the rules, the Committee would gleefully send her out to deal with any offender.

In 1992, Beryl's grass roots work was recognised by the award of the Torch Trophy and in 2000 with a British Fencing Bronze Medal.

Sadly, over eleven years she endured four major illnesses and passed away at Christmas last year.

A pupil gave her a fitting tribute, "Beryl was the ideal coach. Being there at the end of the piste with a cheer for the successful, a hug for the down-hearted and an ever-ready needle and thread for running repairs."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In the January 21 'The Sword', Laurence Burr OBE wrote a review of the book 'Marked Cards' by Emmanuel Olypitis. In it he claims that Kings School Canterbury (KSC) won the Public Schools Championships in 1966.

I do not believe this to be correct as Brentwood School under Jeffrey Featherstone, the Master i/c won every year from 1962 until 1986 except 1967, 1970, 1971 and 1975 none of which were won by KSC.

Additionally in 1966, Brentwood had 6 fencers across the four categories top 6 whereas KCS had only 3.

Old school pride at stake here!

John Sones Ipswich FC

Editor's Reply:
Many thanks, John. Guess where I went to school 1980-1991? That's right! Brentwood! #blush

RESULTS



The up-to-date 2020-2021 season latest results are now listed online and can be [accessed here](#)

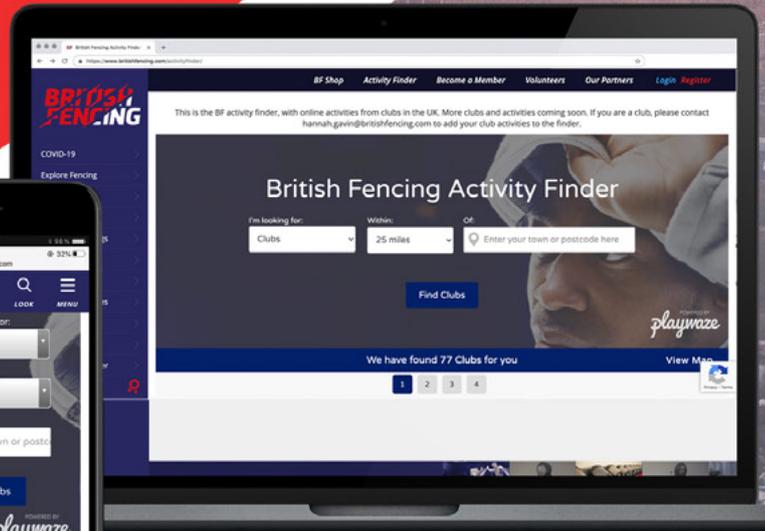
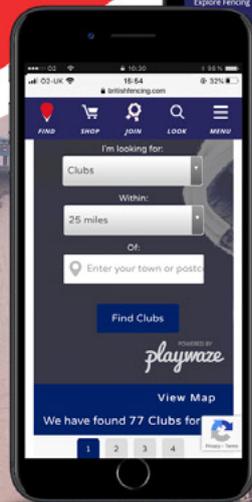
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