

THE SWORD

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TOKYO 2020 REPORT PP4-15
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WELCOME TO THE SWORD



4 TOKYO 2020 - OLYMPIC REPORT

17 NEWS

Team GB - Ambition Programme

The Paralympic Download

23 FEATURES

Armchair CEO takes on CEO

A Life in the Week Of ...

27 DEVELOPMENT

Climbing Your Everest

Back in the Room

Women in Sport

32 REVIEW

"On the Edge"

33 OBITUARIES

Gillian Donaldson

Daniel Sosnov

35 RESULTS

FENCING RE-FOCUSED

PP4-15



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TOKYO 2020

Olympic Report

Photos © Augusto Bizzi

The delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games finally took place at Makuhari Messe B in the Ariake district of Japan's capital, 24 July to 1 August.

Outside Japan, nervous energy enveloped the final weeks leading up to the Games amidst a state of emergency, calls for its cancellation, reports of city-wide protests, Covid-related quarantine measures and positive cases. The reality was somewhat different. Protests did occur but they were minimal, peaceful and respected by the authorities. There were some positive cases related to the Games but the quarantine measures put in place kept these low and most of the positive cases were imported. The strict and regular testing procedures also ensured there wasn't the predicted outbreak.

However, these Games were different and as the IOC President said, "they will be remembered by everyone involved". Empty stadia, military-style procedures way beyond anything seen previously and a lack of Olympic branding outside of the venue locations, meant that Tokyoites not directly involved in the Games, perhaps, wouldn't have known that the Greatest Show on Earth was happening on their doorstep. Those lucky enough to be involved, quickly got used to the protocols and lived by them - apart from very few who were swiftly dealt with.

For fencing, very little was different inside the venue. It remained our once every (usually) four-year opportunity to showcase the sport we love. It was still the career pinnacle of every athlete, coach, referee and administrator involved. The global access to the sport through traditional and new media was still at its peak. Of course there were complaints about the BBC's lack of fencing coverage amongst the sport's community. As frustrating as this was, pointing the finger at the BBC demonstrates a lack of understanding of the changes made by the IOC regarding television rights for these Games. Rightly or wrongly, the IOC put the rights up for tender and the BBC were - and never will be - able to compete



with Discovery+. Not everyone can afford subscription services but the £29 special offer provided by Discovery could have been a lot more.

The most important thing though, without a doubt, was the spectacular showcase put on by the fencers and all involved in the presentation. Here, we take a look back at what happened on the piste.

INDIVIDUAL Women's Epee



Women's Epee Podium

Tokyo 2020 Olympic fencing programme began with the women's epee individual tournament with Beijing 2008 silver medalist from Romania, Ana Maria Popescu the favourite, at least on paper. However, whilst Korea's Injeong and Rio 2016 bronze medalist Sun Yiwen of China stood second and third in the rankings, there was a plethora of other medal contenders. Those included the Brazilian World Champion, Nathalie Moeuillhausen, Italian Mara Navarria, Kong Man Wai Vivien from Hong

Kong, Korea's Kang Young Mi, Coraline Vitalis from France, Tunisia's Sarra Besbes and the Estonian Katrina Lehis.



Lehis Makes History for Estonia

The biggest story of the day started in the top quarter of the draw. During the global hiatus from international sport, Russian Fencing elected to finalise their selections domestically and picked 19-year-old Aizanat Murtazaeva for the ROC. It proved a wise decision because first she knocked out Choi, the winner of the last qualification event. She then edged Kelley Hurley from the USA. Kong also progressed to the quarter-finals, beating Poland's Knapik-Miazga on route. Murtazaeva's great day continued when she knocked out Kong to progress to the semi-finals.

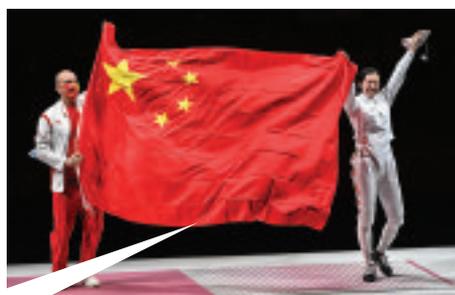
All three Chinese fencers were drawn in the second quarter which would have been a disappointment for Head Coach, Hughes Obry. Italy's Federica Isola edged out Tunisia's hope, Besbes before eliminating one of the Chinese fencers, Lin Sheng, to make the top eight. The remaining Chinese



The Surprise - Murtazaeva

fencers, Sun and Zhu Mingye faced each other to join Isola and it was Sun who made it through comfortably. Sun went on to beat Isola to make the semi-finals.

The third quarter featured one of the toughest draws of the entire fencing schedule, Moellhausen against Italy's Rosella Fiamingo, who hold three World titles between them. Fiamingo took the fight but only just before beating Aleksandra Jarecka of Poland to make the quarter-finals. Lehis lay in wait having come through a tight match with another Polish fencer, Ewa Trzebinska and a more comfortable one with Navarria. Lehis went on to damage Italy's chances further by easing past Fiamingo and into the top four.



Coach Obry with new Olympic Champ

In the main, rankings meant nothing in the bottom quarter as Japan's Sato Nozomi defeated Kang and Estonia's Julia Bejajeva beat Vitalis of France. They faced each other next and it was Bejajeva that prevailed. Popescu lived up to her billing defeating Singapore's Kiria Abdul Rahman and Song Sera from Korea. She went on to comfortably beat Bejajeva to progress to the top four.

Sun's experience showed in the first semi-final and she beat Murtazaeva 12-8. Not even Lehis's massive reach advantage was



Popescu Takes Silver

enough to stop Popescu in the second as the Romanian progressed to the gold medal match 15-11.

So Murtazaeva faced Lehis for the bronze medal. Lehis patiently pressed from the off but after a minute without a hit both fencers were shown the P-yellow card for passivity. Lehis continued to press and went into the first break 3-1. With the pressure on Murtazaeva it was a surprise to see Lehis continue to press in the second period. She did though and the Russian drew level within 30 seconds going into the lead with a lovely flick to the inside wrist. Lehis refocused and opened the distance to re-establish the lead and then drew Murtazaeva out. By the second break the Estonian was 7-4 up and in control. The Russian had no choice but to press and Lehis controlled her perfectly to claim the Olympic bronze 15-8. The result also makes Lehis the first Estonian to claim an Olympic fencing medal.

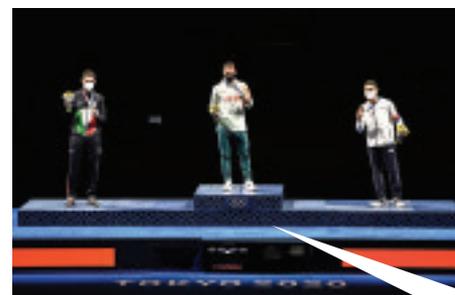


Sun Champion

Passivity was also called at the start of the gold medal match and immediately the fencers jumped into action. Sun was doing all the pressing but it was Popescu who picked off her opponent twice early on. The Chinese fencer changed her approach to level, forcing Popescu to press herself. Sun went into the break 3-2 up but with the pattern of play yet to be established. That became clearer in the second period as Popescu elected to operate off of her opponent's blade with Sun either ignoring Popescu's beats or waiting for the moment to disengage attack. The Romanian snuck into a 7-6 lead at the second break but with the pair so close it was still anyone's title. With the pressure of a second passivity call, Sun pressed immediately in the final period and levelled. She then went ahead twice only for Popescu to level on both occasions before a second passivity call with 26 seconds left on the clock. The Romanian then took a chance on the attack but Sun got the hit in defence. With just 12 seconds remaining Popescu levelled again in the third phase of her attack and the fight went to extra time. Despite Popescu getting priority she was keen not to be pushed to the back line straight away and stepped in to push the Chinese fencer back. Sun brilliantly took the opportunity to land the winning attack to become China's first ever individual epee Olympic Champion.

FIE Facebook Album

Men's Sabre



Men's Sabre Podium

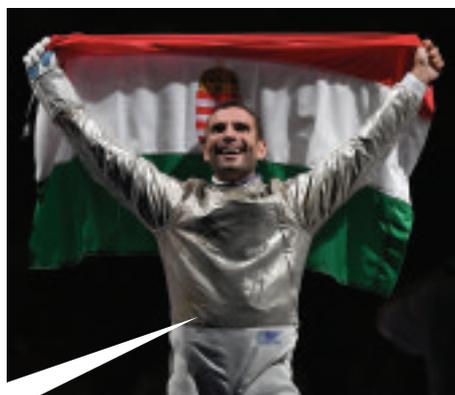
Men's sabre also took place on day one of the Games, and what a start to the tournament! Not only is this the discipline the most spectacular to those that don't regularly watch fencing, but the mouth-watering prospect of whether Hungarian Aron Szilagyi could win three consecutive Olympic titles kept fencing fans on their



Sirovich & Samele Strike Silver

seats all day (or night in the UK). His main opposition came in the form of Korea's Oh Sanguk - heir apparent - and the USA's rising star Eli Dershwitz. Outside runners included Szilagyi's teammate, Andras Szatmari, Sandro Bazadze from Georgia, German Max Hartung and the Italian trio, Enrico Berre, Luca Curatoli and Luigi Samele.

Egypt impressed in the top quarter of the draw with Mohamed Amer defeating the USA's Rio 2016 silver medallist, Daryl Homer and Ziad Elsisy beating the ROC's (Russian Olympic Committee) reigning European Champion, Veniamin Reshetnikov. Amer and Elsisy's run ended in the next round, going out to Oh and Bazadze, respectively. A classy quarter-final performance from Bazadze against Oh, under the calming guidance of Christian Bauer, saw the Georgian take out one of the medal prospects 15-13.



Szilagyi's Threepart

In the next quarter, Hartung eased through Hungary's Tamas Desci before facing Iranian Ali Pakdaman, who had previously taken out Szatmari. Pakdaman's usually aggressive approach was tempered with some fantastically smart decision-making, and he beat Hartung to make the top 8. Pakdaman then faced Szilagyi for a place in the semi-finals. The Hungarian had

stormed through the Iranian's teammate, Mojtaba Abedini, in the previous round. Szilagyi's form was breathtaking as he rolled through Pakdaman 15-6.

Seeding meant that there could only ever have been one Italian men's sabre Olympic medalist in Tokyo as Berre, Curatoli and Samele were all in the third quarter. It was also the quarter that saw two big names fall earlier than expected. In the round of 32 Romania's Iulian Teodosiu felled reigning World Championship bronze medalist Curatoli while Mohammad Rahbari of Iran upset France's 2020 Montreal GP champion, Bolade Apithy. Neither made it any further as Berre took out Teodosiu and Samele defeated Rahbari to set up an all-Italian quarter-final which Samele won.

It was a tough draw for the ROC's Kamil Ibragimov in the bottom quarter but he beat Germans Benedikt Wagner and Matyas Szabo to make the quarter-finals. All eyes were on Dershwitz in this quarter though, and he eased through the home nation's Streets Kaito before coming up against Korea's Rio 2016 bronze medalist, Kim Junghwan. The Korean who had come out of retirement stunned the American in the quarter-finals to make the top four.



Kim's Retirement Plan - Tokyo Bronze

Both semi-finals were tight affairs but Szilagyi came through against Bazadze 15-13 and Samele defeated Kim 15-12. The losers had one more chance of making the Tokyo podium in the bronze medal place play-off as the winners went on to compete for gold.

The first half of the bronze medal match began with both fencers going at each other and Bazadze taking a 4-2 lead. Both Kim and Bazadze then began to come off the line looking to react to their opponent's initial action and, with much of the fight happening in the middle, they went into the break with the Georgian leading 8-7. Despite Bazadze starting the second period well, Kim pulled him back in with sharp attacks off the line and then taking the

fight out of the middle. At 11-11 the 37-year-old Korean called the doctor for an injured front ankle. Magic spray applied, and Kim took the lead 12-11 only to recall the doctor for an accidental hit to the back of the head. A lengthier pause to proceedings included not only some more spray for Kim but also both fencers changing their gloves. When the fencing resumed Kim was more clinical and more decisive, taking his second Olympic bronze in a row 15-11.

Szilagyi started the gold medal match in stunning style - a sharp attack off the line, a trademark beauty of a late parry riposte and a long attack saw him storm into a 3-0 lead. Whether it was nerves or not, Samele only started to flow at 5-1 down and rallied to 8-5 down at the break by opening the distance for some longer attacks. Szilagyi continued his dominance and if anything showed even more variety in both attack and defence, taking the fight and Olympic gold, 15-7. In addition, the high level of his decision-making was exquisite and he made Olympic history by becoming the first men's sabre fencer to win three consecutive individual Olympic titles.

[FIE Facebook Album](#)

Women's Foil

Fencing's second day at the Games began with the women's foil tournament and ROC's reigning Olympic and World Champion Inna Deriglazova was the favourite. Competition came from Ysaora



Women's Foil Podium



USA's First Foil Champion Celebrated

Thibus of France, the USA's Lee Kiefer and Italian pair, London 2012 silver medalist, Arianna Errigo and Alice Volpi.

As expected Deriglazova stormed through the top quarter of the draw beating Poland's Martyna Jelinska, Hungarian Fanni Kreiss and Jeon Hee Sook from Korea to make the semi-finals.

The two fancied Italians, Errigo and Volpi were both drawn in the second quarter which would have been a frustration for Italy's Commissario Tecnico, Andrea Cipressa. Errigo beat Canada's 16-year-old sensation, Jessica Guo whilst Volpi edged Germany's Leonie Ebert, to set up a scintillating quarter-final. Volpi had been one of the form fencers before the halt to international sport but she arrived in Tokyo well-prepared and eased past Errigo.

In the third quarter, Kiefer comfortably beat Amita Berthier from Singapore before winning a nervy contest against Canada's Eleanor Harvey. Meanwhile Japan's Ueno Yuka put in great performances to beat Egypt's Nora Mohamed and Nicole Ross from the USA. The quarter-final between Kiefer and Ueno was close for a while but the American pulled away to make the top four.

The bottom quarter saw a great showing from Canada's Kelleigh Ryan who made the quarter-finals by beating Azuma Sera of Japan and more impressively ROC's Adelina



Khazbak Makes History with Kiefer

Zagidullina. She would have been expecting to face Thibus in the quarters but that was not to be because Larissa Korobeynikova of the ROC beat her. The Russian then edged past Ryan to complete the semi-final line-up.

Both semi-finals were relatively straightforward as Deriglazova beat Volpi 15-10 and Kiefer stunned Korobeynikova 15-6.



Korobeynikova Takes Bronze

Volpi came out for the start of the bronze medal match like her shoes were on fire. She built a 5-1 lead in no time at all. A great video appeal from Korobeynikova not only went her way but gave her time to rethink her strategy. She began landing her attacks and started to close the distance on her counters to negate the Italian's flick to shoulder. The Russian threw in a fabulous stop-hit on her way to drawing level at 7-7. The body language on the piste was clear to see - Korobeynikova's confidence grew as Volpi's ebbed away. The Russian began landing everything, including another video appeal, to go 11-7 up before Volpi landed sixte flick to shoulder to stop the rot. The Italian opened the distance and managed to recover to 12-10 before the clock ran out in the first period. When the bout resumed, the intensity increased further as Volpi attempted to speed things up. Despite a failed appeal, the Italian grittily fought back to 13-13 and then took the lead only for Korobeynikova to level with a closing counter. The Russia lured the Italian into a flick parry riposte and the set-up worked as she stepped in to take the Olympic bronze with another closing counter.

Kiefer started the gold medal match with a determined look against the favourite

Deriglazova and went 5-3 up with the variety that she's known for. It slowed the Russian down but that only gave Deriglazova more thinking time. Known for her strategic prowess she battled back to 5-5 and then 7-7 but went into the first break 8-7 down. They both came out for the second period keen to show their supremacy but ended up scrapping a little. Once both settled, Kiefer was the one to land a couple of hits before Deriglazova deployed a brilliant stop-hit. Again Kiefer built a lead working with actions off the blade in attack and defence, only for Deriglazova to fight back again to 12-12. The Russian then blew the last of her video appeals before Kiefer landed a counter to get within one hit of the title. Deriglazova got one back before a beautifully timed counter-block from Kiefer took her to Olympic gold and into the history books. Not only did she become the USA's first woman to claim an Olympic foil medal, she also became the USA's first Olympic foil gold medalist.

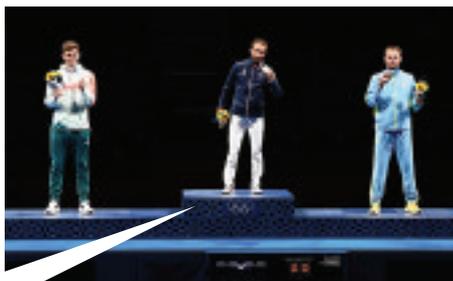


Steely Eyed Deriglazova Secures Silver

FIE Facebook Album

Men's Epee

The other weapon to be contested on day two was men's epee and all eyes were on reigning World Champion, Gergely Siklosi from Hungary, the man he beat in the World final, ROC's Sergey Bida, Korea's reigning Olympic Champion, Park Sangyoung, in-form Ukrainian and winner of the final qualifier (Kazan World Cup) Igor Reizlin, France's Yannick Borel and Japan's Asian Champion Yamada Masaru.



Men's Epee Podium

In the top quarter the World and Olympic Champions were on a collision course. It went to form as Siklosi defeated China's Dong Chao and Moroccan Houssam Elkord whilst Park knocked out the USA's Jacob Hoyle and Minobe Kazuyasu of Japan. The quarter-final was a tight one but Siklosi overcame Park.

The second quarter also went to seeding. Italy's Andrea Santarelli took care of the ROC's Sergey Khodos and Frenchman Alexandre Bardenet to set up a quarter-final with Yamada who beat Kyrgyzstan's Roman Petrov and Kazakhstan's Ruslan Kurbanov. It was another close quarter-final but Santarelli upset the home crowd by beating Yamada.

In the third quarter Reizlin had a tough draw but battled through Benjamin Steffen and Max Heinzer - both from Switzerland. The biggest upset of the tournament came from Egypt's Mohamed Elsayed who comfortably beat Borel before going on to defeat Lan Minghao from China. Reizlin stopped the Egyptian's run in the quarter-finals but only just.

In the bottom quarter Bida held his form to beat Yeisser Ramirez from the USA and Japan's Kano Koki. Meanwhile, the French team's Borel-based disappointment would have been countered by the performance of Romain Cannone. He beat Venezuela's London 2012 Champion Ruben Limardo and Dutchman Bas Verwijlen to make the



Cannone Flying to Gold

quarter-finals. He didn't stop there either, going on to beat one of the favourites Bida to make the top four.

In the first semi-final Siklosi maintained his shot at the Olympic title, defeating Santerelli 15-10. Cannone also continued his fine form of the day to beat Reizlin by the same score.



Reizlin Overwhelmed with History-Making Bronze

Reizlin started the bronze medal match much more mobile, dancing in and out of distance but Santarelli landed a confidence-boosting flick to the foot to get the scoreboard moving and slowed his opponent down. Just over 50 seconds passed before Reizlin was forced out to avoid a passivity warning. Santarelli was ready and landed a second. A counter attack and a double meant Reizlin got on the scoreboard before the period ended but he trailed 4-2. Reizlin started the second period as he did the first, moving freely and landed a foot hit of his own before drawing level with a counter. In this tense encounter it would have been acceptable for the pair to play passivity but they didn't. Both went for their actions equally successfully and they went into the second break tied at 8-8. The start of the final period saw another hit to foot and it was Santarelli at it again but the Ukrainian struck back immediately. The distance closed up and Reizlin struck twice before landing his second hit to foot to bring the score to 13-10 in his favour. Despite another great foot hit from Santarelli, Reizlin claimed the Olympic bronze medal 15-12, becoming the first Ukrainian to win a men's epee Olympic medal.

The gold medal match began with the accustomed efficiency that is expected from Siklosi pitted against the free-flowing energetic flamboyance of Cannone. The Frenchman struck early twice with a flick and a fleche before the Hungarian landed a



Siklosi Silver

simple direct attack. The tone of the match was set and the pair traded hits going into the break tied at 4-4. At 6-6 in the second period Siklosi was carded for barging and appeared frustrated by Cannone's incredible mobility. It was the turning point in the match and the Hungarian elected to open the distance. His attacks began to look too predictable for Cannone who at worst came away with double whilst landing three single light counters plus a couple of binding ripostes. The Frenchman eased into the second break 14-9 up and went on to claim the Olympic crown 15-10. It was the first time a French men's epeeist had claimed the title since Eric Srecki did at Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

FIE Facebook Album

Women's Sabre

The third and final day of the individual competition began with the women's sabre tournament. The main story of the day was simple - could the ROC's Sofya Velikaya convert the two silver medals she had won



Women's Sabre Podium

at the two previous Olympics into gold? Her biggest rival for the title was Ukraine's Olga Kharlan but other contenders were in the mix. Manon Brunet from France, China's Shao Yaqui, Hungarian Anna Marton and the USA's Eliza Stone were all threats too.

The first big surprise of the day came in the top quarter where Kharlan went out to China's relatively unknown Yang Hengyu. Yang then went out to the ROC's Sofia Pozdniakova who had previously knocked out Rosella Gregorio from Italy. Qian Jiarui from China did a great job beating Hungary's Liza Pusztai but Pozdniakova was too much for her in the quarter-finals.



Brilliant Brunet

There were more surprises in the second quarter as Stone fell to Azerbaijan's Anna Bashta. Bashta went on to face Olga Nikitina of the ROC and took her close but ultimately failed. Brunet handled India's first fencing Olympian, Bhavani Devi before beating Japan's Emura Misaki and the French contender dispatched Nikitina with ease to make the top four.

In the third quarter, Zaynab Dayibekova from Uzbekistan who had qualified through Asia's zonal was another biggest surprise on the day. She defeated Shao with comfort before beating Korea's Yoon Jisu to make the quarter-finals. Marton also made it through by beating Maria Perez Maurice from Argentina and Korea's Choi Seeyeon, and the Hungarian went on to knock out Dayibekova.



Pozdniakova Adds Olympic Title to World Title

In the bottom quarter Velikaya demonstrated calm determination beating Hungary's Renata Katona and Italian Irene Vecchi. Korea's London 2012 Champion Kim Jiyeon faced the USA's Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 Champion Mariel Zagunis for a quarter-final spot against the Russian. Zagunis prevailed but was then well-managed by Velikaya.



All Russian Final

Brunet started the bronze medal play-off sharper than Marton, luring her into finishing and landing one parry riposte and two long attacks to go 3-0 up. That made the Hungarian indecisive off the line and Brunet began attacking. By the time they got to the break a confident-looking Brunet was 8-2 up. The French fencer came out for the second period and won the decision-making battle to go 11-2. Marton rallied but it was too late and Brunet converted fourth place at Rio 2016 to bronze in Tokyo.

The gold medal match was a repeat of the 2018 World Championship final where Pozdniakova stormed into a massive



Pure Class Shown by Defeated Velikaya

lead and went on to win. Add to that the pressure Velikaya must have been feeling in her third consecutive Olympic final, (having lost the previous two,) it was no surprise that Pozdniakova landed the first hit. Velikaya's nerves settled and she went 3-1 up with two attacks and a stop-cut. She converted that to 7-4 only for Pozdniakova to land her attacks off the line. Velikaya landed a long attack to take them to the break in a finely-balanced final. When they came out for the second period the pair traded hits to 10-10 before Pozdniakova went on a run of three attacks off the line followed by a counter-parry riposte. Velikaya got one back with a super counter-block but then elected to bring the fight out of the middle on the defence. Pozdniakova was patient with her long attack and landed the winning hit, taking the Olympic title 15-11. Despite the heart-break for Velikaya she showed her class in warmly congratulating her teammate on the podium piste.

FIE Facebook Album

Men's Foil



Men's Foil Podium



Untimely Injury in the Final

The men's foil tournament was also held on day three and British hopes were high for Marcus Mepstead. The 2019 World silver medalist was certainly in the running along with Italy's World number one, Alessio Foconi and the reigning World Champion, Enzo Lefort. Other contenders included Italy's reigning Olympic Champion Daniele Garozzo and in-form Americans Nick Itkin, Gerek Meinhardt and Alex Massialas. There was also interest in the ROC's Kirill Borodachev who was showing promise prior to the global lockdown.

There was a big upset at the top of the draw as Meinhardt went out early to the ROC's Vladislav Mylnikov. The Russian didn't capitalise, losing in the next round to London 2012 silver medalist Alaaeldin Abouelkassem from Egypt. Japan's Shikine Takahiro had a great day as he beat Hong Kong's Choi Chun Yin Ryan and then Abouelkassem to make the top four.

Garozzo and Lefort were drawn in the same quarter and did their jobs beating Japan's Matsuyama Kyosuke and Saito Toshiya, respectively. Their match up in the quarter-finals was the pick of the bunch but Garozzo showed his best form to prevail.



It's been coming for Choupenitch

The third quarter saw an out-of-form Massialas go out to Peter Joppich from Germany. The German then faced Czech Alexander Choupenitch next, but was unable to overcome a fencer who had been showing signs of a big result for a few years. There was disappointment for Great Britain when Marcus Mepstead went down to Egypt's Mohamed Hamza. However Hamza was fencing the tournament of his life and went on to beat Italy's Athens 2004 bronze medalist Andrea Cassara.

In the bottom quarter Itkin took out the ROC's Anton Borodachev before losing to his twin Kirill in the next round. Foconi and Cheung Ka Long of Hong Kong faced each other in the 16 and the Italian surprisingly went out to a heavy defeat. Then, in a stunning display in the quarter-final, Cheung clawed his way back from a 14-9 deficit against the young but commanding Russian to make the top four.



Cheung Paving the Way to a Different Game

In the first semi-final Garozzo continued his strong run, beating Shikine 15-9 to make his second consecutive Olympic final. In the second semi Cheung, who had been fencing well all day, took out Choupenitch 15-10.

The Czech athlete began his bronze medal play-off with a sense of urgency and dominated the distance to go 5-0 up, using

his reach to land counter-attacks before running away. Japan's first shot at a home medal was fading fast. Whether Shikine attacked fast or slow Choupenitch had the answer and went 11-5 up. Finally the Japanese fencer worked out how to land his attack - starting fast to draw the parry, keeping his blade out of the way and then landing the final action. He landed a few of these broken time attacks but he had solved the puzzle too late into the fight and Choupenitch claimed bronze with a parry riposte. In doing so he became the first athlete from the Czech Republic to win an Olympic fencing medal.

Garozzo came on to the piste for the final with a look of steely determination in his Olympic title defence. On the other side Cheung Ka Long looked calm and relaxed having fenced well in his semi-final. Garozzo got the better start, taking a 4-1 lead with a mix of his modern and classic fencing. Cheung though laid out his game plan to keep the distance dangerously close and it started to work for him. He combined attempted stop-hits, attacks into preparation, closing counters and, when he got the chance, longer attacks with absence of blade, to go into a 6-4 lead. Garozzo fought back with a long but patient attack but injured his front leg in doing so. After a short medical time-out, Garozzo came back on and was moving freely. The problem for him was that Cheung was full of confidence and continued dominating with his variety to go 10-5 up. Garozzo turned it around though, using second intention to lure out the counter and then either finish his attack or finding a parry. He got back to 10-9 down before Cheung went on another run, including a lightning fast attack into preparation to get to 13-10. Garozzo only managed one more hit as Cheung claimed Hong Kong's first ever Olympic fencing medal, the men's foil gold. He became only the fourth non-European to claim that title.

[FIE Facebook Album](#)

TEAM

The team events began on day four of the Games. The individual tournament had produced records and firsts on every day and notably athletes from six different countries had won gold. At this stage the ROC sat on the top of the medal table with one gold medal, two silvers and one bronze with all the medals distributed amongst twelve countries.



Women's Team Epee Podium

Eight teams competed in this event and it was no surprise to see China progress to the semi-finals with a 44-32 victory over Hong Kong. Korea had a tighter match against the USA and took the lead in the fourth pushing on to win 38-33.

The surprises came in the bottom half of the draw. First Italy stunned the ROC taking a 19-17 lead into the final leg where Violetta Kolobova and Rosella Fiamingo both scored 14 hits in a thrilling finish - Italy winning 33-31. Then the number two seed Poland who led going into the eighth leg fell to Estonia. Lehis, the individual bronze medal winner, did the damage in the penultimate bout and Estonia went on to win 29-26.

In the first semi-final Korea led the World number one team China 9-8 after leg three. The Chinese team substituted Sun Yiwen, the individual gold medalist but still trailed 14-17 after six bouts. Korea pushed on in the final third to win 38-29.



Italy Take Bronze



Estonian Golden Joy

Estonia played a patient game against Italy in the other semi-final. They held a six-hit advantage after six fights, extending that through Erika Kirpu to nine hits after seven. Federica Isola came on for Italy in the penultimate bout and scored 11 hits but Estonia still led 29-25. Lehis anchored them to a 42-34 victory.

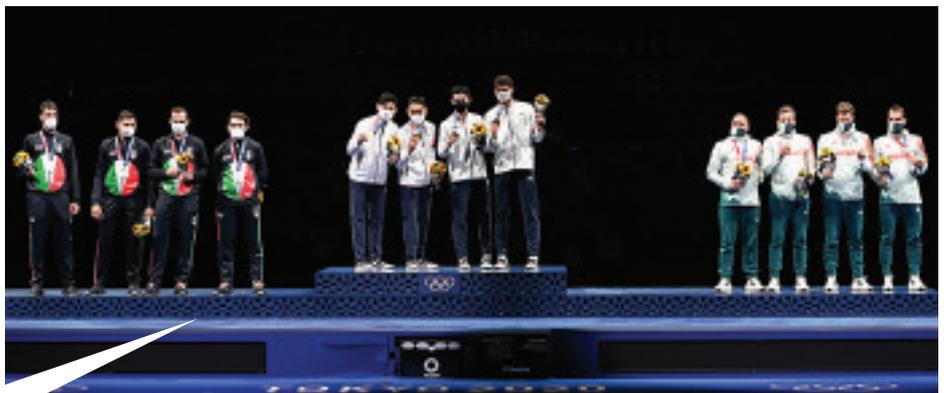
In the bronze medal match Italy lined up with Rosella Fiamingo, Federica Isola and Mara Navarria against China who started with Zhu Mingye, Xu Anqi and Lin Sheng. The Chinese led 7-6 after the first third of the match but the Italian trio outscored China 9-4 in the middle of the match and led 15-11. Navarria gained another two points in the seventh leg before the Italian substitute Alberta Santuccio came on. Despite China winning the final two bouts 8-4, Italy claimed the bronze medal 23-21.

Korea began the gold medal match with Choi Injeong, Kang Young Mi and Song Sera and led Estonia 13-11 after three bouts. The Estonian line-up of Julia Beljejeva, Katrina Lehis and Erika Kirpu closed the gap by one hit in the next three legs but still trailed 22-21. Both teams made their substitution for bout seven as Irina Embrich brought Estonia level against Korea's Lee Hyein. 24-24 turned to 26-26 going into the final bout where Estonia's individual bronze medalist Lehis outscored Choi 10-6 to claim the country's first ever Olympic fencing gold medal.

FIE Facebook Album

Men's Team Sabre

On day five of the Games Japan used three of their host nation places to form a team with Yoshida Kenta who qualified individually through the Asian zone. They took on Egypt in the incomplete round of 16 and fell behind at the start. Egypt made the quarter-finals, winning 45-32.



Mens Team Sabre Podium



Hungary Claim Bronze

World number one team Korea were Egypt's next opponents and despite a tremendous performance from Mohab Samer, Korea progressed 45-39. The ROC versus Germany match was expected to be a close one but the Germans were more determined and led from the second leg until they won 45-28.

In the bottom half of the draw Italy were the favourites against Iran and led 40-33 going into the last fight. Ali Pakdaman scored a stunning 11 hits against Luca Curatoli to level at 44-44 but the Italians scraped over the line in the end. Hungary lived up to their billing and comfortably beat the USA 45-36.

In the first semi-final Germany continued to look strong and led Korea 15-11 after



Korea's Olympic Champions

three fights. The Koreans fought back in the middle three but still trailed 30-29 with three fights remaining. They edged into a 40-37 lead going into the anchor leg when the Germans brought on their substitute, Richard Huebers. As bravely as he fought, Korea went through to the final 45-42.

In the second semi-final everyone was expecting Hungary to beat Italy to set up every neutral's dream final and they led 15-11 after a third of the match. Italy brought on their substitute Aldo Montano who had won the individual title and team silver at the Athens Games in 2004, plus team bronze at Beijing 2008 and London 2012. He did his job and not only closed the gap by three points in his two legs but also lit a fire under his teammates who closed out a remarkable win 45-43.

Hungary lined up for the bronze medal match with Aron Szilagyi, Csanad Gemesi and Andras Szatmari but - because of the draw and their desire for Szilagyi to anchor, the three-time individual Olympic Champion had three matches between each of his bouts. This is where the German team had to do some damage and they started with Richard Huebers, Max Hartung and Benedikt Wagner. Germany failed to capitalise and Hungary led 15-11 after three bouts and 30-16 after six. That 14-hit lead remained going into the anchor leg between Hartung and Szilagyi and what a leg it was. With nothing to lose, Hartung went on a run of hits and the Hungarian looked completely lost. Despite Hartung's amazing 14 hits, Szilagyi pushed Hungary over the line and to the Olympic bronze medal 45-40.

Italy, buoyed from their semi-final win, started with individual silver medalist Luca Curatoli, Aldo Montano and Enrico Berre - all looking determined. The Korean line-up of individual bronze medalist Kim Junghwan, Oh Sanguk and Gu Bongil knew gold was theirs if they could keep a lid on the pressure. The Korean built a 15-6 lead in the first third of the match which they extended to 30-17 in the middle. At 35-20 going into the eighth leg, Korea were so confident that they brought on their substitute Kim Junho. He was as good as his teammates and left his anchor to finish things off with a 40-21 lead. Oh remained professional and took Korea to the Olympic title with a 45-26 victory.

FIE Facebook Album

Women's Team Foil



Podium

The women's team foil event took place on day six of the Games and the quarter finals went with seeding. The ROC beat Egypt 45-21, the USA saw off Japan 45-36, France defeated Canada 45-29 and Italy overcame Hungary 45-32.

In the first semi-final the USA looked like they were going to cause a big upset, leading 30-26 with three legs remaining. Kiefer, the individual gold medalist, did most of the work to put them there. However, the Russians brought on substitute Marta Martyanova and she began the comeback leading to the ROC prevailing 45-42.



Back on the Olympic Podium

Men's Team Epee



Russian Golden Huddle

In the second semi-final it was France seeking to upset Italy but it didn't look good. Going into leg seven Italy led 30-25 but the French closed the gap to 40-37 going into the anchor leg. On came Ysaora Thibus for France against Arianna Errigo and Thibus turned it around to win 45-43.

Hurt but still in for a medal, Italy lined up for the bronze medal match with Errigo, Martina Batini and Alice Volpi. They faced a game USA team who started with Nicole Ross, Lee Kiefer and Sabrina Massialas. Italy were very business-like in their approach and led 15-13 after three fights extending that to 30-20 after six. Their confidence was high and they brought in their substitute, Erica Cipressa, who won her only bout 5-1. Italy went on to seal their place on the podium with a 45-23 victory.

The ROC began the gold medal match with Larissa Korobeynikova, Inna Deriglazova and Marta Martyanova as France started with Ysaora Thibus, Anita Blaze and Pauline Ranvier. As expected, Russia began well leading 14-9 after the first third of the match. They also won the middle third extending their lead to 30-20. Substitute Astrid Guyart was brought on by the French team but went down 5-1. Despite Ranvier and Thibus closing the Russians down the ROC claimed the gold medal 45-34.

FIE Facebook Album



Japan's Golden Moment

Day seven of the Games featured the men's team epee event and it was no surprise that the home nation used three of their host nation places to create a team along with Yamada Masaru who had qualified through the individual Asian allocation. Ranked fourth in the World, they were always going to be a threat as the USA discovered in the incomplete round of 16. Despite trailing by some way going into the last three bouts, Japan took the win.



Korea React to Bronze

World Number One Team France were their victims and again Japan came from behind to knock out one of the favourites. Also in the quarter-finals, China handled Ukraine, the ROC team took out number two seed Italy and Korea saw off Switzerland.

In the first semi-final Japan took a commanding 11-1 lead after three legs and never looked back taking the victory 45-38. Despite a slow start in the other semi-final, the ROC team wrestled the lead away from Korea in the fourth bout and went on to win 45-38.

The all-Asian bronze medal play-off saw Korea lined up with Kweon Youngjun, 2016 Olympic Champion Park Sangyoung and Song Jaeho. They took on China who started with Dong Chao, Lan Minghao and Wang Zijie. Korea edged the first third of the match to take a 9-8 lead but China fought back in the middle third to steal a 27-23 lead. The Korean pair of Song and Kweon drew level at 34-34 going into the final bout where Park outscored Dong 11-8 to take the bronze medal for Korea 45-42.

Favourites from the ROC team lined up with Sergey Bida, Nikita Glazkov and Pavel Suhkov. They faced a Japanese team, in search of their first medal on the piste at the Games, who started with Yamada Masaru, Kano Koki and Uyama Satoru. The Japanese trio led 13-11 after three legs. The Russians closed up in the middle three bouts but still trailed 28-25. Japan applied the pressure in the final three legs and Kano anchored them to Olympic gold, winning 45-36. A victory that saw Japan achieve their highest fencing medal count of any Olympic Games.

FIE Facebook Album



Men's Team Epee Podium



Women's Team Sabre Podium

Japan elected to utilize their host nation spots to make a women's sabre team, adding Tamura Norika, Aoki Chika and Fukushima Shihomi to the already qualified Emura Misaki. They proved far too strong for African qualifiers Tunisia, beating them 45-29 to make the quarterfinals.

The top eight knock out went with seeding as the ROC beat Japan 45-34, Korea defeated Hungary 45-40, France comfortably knocked out the USA 45-30 and Italy had a scare but eventually overcame China 45-41.



Bronze for Korea

In the semi-final between the ROC and Korea, the Russians got off to a great start leading 15-10 and then crushed the Koreans 15-4 in the middle third, going on to win 45-26. The other semi-final between France and Italy turned out to be a cracker. France led 15-9 and 30-14 before Italy brought on their substitute. Michela Battiston came on in the seventh leg against Charlotte Lembach and scored 18 hits to the French fencer's five. Italy were back in it but Brunet and Berder saw it out for France, winning 45-39.

In the bronze medal match Korea began with Kim Jiyeon, Seo Jiyeon and Yoon



Russia's Golden Moment

Jisu against Italy who lined up with Irene Vecchi, Rosella Gregorio and Michela Battiston. The Italians edged the first third to lead 15-13 and extended their lead in the middle to 30-26. Seo went on a rampage in the seventh leg scoring nine hits to put the Koreans into the lead 35-33. Yoon and Kim carried Korea to the Olympic bronze 45-42.

A thrilling gold medal match saw France line up with Manon Brunet, Cecilia Berder and Charlotte Lembach against the ROC who began with Olga Nikitina, Sofia Pozdniakova and Sofya Velikaya. Russia put Nikitina on first and last to avoid big gaps between her teammates' fights. France led 15-13 after three legs but Nikitina went on an 11-3 run in the fifth and Russia led 30-24 with three fights to go. France brought in substitute Sara Balzer in the seventh but Russia increased their lead. Nikitina went into the anchor leg against Berder with a six-hit lead and took the Russian team to Olympic gold, 45-41.

FIE Facebook Album

Men's Team Foil



Men's Team Foil Podium

Japan used the last of their host nation places to make up a men's foil team. Shikine Takahiro had qualified through the Asian individual quota and was joined by Saito Toshiya, Matsuyama Kyosuke and Nagano Yudai. Their ranking meant that Germany faced Canada in the incomplete round of 16 and beat them comfortably 45-31.

The Germans then lost to gold medal favourites the USA 45-36 in the quarter finals, whilst France beat Egypt 45-34 and the young ROC team beat Hong Kong 45-39. Perhaps the biggest shock of the tournament came in the other quarter-final where Japan stunned Italy, winning 45-43.

In the first semi-final, the relatively inexperienced ROC team took on favourites the USA. It was tight but the USA led 15-13 and 30-39 going into the final third. The Russians picked the American's pockets though - winning 45-41. In the other semi-final, Japan led France 15-11 after three legs but the French fought back to lead 30-28 after six. Despite the brilliance of Matsuyama in the anchor leg, France won 45-42.



French Foil Gold

In the bronze medal match the USA lined up with Alexander Massialas, Race Imboden and Gerek Meinhardt against the plucky Japanese team, Shikine Takahiro, Matsuyama Kyosuke and Nagano Yudai. It was a relatively comfortable victory for the USA who led 15-11 and 30-22, before going on to claim their spot on the Olympic podium 45-31.



Greg Massialas and his bronze medal winning team

The gold medal match featured the French trio of Erwann Le Pechoux, Julien Mertine and Enzo Lefort against the ROC who started with Anton and Kirill Borodachev plus 2016 Olympic silver medalist Timur Safin. The French team were far too strong for the Russians, leading 15-8 and then 28-21 up, going into the final three legs. Erwann Le Pechoux anchored France to the Olympic gold 45-28, claiming France's first men's team foil Olympic title since Sydney 2000.

[FIE Facebook Album](#)

With the world in such a difficult place, Tokyo provided a perfect reminder of why we love fencing. Upsets and glory abounded but the most telling thing was the change. With everyone around the globe in isolation the sport has developed

in pockets and in different ways. Who knows what will be on the cards, if the new season will be able to start on schedule? What we do know is that, when it does, the deck has been well and truly shuffled.

TOKYO TAKEOUT

Karim Bashir

The end of the Olympic cycle lends itself to rest, recharging the batteries, reflection, even retirement, and perspective.

Sadly, for me and many others in the global fencing family, perspective came rather brutally, days after the Games, when USA Fencing Head Women's Foil Coach, Buckie Leach died when riding his motorbike. He'd just returned from Tokyo having overseen Lee Kiefer making history by becoming the country's first ever Olympic foil gold medalist. The news hit me hard and tears were shed.

My grief was eased by the outpouring of love for Buckie on social media. His sister posted that Buckie held so dear what he had achieved in fencing and that he'd died instantly doing the thing he loved most after fencing - riding bikes. "Don't feel sad", she encouraged us. "Celebrate Buckie. That's what he would have wanted."

Perspective is generous, and let us extend it to how we interpret Marcus' result. Qualifying in the circumstances that he did is a massive win for him, Johnny Davis, Dan Kellner and British Fencing. More uplifting than disappointing, as when we consider Estonian epeeist, Lehis and her WE team's result. Hailing from a country of 1.3 million people, fencing for many years without an Olympic medal - now they have two! If they can do it, surely so can we? Perspective, belief and patience is what we need.

Buckie leaving us was tragic as was the end of Russian Women's Head Foil Coach, Ildar Mavlyutov's battle with cancer just a few weeks later. If we hold in our sights that their journeys were not in vain, then we can so too believe that nor are ours.



Buckie at Work

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TEAM GB

Ambition Programme Diary

By Sophie DeVooght



This year, a group from BF attended Team GB's fifth Ambition Programme, preparing them for Paris 2024. Katie Arup, Ian Lichfield, Kamal Minott, Caiti Maxwell and Ben Andrews, all attended.

Katie Arup shared news from the first day. "Great first day here at the London Olympic Park. It has been excellent to see the athletes interacting with each other, working in teams to consider the journey they are all on towards Paris. Helping each other to identify and openly discuss their fears and hopes for the future."

"As a coach on the programme, I have found it very informative to have the opportunity to talk to other coaches from different sports about how their athlete development programmes are run, about the athlete pathways that they are facilitating, the hurdles they face within their respective NGBs and how they have overcome them."

"The Team GB Ambition team leaders have been bright, supportive and incredibly enthusiastic about Team GB values, encouraging everyone here to feel a part of Team GB whilst also appreciating how special it is, and helping us to realise how we can best support our athletes whilst competing in Paris in 2024."



Ben Andrews also shared his reflective diary and his thoughts on how the experience has impacted him. "Being welcomed onto the course and receiving our Team GB Kit and accreditation for security was a tangible acknowledgement of selection for the program and laid the foundation for the inspiring few days with fellow athletes and Olympians. This simple act instantly made us feel part of a team."

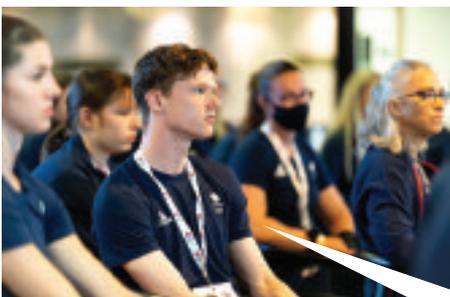
"It was an amazing opportunity to get together with athletes from other sports, to share stories and make new friendships. Talking to the other athletes from so many different sports, it was inspiring that many share the same issues, ambitions and goals."

"The 34 athletes selected to be part of the Team GB Ambition Programme for Paris 2024 came from a range of sports including Fencing, Diving, Modern Pentathlon, Athletics, Shooting, Climbing, Equestrian, Canoeing and Artistic Swimming. As part of the programme, we had talks from Olympic medalists Leon Taylor (Diving), Kristian

Team GB started the Ambition Programme to prepare future Olympians for their first Games. They shared, "The Olympic Games is like no other sporting competition. With over 10,000 athletes from over 200 countries, the event is an awesome step up in scale from any individual sport's World Championships or even the Commonwealth Games. Attending an Olympic Games for the first time can be a daunting experience for athletes and coaches. The sheer size and scale of the event can be overwhelming, and staying calm and focused in the Olympic environments can be challenging."

"Over the five Olympic Games prior to Beijing 2008 an average of nearly 70 of Team GB gold medallists were already Olympians, having attended a previous Games. This demonstrates just how important the knowledge and insight into the Games environment can be for performance success."

"To better prepare athletes and staff for their first Olympic Games, Team GB created the Ambition Programme, delivering the first version of the programme in Beijing 2008 providing aspiring Olympians and their coaches with an opportunity to experience some elements of the Olympic Games prior to attending one themselves."





Thomas (Gymnastics) and Senior Olympic Sports Reporter, Nick Hope. Our mentors included Olympians, Lizzie Simmonds (Swimming), Chris Cook (Cycling), Hannah England (Athletics) and Goldie Sayers (Athletics).”

“All gave an insight into what to expect from our first Olympic Games and how best to be prepared with a plan that can be adapted to each individual athlete and their sport. Our sessions included, Preparing and Being Adaptable, Life in the Village, Obstacles versus Opportunities and Media Scenarios. All sessions were inspiring, thought provoking and will add real value over the next few years. The three sessions that stood out for me were the Team Building activity, Circles of Concern, Influence, Control, and Contingency Planning.”

“One of the first activities was a team exercise where one person was blindfolded and had to be guided and instructed to complete a set of challenges they hadn't seen before. This included hula hooping, throwing a bean bag onto a target, and placing balls onto cones. The person then removed their blindfold and practiced the exercise again, before repeating the task with the blindfold on once more. The time to complete the task was subsequently reduced having had a little knowledge of what was involved, despite the distraction of the 800m final being played on the big screen where Keely Hodgkinson won a Silver medal! The exercise illustrated the aim of the course, to prepare athletes



for the unknown. However, for the 2024 Olympics we would still be somewhat “blindfolded” and we would have to draw on the skills explored as part of this course to adapt.”

“In the second session we discussed our circles of concern, influence, and control for competing at the Olympics or Major Championships. For example, what aspects of competition you have to accept such as the change of DE tableau, areas you have control such as preparing and checking weapons, and areas you are able to influence by your actions and attitude for example your interaction with opponents and officials.”

Ian Lichfield said, “It is a privilege to be part of the Team GB Ambition programme. The opportunity to connect and work with athletes and coaches from other sports, sharing challenges they have all faced through the pandemic, was enlightening. The guest speakers and the guided workshops were thought provoking.”

The athletes and coaches who attended the Ambition Programme will take their learnings forward as we look ahead towards Paris 2024. Thanks to UK Sport and the National Lottery, BF is one of



“In the contingency planning case study from the Rio Olympics, the official bus went to the incorrect venue, meaning the athlete would miss their competition. We then discussed how we would react to this situation and what our contingency plan would be in that scenario. I found this particularly helpful as there have been many instances competing abroad when a teammate's bag was lost in transit leaving them without the kit required to compete. How this is dealt with, and the reaction of the individual athlete can not only affect their performance but also impact the wider team and the traveling coaches.”

“In summary, I had an amazing time meeting athletes from a variety of sports and hearing from past Olympians. I'm feeling extremely motivated and inspired as a result of the course and excited to see what the next few years will bring in the lead up to Paris 2024. My favourite quote of the programme, “T-CUP: Thinking Correctly Under Pressure”.”



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. In December 2020, UK Sport 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, through the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games and beyond, to 2032.

TOKYO 2020

THE PARALYMPIC DOWNLOAD

By Viv Mills and Siân Hughes Pollitt

Photos: © Augusto Bizzi

“We all wanted to show the world what we are capable of. We went to Tokyo to make a name for ourselves, to make it clear we are a team to worry about, to say that we are coming for the top: we are coming to take everything.”

Oliver Lam-Watson -
GBR Paralympic Fencer

With this mission statement imprinted on their hearts, four of Great Britain's top fencing athletes went to represent the nation at the Tokyo Paralympics. Their intention was a bold one and their accomplishment was a convincing one: the best medal haul in Paralympic fencing for GBR since 1984.

It was, however, an unnerving start to the Games with Piers Gilliver (Category A Men) exiting the individual sabre competition early in the knockout stage and Gemma Collis-McCann (Category A Women) failing to make the cut after poules.

But Gilliver and Collis-McCann returned for Day 2 to compete in their respective epee competitions, along with Dimitri Coutya (Category B Men).

In the poules, Collis-McCann beat Drozd (POL) and Matsumoto (JPN) but lost to Veres (HUN the eventual winner), Rong



Piers Gilliver



British Attacking Force

(CHN and eventual silver medallist), and Evdokimova (RPC) finishing ranked 10 in the tableau of 16. She fenced Breus (UKR) in her Direct Elimination match, losing 5-15.

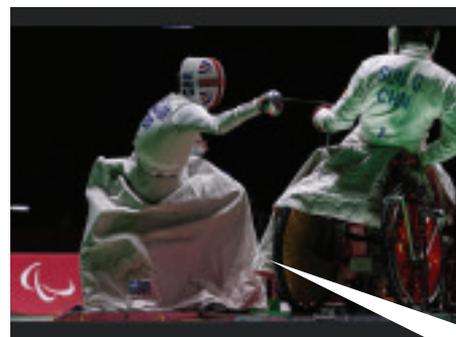
Gilliver won all of his six poule matches, making the tableau of 16 as the number one seed. Earning a bye to the quarter-finals, he fenced Manko (UKR) breezing through with a 15-2 victory. The semi-finals saw him meet Gang Sun (CHN) in a replay of the 2016 Rio Paralympic final. On this occasion Gilliver won convincingly 15-6. In the final he was pitted against Shaburov (RPC). The match ended in a 15-9 scoresheet, with Gilliver confidently seizing the gold medal and the Paralympic crown.

So too with Coutya, who won all of his poule matches in the Category B event and was similarly ranked first in the tableau of 16 having been awarded a bye. Fencing Datsko (UKR) in the quarter-finals, Coutya won 15-13 before losing 12-15 to Guissone (BRA) in the semi-finals. In the bronze medal match he exercised his athletic precision to beat Pranevich (BLR) 15-11, marking his sweet revenge after the Belarusian had beaten him in the quarter-finals in the Rio Games and also in a World Cup in February 2020.

The pair confirmed a faith in both approach and achievement. Gilliver said, “I just had to focus on my game plan and the best way to execute it”. Coutya, meanwhile, acknowledged a tough day had ended with a result to be proud of saying, “It feels wonderful to win a bronze for Great Britain and my first Paralympic medal.”

Day three saw Gilliver, Coutya and Oliver Lam-Watson (Category A Men) compete

in the Men's Team Epee competition. In the preliminary rounds they beat Ukraine, France and Poland, to progress to the semi-finals where they were defeated 35-45 by the Russian Paralympic Committee (RPC) team. In the bronze medal match they faced Ukraine once again. Ukraine attempted to spice things up a bit, changing the order of play with a view to dominating the penultimate bout to finish on a win. GBR however effected a forceful finish with a victory over Ukraine 45-38. The bronze medal was theirs.



Gilliver beats Sun

Reflecting on his debut at the Paralympics, Lam-Watson said, “We have trained to a rigorous schedule, with a rationale of considering how everything will affect our performance. We all know we came here not just to take part, but to be competitive”.

Coutya was the sole GBR fencer in the Individual Foil on day four of the competition. He won five of his poule matches, losing one to Feng (CHN) meaning that he was seeded third in the tableau of 16. A bye to the quarter-finals saw him meet and beat Valet (FRA) 15-8. In the semi-finals, Coutya fenced Feng once again.



Dimitri Coutya

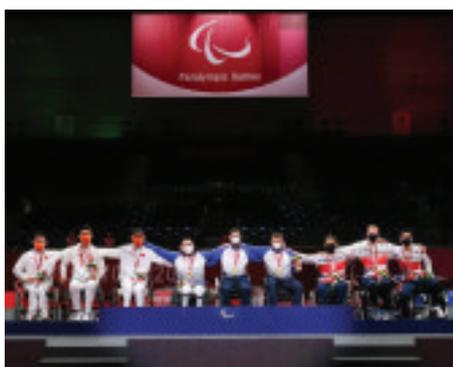


Ollie Lam-Watson

The scores were close until Feng started to build up a lead at 10-7. Coutya recovered to 10-10, only for Feng to race ahead again to 10-14. Coutya – undaunted – clawed himself a 14-14 come-back, before Feng scored the final point. In the bronze medal match Coutya took no prisoners and showed his mettle beating Kamalov (RPC) 15-2.

On losing the semi-final so narrowly yet winning the bronze medal so emphatically, Coutya had never lost sight of the podium, “I didn’t have the chance to process it. We had to go pretty much straight back into the call room for the bronze medal match. I’m going to take some time to get over today. But I had to put it aside for the time being, and just push through so that I could come away with another medal.” Coutya continued to highlight how these Paralympics moments hail from a long history in applying himself to training. “I can see the work that I’ve put in being realised now. Having taken time after Rio to take account of how many errors I’d made and how to improve my training, I’m happy that it’s come through and I feel I can see that development”.

Day 5, and the final day of competition for GBR as Gilliver, Coutya and Lam-Watson



Tokyo 2020 Men's Team Epee Podium

undertook the Men’s Team Foil. Having drawn both the RPC team and Italy in their poule, GBR were facing up to the fact that they had beaten neither side in a team foil competition before. Their first match was against the Russians. Describing it as a ‘war of attrition’ Lam-Watson said how he and his teammates with the close support and scrutiny of their coaches, devised the best game plan to divide and conquer, pulling it off with a 45-44 win, with Gilliver scoring ten points in the final leg. After the RPC, Ukraine proved a much easier match, concluding with a 45-21 victory. The GBR Paralympians then took Italy 45-37. This triumphant clean sweep saw them finishing their poule in first place.

Meeting France in the semis, they won 45-21, meaning they would fence China in the final. The Chinese team had the Cat A gold and silver medallists, and the Cat B silver medallist from the individual competitions. Nonetheless the scores remained very close until the last two legs, where GBR were leading 35-34. However the strength of their opponents prevailed, ending in victory to China 45-38 and GBR coming away with the silver-ware.



Team Tension

“It is a real testament to how far we’ve progressed and what strong contenders we are becoming,” Coutya said afterwards. “Huge respect to the Chinese team. They’re incredibly quick and very hard-working, so for us to come away with a result like this, and get so close to them, really shows that we’ve come a long way and they are well within our reach.”

Recognition for GBR’s rising dominance must also go to Head Coach, Peter Rome. Before his arrival, GBR had not fielded a wheelchair fencing team since 2014, languishing at the bottom of the ranking tables in all three weapons. Peter stuck to his vision that a good set of dedicated fencers could progress well enough to qualify for the Paralympics. In just two years – which amounted to about 14 competitions – he has more than demonstrated the viability of this coach approach.

Gilliver, having now amassed a full complement of gold, silver and bronze Paralympic medals, underscored how monumental their achievements within this time span are. “It feels really amazing. For me in the individual, it was the gold that I was really hunting but looking to progress in the team events was a big challenge. Although it looks like it’s still the same individuals, actually it’s a very different game. We’re a new team. To come away as team medallists is a dream come true.”

These Games have given the GBR team a final medal haul of one Gold, one Silver and three Bronze medals. They have made the 2020 Games a turning point for wheelchair fencing in Great Britain, with a prize-win that ensured and secured them third place in the Paralympic fencing medal table, behind China and the RPC.

The fencers have convinced the world of the spirit in their team; now for the team behind that team spirit. Further tribute naturally goes to Peter Rome assisted by coach Ben Peggs – two true pros; with the roll call of thanks extending to WCP Programme Managers Matt Hammond and Kate Eddy, plus the support staff at Team Bath as well as the three fencers who missed out on qualification for Tokyo, but shared with sparring duties: Shah Rashid, Josh Waddell and Justine Moore.

The consistent belief of both UK Sport and British Fencing has made so much possible, while credit goes to EIS for setting up and running the World Class Programme, to Bath University for providing the facilities and to Jon Willis for allowing Gemma Collis-McCann to train at the Leon Paul Centre.

Sayonara Tokyo.

A bientôt! ... A Paris 2024 ... Vive l’escrime paralympique!



President Philbin with the Tokyo GBR Medalists

YE GODS!

Reinventing The Bath Chair - 'Ablebods' versus Paralympians

By Siân Hughes Pollitt

Little did the inventors of the Bath Chair - originating in the eponymous city in the 1700s - suppose that their prototype would one day be commandeered by fencers, amongst them GBR Paralympians, Piers Gilliver, Dimitri Coutya and Oliver Lam-Watson - now poetically based at Bath University. That's where 'Ablebods' - aka foilists: Ben Peggs, Dominic de Almeida and Raff Rhys Pollitt attended a pre-Tokyo sparring camp at Wheelchair Fencing HQ.

"Mind-blowing. Outrageous hand speed. Just crazy", are Dominic's first impressions. "Their physical mechanics are fascinating to see. We're taught our whole aim is to remain stable in the upper body, but the way their torsos move, the speed of their lunges ... it's almost impossible to hit them. As non-disabled fencers we think we're athletic but in reality we have hardly any of their range of motion".



Raff vs Ollie

"It's not just down to speed and accuracy, these guys have brains that move just as fast", adds Ben who is long-since familiar with the sport that he defines as 'speed chess'. Having coached Dimitri for nearly two cycles and now coaching Ollie too, Ben is at the centre of this whirlwind discipline which he says differentiates itself from non-disabled fencing by being even more highly-pressured, faster and quicker-witted. "There is no time to collect your thoughts, no time to strut to the back line or even fiddle with shoelaces; you're right back in the fight - split seconds after the last. The tactical thinking means thinking like a super-computer."

Super is a word that we start to hear a lot around Para-Sport. Since Channel 4's

Paralympic campaign for London 2012, we've been encouraged to 'Meet The Superhumans'. The slogan evolved to 'We're The Superhumans' for Rio, and 'Super. Human' for Tokyo, with the add-on that 'To be a Paralympian, there's got to be something wrong with you'. This message distills a New Mythology where the ability harnessed out of disability elevates these athletes to demi-god-like status. Whereas Greek myth focuses on deities and warriors as teaching tools to tell a story, we're now able to train our attention on Paralympians to open up alternative hero narratives. It's a recognition that these days fully permeates the sporting world, with wheelchair fencing established as an elite discipline at Bath University, a world-class facility.

The foilists insist, however, that this particular crew of Paralympians prove success can be a down-to-earth, everyday kind of storyline. Raff says, "It's because of their combination of friendship, team dynamic, hours of hard work, gallons of sweat - everyone working to be the best they can be so everyone else can be the best too. Training for their own success helps others succeed. The process might be hard but it isn't complicated". What's more, Piers, Dimitri and Oliver mainly only have each other to fence - day-in, day-out. They have to beat one another whilst having each other's backs and acting as one another's support network. All this while locked into a steel chassis, with little physical or mental leeway. Time out? There is none. It is a relentless high-stress scenario that encourages high-performance. Having sparred with Dimitri on-and-off since he was 12, Raff confirms how fencing him has changed "100%. He's a beast now. A juggernaut. You've more



Dominic Prepares

chance of catching lightning in your hand than defending yourself against Dimitri's flicks to flank. Either he was going easy on me for a few years, or his team and the set-up have made all the difference".

The difference can indeed be distilled by looking at their impressive list of results. And, as Ben points out, with extra layers of complexity as the wheelchairs fencers compete not only in one weapon but in two, and across categories. In Tokyo, Dimitri Coutya competed in Cat B Foil and Epée, Piers Gilliver in Cat A Epée and Sabre, and Oliver Lam-Watson in Team Epée and Foil. They were joined by Gemma Collis-McCann who fenced Cat A Sabre and Epée. Let's just say that after a lifetime of being told what they can't do, the athletes showed us what they can. It may be satisfying to prove the nay-sayers wrong, but it must be a pure, unadorned reward to win the medals that they did. Individual Gold and Bronze, Team Silver and Team Bronze. No spoiler here on what their Paralympic game plan secrets were but let's just say that if you think you are well-prepared for any given competition, then think again. This is 'next level'. What their rigour clearly does achieve, we are able to disclose. The ability to sacrifice oneself physically and



Ben defends against Ollie



Ollie and Ben Setting Up

emotionally to the demands of training generates change, growth and triggers self-belief. At the same time, it also destroys most of the opposition.

Although at the training camp the immediate talk is of how they've been wiped out by their Paralympic peers, the foilists never lose sight of the intrinsic benefit. Dominic says that just before heading to Bath, he'd broken his big toe and was taking seated lessons from his coach, Ziemek Wojciechowski. On his return, Ziemek noticed how much stronger and keener Dominic's hand speed and actions were. As for Raff, he pinpoints how when he got back on piste, he felt there was suddenly eons of time to use for thought and action within the fight. The foilists admire how Dimitri deploys his super-strong back arm as an anchor to propel the body back and forth. All of them applaud Piers' seemingly computer-like accuracy in pre-empting his opponent's reactions. Describing him as an innate fighter - so intense and commanding in the chair, he reportedly allows no-one time to draw breath, raining down blows. Equally, all



Stronger Together

affirm how Oliver is similarly masterful - how fighting him is like placing yourself in front of an ever-present threat. Back to Dimitri? Dodging his hits, apparently, is like trying to get out of the way of the wind. All in all, fencing in the Bath Chair makes these able-bodied fencers re-think what they thought they knew, being tested afresh and being put through their paces while never placing a foot on the piste.

Team-work. Functioning as an organised unit. Gym plans. Sports psychology. 1:1 lessons. Then, there's the right attitude and work ethic. As Dominic says, "They go about it the completely right way. Textbook. They're super-competitive but maintain a very healthy and friendly training environment". Indeed the Paralympians have fun, spending time with each other outside fencing creating solid relationships. They bring that energy back to their multidisciplinary Olympic-level facility which in itself breeds an Olympic-level set-up within their own programme. The results reinforce belief in this whole modus operandi. It works. And one last thing: their humility - their demonstrable gratitude when the 'Ablebods' make the trip, telling them that they're the breath of fresh air.

If anyone were to bottle anything, then go bottle all that.

There is one phrase that Ben repeats across his social media and in conversation with The Sword when he talks about wheelchair fencing. The expression is that of the whole GB Paralympic Squad: 'Impossible to ignore'. The words effectively detonate a truth bomb, and it is this: face it - we can all learn from our Paralympians. In fencing, we can process the unique mix of depth and breadth that this particular branch of the sport demands physically and mentally. If we are to ignore it - shut it away, sideline it, then we'll be the losers. For their part, the 'Ablebods' are happy to take the lesson. Raff is grateful for the 'epic opportunity' to fight those who are



Peter Rome & His Team

'fashioning greatness' just by their sheer hard graft and taking nothing for granted. Dominic too is appreciative of having experienced the wheelchair fencers' speedial sense of movement and ability which is on a scale that 'Ablebods' find difficult to mimic but which could bring so much to their game.

Ben directs us back to the cohesion of the athletes themselves, their programme, and Paralympian National Coach, Peter Rome - who is described by one and all as the glue that holds it all together: calm and constant in this maelstrom of seated swordplay. Peter has taken the essence of these superhumans, channelling it into national pride and triumph - currently hard to see outclassed elsewhere on the planet. It's surely not too far-fetched to imagine him, one fine day in Bath, taking a call. On the phone would be none other than Zeus, father of the gods; tbh a bit spooked by talk of Gods and Heroes and 'catching lightning'. The Myth Meister issues a challenge, boasting his fight squad of Hercules, Perseus ... oh and the only reason they have to do wheelchair in the first place: Achilles ... you know, his heel?

Then Zeus asks Peter, "So who've you got?"



Medal Moments

ARMCHAIR CEO VS CEO

Georgina Under The Spotlight

By Siân Hughes Pollitt

Photos: Den Pollitt

If I had £1 for every time somebody had rolled their eyes, shook their noggin in disbelief and, with a heavy sigh, tutted, "British Fencing!"; or dare I say, I had awarded myself £1 for every occasion when I too had done it, I could probably pay for the Olympics to become an annual, rather than quadrennial event and throw a huge shindig afterwards.

We appear to be a nation of armchair experts, able to do everyone's job better than them. So entrenched are we in this habit, we don't even realise we are unpicking portfolios, chewing over and spitting out the efforts of others. And because I would prefer not to admit - even to myself - that I am a perpetrator, it is an attitude that I bury to the back of my mind when I start a conversation with Georgina Usher, Chief Executive Officer of British Fencing to ask what her diary has been packed with in the run-up to the Olympics.

We first talk over the phone to arrange logistics. This, in itself, is rather novel. Normally when someone is going to be featured in an article, they either run for cover, or they source a variety of ways to dictate the terms of engagement. With Georgina it is neither; presumably she has never attended 'Do Not Trust A Journalist' training or she's secretly harbouring a more cunning masterplan.

She is a brisk talker by anyone's standards, constantly extending to the very confines of speech in order to fully verbalise her thinking. A former Management Consultant and self-confessed data-lover, who has to refrain from clicking on every spreadsheet that she is copied into, she computes, re-computes, programmes, processes and then delivers a distillation of content, filtering down facts and figures. We fix a date to speak properly. Then I mention, in passing, that my 13 year-old daughter is returning to fencing after a self-imposed exile of three years. Georgina's voice suddenly and palpably shifts up the gears, spilling over with warmth and emotion. She shoots straight from the heart.

"How exciting!", she exclaims and, in one and the same breath, manages to cover

what kind of benefits her younger self drew from the sport, those that her own child is deriving from fencing and how every young person can find a strength or a purpose once they pick up a sword. She tells how - even now - some of the most treasured emails she finds in her inbox begin: 'Dear Georgina Usher, I am 14 years-old and am interested in taking up fencing' ...

Before approaching Georgina, somebody who knows her well advised me of her passion for all things fencing. To be honest, I was a bit nonplussed. Words like 'passion' can be a yawn, bandied around too often to denote too many levels of love and dedication that they become meaningless. You cannot 'tell' these words, you have to show them. But here we are, in the midst of the briefest of telephone chats, with Georgina making her zest and zeal for the sport, and her love for its entire community, tangible.

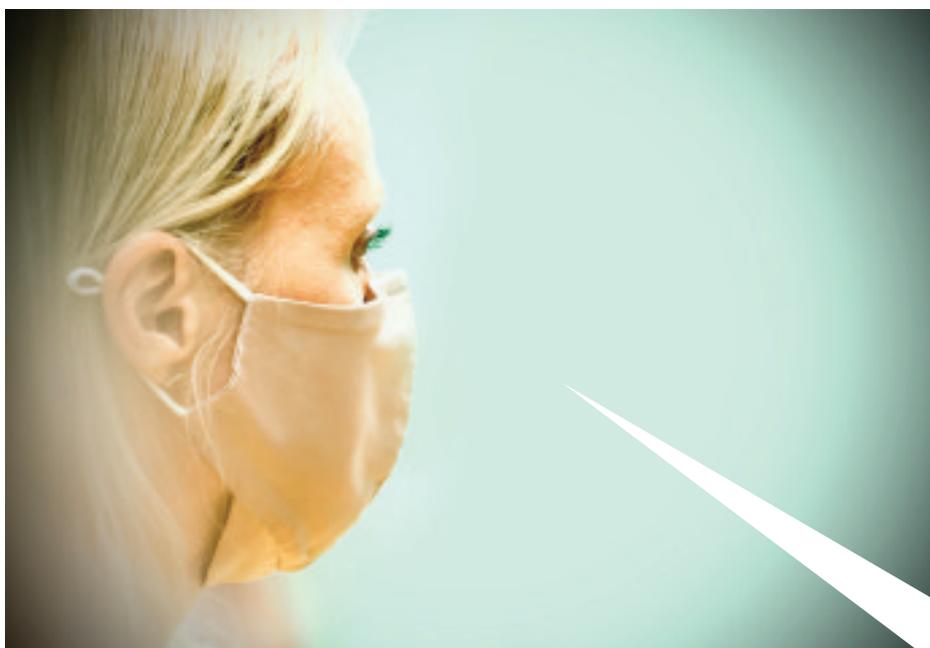
I'm taken somewhat by surprise when she keeps referring to 'our fencers'. By that, Georgina does actually mean every single fencer. Each and every epeeist, foilist, sabreur, male and female, U17, U20, Senior and Veteran and U15 ... The. Whole. Lot. "Yes: 'Our Fencers'", she confirms with a smile. And she talks at length about how

her own prevailing principle of governance is to do the right thing by them.

Why so? Georgina responds that a tough time at school meant that she started fencing with no precise dream and no particular thought process but just as an escape into something she could enjoy for its own sake. We may know her now as one of GBR's most successful women epeeists but Georgina discloses that she actually started her fencing journey as one of GBR's potentially least eminent women's foilists - conceding she was 'terrible' at the weapon.

Her eventual ascendancy to the Top 16 of the world senior women's epee rankings however was not a preoccupation for the 11 year-old Georgina. What was paramount was the sport's sheer positive force in her life. "Why I do this job comes from the fact that fencing was an amazing thing that saved me. I give back to the sport the way all the coaches, referees, and volunteers gave to me. I inherited a sense of legacy from a previous generation. I was shaped into a fencer, and fencers like to do things the right way with a respect for rules and values."

A tough time? Saved her? I rattle out my challenges. Georgina clarifies that the tough time was when she was bullied at school for her height and her appearance. I ask her for stories to illustrate how that played out. She says she would willingly volunteer them to me now, only to cry on



reading them back in print. That's all I need to know.

Physically-speaking, fencing turned out to be young Georgina's safe place. She could don the mask and look like everyone else; her tallness - in epee - ended up becoming very useful. Fencing empowered her. Emotionally too, Georgina discovered how it proved a haven, also acting as a life-enhancer. She goes to use that passion-word again. I have learned to grudgingly allow it. "I am passionate about fencing at the highest levels but journeys have to be special wherever they stop. They are never years wasted. Even if you are encountering this sport through a social impact project - say, in the area of domestic violence - it is proven that fencing can play an important part in moving forward and in recovery". Back to safe places and spaces and Georgina confirms this is her number one priority. She succeeds in touching a nerve with me; I've always felt fencing has given my children a shield to deflect some of life's harsher blows. We move on to talk about inclusion.

Getting Georgina started on this particular topic is reminiscent of watching our nine-

month-old Staffordshire puppy go for a parkour session in amongst the living room, its furniture, its walls and its ceiling. What underpins Georgina's similar prowess to navigate a complex landscape with such speed and efficiency is her willingness to appreciate her target audience and know how to listen to and talk to them. "British Fencing members are super-bright. They form a group of challengers and they keep me on my toes". Georgina fluently quotes me research and statistics that have helped better detail this profile. As she flows, the pennies of understanding begin to cascade. Phrases like 'hugely individualistic', 'creative' and 'don't fit an identikit' all serve as catalyses for insight and, I have from Georgina's mouth - a typical yet non-typical portrayal of a unique set of sporting folks.

For Georgina to truly engage with this diverse collective, she has to relentlessly work against becoming 'lost' from any one type or group, and be everything to one and all.

I spare a thought for my own, some might say 'unadorned', style of tackling fairness and equality - consisting solely of a bald instruction to my husband to:

'be a feminist', and buying a 9-in-1 multi-cooker as his 50th birthday present so he can enjoy the kitchen as much as I do. Georgina's methodology is rather more sophisticated, using society's newly-found adeptness to connect through video call as one way of bringing together voices and creating 'listening' events. Hearing stories from those who have lived the experience facilitates better understanding. When the stories that members share are upsetting, Georgina says they make her determined to reduce the chances of those experiences happening again, asking herself how she can seek to help, support and educate the fencing world at-large.

It's now dawning upon me that Georgina's cunning masterplan must simply have been to do her job then tell me about it when I asked. If I am still hanging on by a thread to the notion that I or anyone else could ever imagine doing any better, Georgina delivers the final hit. The D-word. Data. I am a confirmed data-phobe - an inveterate coward in the face of filling out even a gas meter reading online. I had forgotten that the overwhelming nature of Georgina's CEO role is admin. She has to be audited, sit on innumerable committees, councils, boards and forums, generate consultations and then pour through the findings, create policy, dismantle parts of it, and then build it back up again. While I wail about having hundreds of unread messages in my inbox, Georgina reads every email without deleting one.

There. I throw in the towel.

Figuratively penning a letter resigning from my self-appointed capacity of 'British Fencing Armchair CEO', I metaphorically sign it in blood. I then silently and sheepishly hand back the reins to Georgina.

Do you know what? She can do it.



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A LIFE IN THE WEEK OF Georgina Usher

My week starts with reviewing and final updates to **BF's Selection Policies** before launching a consultation. We review our selection policies every year. A big piece of work. Massive even. While it's one thing updating our procurement policy, selection is emotive, it impacts people. No right answer, but we want to take the time to speak to our community directly, making the best decisions possible. Those who don't love it are very vocal. I often only hear from detractors but making (even difficult) decisions is part of the job. My week will end with the **ADP Camp in Nottingham** and I must review the **Risk Assessment, incorporating Covid Protocols**. When it comes to health and safety, BF has to set the standard, doing it the best way it can be done. When risks turn into issues, it can be clearer what action to take; but limiting and mitigating risk - that's a big challenge. I make a mental note to book my car in for its MOT before Friday so I can make my way to Nottingham - safely. At the **Membership Meeting** we're appraising membership figures, launching community discussion events, organising fencing competitions as well as the BF championships. We have to address our twofold membership - part 'competee-level' and part 'community-level'. We've worked hard to know who our members are and create an environment where every fencer can find their level and be happy. I progress to a **Sports CEO Forum Meeting** which is a great opportunity to connect with CEOs across the sector, getting vital peer support. CEOs are frequently expected to have all the answers! There's chat and sharing information about how Covid is impacting our respective sports. We also



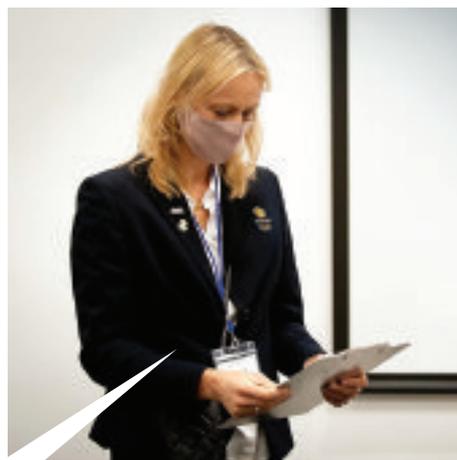
talk about governance, structuring our organisations to deliver to our members and founders, and safeguarding - just some of the areas that CEOs have to obsess over.

Next up a **Meeting with Maslaha** (our partner for 'Muslim Girls Fence'). We discuss long-term objectives, organisational positions and how to use our collective voice to inspire change both in the UK and globally. My mind goes back to when I first went to a state school in East London to talk to girls at the heart of the project and the taxi driver asked me whether I was sure this was the right place. I was and still am so proud of this project and all the unexpectedly 'right places' where fencing can help make a real difference. Then it's an **Update on the BRCs** and specifically where we are on sourcing venues for BF portfolio events. As our events grow, the issue is to find big enough spaces. It's a big challenge that feels like a constantly moving feast; new clashes with FIE and EFC events suddenly taking us back to the drawing board. I then respond to an **FIE Application Deadline** for information. FIE Head Office is very supportive and helpful - making our work easier. I'm also on the FIE Women in Fencing Council which has an important role to play in increasing the opportunities for women in fencing internationally. BF has a dedicated group of volunteers who sit on various EFC and FIE councils and commissions attending annual meetings and congresses each year. The work around that can be very intense but you get out as much as you put in. Intense and time-consuming is also how I'd

describe my **Meeting with Auditors**, where we plan out the governance and finance review that auditors appointed by Sport England and UK Sport undertake every four years. Work that has to be done; it's right - given the government funding we get - that we're audited in this way. I like to do it well, recognising that good governance is the platform for a well-run sport.

I connect with my team at our **Staff 1:1s**. I have totally different personalities working with me with a broad set of skills and experience - which I love. These 1:1s are a great opportunity to lend a listening ear and support them with their challenges, also identifying any issues or risks to be escalated to Board level. Everything from coaching and learning development to social impact and programmes that encourage participation in fencing. I need to work with people different to me - it makes the organisation stronger. Listening is the bedrock of my next diary entry - the **LGBT+ Listening Event Evening** where I get the opportunity to connect with our members. I hear stories directly from those who've lived them. If they're positive experiences, we can take that and amplify it. If they're negative, I can work out ways of them not happening again. It is important that we all work towards making the community more inclusive.

A **BOA Board Meeting**. I'm one of the NGB Representative Board Directors. An incredibly difficult year for the Olympic Association but the Exec Team has done a fantastic job in getting Team GB to Tokyo. A **Catch Up with Sport80** follows. It's a constant priority to keep driving improvements to the service we offer members. Then a call with one of the team to **discuss short/medium/long term strategy around apps** - important because the urgent problems of the present can overtake those of tomorrow. This call is followed by another to the **BF Lead Safeguarding Office to check-in on safeguarding cases and start the safeguarding policy review**. I'm constantly amazed at how strong we are together; how committed the staff team are to BF, our members and the sport even through very tough times.

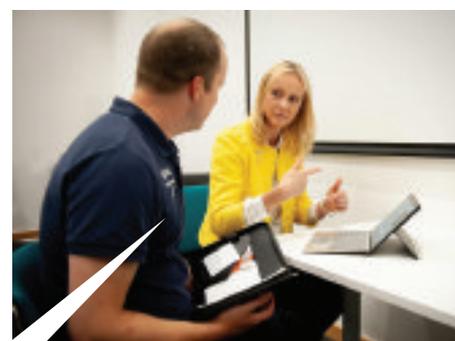


Then, anticipating a fair amount of work in a short space of time, I attend a **Sport England meeting where the April 2022 funding application process and timescales are announced**. More funding work follows with me arranging a **meeting with UK Sport** to update on progression and discuss future steps for accessing additional 'confirmation' funding for athletes meeting Paris trajectory performance standards. Then a **call with BF Social Media Manager re. Press Releases for Tokyo**. It's so important both personally and for BF to have representation at Tokyo - so many of our up-and-coming fencers were inspired by our GBR fencers at previous Games. After the loss of funding in 2016 it's been an enormous struggle for everyone to keep chasing the Olympic dream; I could not be more proud of Marcus Mepstead for what he's achieved over the past few years.

Preparation for next week's BF Team Meeting starts in earnest. I really miss seeing the team in person but the reduction in travel does have advantages. The results of the annual staff survey are surprisingly positive (I thought!) given the year we've had. We discuss areas that are working well and how we can further improve. Avoiding sending emails 24/7 is one area that some of us need to pay some attention to! ... More meetings - this time the **Home Nation Commonwealth Working Group**. It's vital to connect with the individual Home Nations and work together so

we don't all independently reinvent the wheel. One constructive Covid outcome is strengthened relationships, particularly in the performance space where the BF Fencer Pathway provides a framework that can be used by all fencers at all levels.

An early alarm and by 6am I'm on the road to **Nottingham**. Having booked my car in for its MOT earlier in the week, I then promptly forgot. An unknown number rings off my phone during one of the week's many meetings. All eventually sorted thanks to the very accommodating local garage. I haven't been in the car for ages, but take the opportunity to catch up on calls, including one to the BF Board Chair for a brief **Weekly Board Check-in**. I listen to the radio - LBC or Five Live. Arrive and onto **Reviewing the Advanced Coaching Programme** - opportunity in part to take off CEO hat and contribute as a coach (have to make sure I don't do this too often!) When I take my CEO hat off I start thinking about fencing from the perspective of coach,



athlete and 'fencing parent'. All those personalities in the room at the same time are not necessarily helpful but it's about knowing which perspective to prioritise when. On Saturday I attend the **ADP Camp**. (Feels like I'm mostly shouting at everyone to stay 2m away from each other and pull their socks up!) Some of the athletes have obviously been working hard on their physical training. Great to see. Return from camp on Sunday ... usual housework, remembering to **wash my child's fencing kit**. Feel a bit sad I didn't get to fence myself this week. Instead I respond to emails about our local fencing club's AGM (pre COVID I'd coach there on a Saturday morning). Finish the week by taking the kids swimming where I'm the COVID volunteer for the session - registration duties only! I don't think anyone with kids has had a day off for a while ...



CLIMBING YOUR EVEREST

Plotting Your Course With Steve Kemp

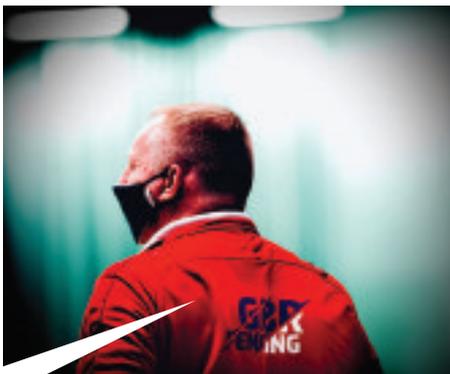
By Siân Hughes Pollitt

Photos: Den Pollitt

“The most damaging phrase in the language is: ‘It’s always been done that way.’” Steve Kemp quotes Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, one of history’s unique incarnations who challenged perspectives of what, or who, should merit the term ‘elite’. Hopper – for the uninitiated – started out as a maths professor. Originally rejected by the US Navy in World War II she became an older naval reserve and a pioneer of computer programming, going on to be awarded one of the highest military ranks in America.

Steve is making two points in one. The first is that change is always desirable, always necessary. If we just do something one way because we always did it thus, then, as rear-admirals might say, we’re sunk. The second reveals British Fencing’s Head of Pathways dislike of inauthenticity, and those who claim to be something, or be offering something, that is not entirely honest.

Elite, or ‘e-lite’ as Steve refers to it, paired with terms like ‘high-performance’ are what he calls ‘words on a wall’. He could be the British Fencing equivalent of Banksy – an unlikely iconoclast re-spraying the ramparts of our minds where we’ve stalled in our thinking. For him, the truly elite stand at the pinnacle of their disciplines. All



sports have their elites too, and all sports also have those who do just want to take part at their local club, school, university or wherever, however takes their fancy. Every type of fencer has their merit.

The ADP recognises that. What essentially started out as a talent programme for those aged 15 to 23, has become the umbrella for a defined pathway – a track that starts at 14/15 years old and carries onto a fencer in their thirties. Steve analogises further, encouraging us to think of the fencing athlete’s journey – ultimately the Olympic goal – as akin to climbing Everest. Progressing through Cadet and Junior ranks is like flying from London to Kathmandu. The first major milestone of a World Championships is the same as reaching Base Camp 1. The climb is long and arduous. Many give up. 99% don’t make it anywhere near the top. The Hillary Steps? Well, Steve reckons, that’s like Marcus’ tenacity in pursuing and securing qualification for the Tokyo Games, coming within a whisper of the very summit.

Steve’s point is that what matters is the athlete’s journey. His responsibility is to lead a team who can create the kind of environment that will help the fencer to go as far as they can, as well as they can. When asked about criticisms and comparisons with other more ‘successful’ fencing nations than us, Steve makes the observation that GB as a country has just come fourth in the medal table in Tokyo. He also does a bit of a Banksy again, conjuring up a picture that, while it’s always the goal to strive towards, placing the aim of being global podium-perchers above all

else might nonetheless prove to be at a devastating cost to athletes’ mental and physical healths. What’s more, 99% still wouldn’t make it anyway – that’s just the incontrovertible statistic of sport maths and medals. It’s easy to imagine how that ‘at all costs’ concept, as well as what we think we should wish for, could be aerosol-ed into visually arresting, thought-provoking graffiti art – at which point we may well reconsider.

Making the fencer experience worthwhile at whatever level is something Steve holds dear. He’s fully aware that no matter how strong you think you are, the athlete situation is already a pressured one. Factor in dealing with stress, loss, even trauma, and the development of people ramps up to the next level. Steve recounts a personally transformative experience of attending a training course where one day was dedicated to hostage-taking. Actors came in to play a scenario that was no child’s-play: delegates set up a firearms team, practiced to be ready to go in, if required, and the role of the negotiator was undertaken.

In this case, the context was a husband and wife. Just the two of them; the husband holding his wife hostage. Only she was pregnant, so now there were three lives at stake. The conversation with the husband was going well, trust was being developed. Then it transpired that the husband was a serving soldier who had just returned from Helmand. That one word triggered a massive emotional response. Steve said





he was completely overwhelmed, and had to get up to leave the room for a while. Get his head back. Breathe. Why? "Suffering", he replies. "The layers of suffering". Seeing others endangered, even in a theoretical situation, appears to have reminded him of his own human vulnerability as well as prompting him to think of a former co-worker who had experienced a profound mental crisis. Distress and trauma are elements that are in ADP Programmes. Steve Kemp wants to make sure that when they happen - and they will happen - there is the psychologically safe environment to respond in these times, for fencers, and the team of coaches and support staff.

For those still holding fast to their 'all or nothing' ethos and the binaries of 'do or die', 'win or lose', Steve has a question, "Who would you rather have dinner with: Tiger Woods or Roger Federer?" He points to the former, agreeing the system of starting the individual from a really tender age on the golfing circuit works and gets results, but is rather like open-cast mining. You find your gold potentially having left a mound of disturbed earth in your wake. With Federer, the picture of a more fully-rounded athlete emerges. The multiple



Grand Slam winner - as a young sportsman - also played basketball, badminton, table tennis, handball and football and he swam, wrestled, skated and skied. He didn't settle on tennis until he was a teenager.

The beating heart of the ADP is firmly focussed on forming such well-rounded 'better people', and that's done by using expertise and experience as well as deploying a collective ability to unify. Another crucial point is that the ADP is not mandatory. Steve emphasises that it's a step that the athlete must take; it's down to the fencer to show their commitment and make their decisions and own their responsibilities. Crucial because this push-and-pull of the development pendulum can prove to be a heavy burden for both sides. Steve knows that as much as his vision can propel fencers forth, the data might equally find points where his vision has held them back. "This has to be their journey, their moment in time. If I'm honoured, then I get to be part of that. The athletes can take away a bit of what I've done with them, or they can walk away if it's not for them - either's good because it's their choice. It has to be."

If anyone labours under the misunderstanding that, in creating a caring, sharing development pathway, Steve has lost sight of the real game then perhaps they should swipe through the photos of his 16 year-old daughter's rower's hands on his phone. Her palms are wrecked. Blistered, battered, bulbous - a sacrifice to the rigours of sport. But, as he all too well appreciates, she is growing and learning and interacting and taking responsibility - getting used to building up life skills of every kind and she's putting herself - via her sport - into challenging contexts that she can use to develop into a better person.

Steve is clearly purposeful about what's needed next in fencing: to become 'world-class ready' by 2023 in time for Paris 2024. "Who knows if it will happen but we're creating that plan. We're on the bus, on the journey. We're going. It's hard work and hard work works". The ADP is constantly evolving because there's constantly work being done and constantly more work to do. He sees himself not as the owner but as the caretaker of many a hope and dream. "I'm a custodian for a short amount of time. If I can leave it all in a better place then I can sit in my armchair when I'm old and feel ok".

Throughout his interview, Steve weighs up every idea, references every motivational speaker and expert, every mode of thinking and processing - sometimes flipping things on their head, offering fresh and unusual angles. At one point he fishes out his notebook to show a flow-chart diagram-thingly he's drafted. The cat's out of the bag - he's deffo not the real Banksy. Not with those pen strokes. Nevertheless he's still the person brave enough to attempt change and then keep on driving it so our fencers can end up in a better place as better individuals.

"Yes", he confirms. "I draw on everything, I try to put everybody else first. All good people should put themselves second".

Points taken, Steve. But just don't expect us to let you loose with a spray-can any time soon.



BACK IN THE ROOM

THE RETURN OF ADP

Junior Men's Epeeist, Louis Taiwo Williams, tells us why it's so good to get the band back together

I was four when I saw Usain Bolt win gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. I wanted to do that ... have done ever since. I just didn't know what I was going to be doing to earn that Olympic Gold when I was only four. I do now.

On Zoom, I am definitely a camera-on kind of guy. I like to be 'in' the room. Present. So getting back in the ADP room felt right. I suppose I'd say easy but I mean easy in a comfortable sense - where I belong. It's still pressure. It's still learning. To see what my fellow fencers are doing technically, it informs me how I am going to do to fence them.

Then the sense of team - I love my squad. There's no hostility. It's a warm environment with my generation that are all first-year Juniors now. We had two years of multiple team events and travelling as Cadets and whilst we might have missed a block, we can remember our experiences together and use our mentality still to uplift us. It feels like the Brits are the best fencing nation - me and my team have a camaraderie that I've not seen elsewhere.

We're also back in the room with BF. That's pressure but it's good. I think I have the skill. I have the potential and I want to show them what I can do.



Louis Observes

For me, that first day was tough. During a team match, a debate over one of my hits ensued during which I was accused of cheating. That got me going because I want to win but I want to win honestly. (In Krakow 2020, I was fighting a French fencer when I hit the floor. The referee classed it as my hit until I insisted it wasn't. The French coach shook my hand. That's how I like to operate.) A few other situations that day and I ended up feeling frustrated.

That's what's good about ADP. You get worked up one day but you've got to deal with it and get back in the room the next because there's still a job you need to finish. Applying that approach paid off. I fenced how I needed to prove my point that I am going to be World Champion. I'm going to be Olympic Champion. I thought, 'I will show you I have talent.'

Olympic Team Manager, Johnny Davis and Head of People and Culture, Dusty Miller were observing the camp. They came and had a positive chat with me where I told them that I am going to try and get to Paris and the things I want to do in epee for Great Britain.

The July ADP camp was very restricted but we were able to work around it; it felt like we were gaining pace again. I completed my BF coaching certificate, so now I can teach groups up to a certain level.

As for what ADP teaches me - well I just use everything that room has got to give me. When good stuff happens, it's great - of course. When tough stuff happens, I don't let it slow me down. I just turn it around and apply it with a bit of fighting spirit to spur me on.

Cadet Women's Foillist, Issie Johnson gives us her own take on going from Zoom to the Room

Eighteen months of Zoom training may have been a lifeline for access to our sport and keeping active but it presented a real challenge when everyone in the house is stretching the wi-fi bandwidth to its absolute max! Buffering interspersed with enforced stints of self-isolation and the disappointment of cancelled events. How fantastic is it to be back involved in actual in-person training and properly scheduled, BF organised competitions?



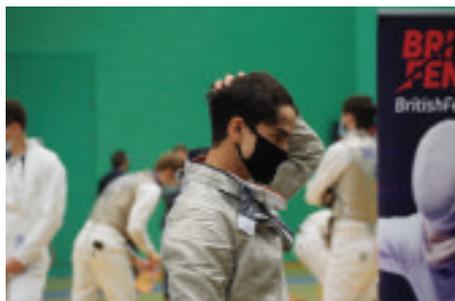
Issie Collecting 2021 Cadet National Bronze with Bronwen Hyde

With Cadet and Junior Nationals and A Grades around the corner, the ADP August foil camp at the Leon Paul Centre came at the right time for me to get in some pre-season training with fencers and coaches from all around the country.

It felt a relief and a step back up to be in the salle with my fellow Cadets, as well as the Junior and Senior squads and to have the opportunity to spar with fencers from across the age categories - a highlight for me being the team sparring. Team competition gives you a great opportunity to get to know other fencers and work together, playing to each other's strengths whilst practicing different tactics. The social aspect was also a bonus.

We were very privileged to have Richard Kruse at the camp, to encourage and inspire us all. He emphasised the importance of session warm-ups and warm-downs. I must have got so locked into imagining fight scenarios I started wondering who might win in a fencing bout between Richard Kruse and Tom Cruise? While I'm in that ADP room, I'd better say Richard!

Johnny Davis, the Olympic Team Manager, talked to us about the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and what it takes to bring Team GB together. Hearing about the incredible atmosphere at the Olympics, from someone who was there, was so motivating. He also talked about the plans in place for the next Olympics in Paris in 2024, which everyone found encouraging.



Reflective Ryuki

During the camp we had the opportunity to do warm-ups, strength and conditioning and footwork exercises with all of the ADP coaches. It's always so interesting to see how different coaches run these sessions. There is always something new to learn and add into your routine. The personal feedback and advice given by the coaches during sparring and piste exercises was really helpful - highlighting useful things to work on in the future.

Mindset before and during fights was a focus which really seemed to help all of the athletes there helping people reflect further and get new insights into their fencing. We spent a lot of time thinking about mindfulness with the True Athlete Project and practised a guided meditation - something I have never done before and found interesting to experience.

Having worked hard, learnt lots we left feeling motivated and looking forward to the new season. We're all hoping that our much-missed international competitions will be on the schedule in the near future. It's been a long time since the last one and everyone has missed the squad trips a lot. Packing up the fencing bag, ready to go and face other nations is such an exciting feeling and I'm looking forward to the next time this can happen.

The way I see it, every piece of advice I can get from the ADP experts is advice

worth hearing, every opportunity to fence with like-minded is an opportunity worth seizing. I appreciate that it takes a lot of effort to organise these events for us and am grateful for all of the work put into planning the camps to make them challenging, engaging, motivating and fresh.

Cadet Men's Sabreur Ryuki Hiyama tells us how the August ADP Camp made him dream of Olympic summers to come

The August ADP camp was only the second I'd attended in person. My initial ADP experience was on Zoom only. The first take-out I have about being back in the room was how it is a great way to gain insights about the way other coaches and sabreurs do things. It does shake things up a bit when you get to train with your competitors. Equally it feels good to have a social element being with others.

My training over the lockdowns was with my brother, Yoji - also a sabreur. We'd train in the back garden, picking up our swords, sparring with one another while having video calls with our coach. It worked well and my brother improved massively; he gained a lot of experience he might otherwise not have had.

All my coaches at Shakespeare Swords are marvellous teachers and credit to my main coach, Chris Buxton for the work he has done with me. I really enjoy training with him week in, week out. At the same time, going to the ADP camp gives me the opportunity to be working with other coaches as well. On this occasion I had the chance to work with James Williams, Beth Davidson, Curtis Miller and Fran Whalley. They're all different and have something unique to offer as coaches.

James is so outgoing. Dialogue with him is always an encouraging experience - really

enlightening. He has years of experience and is such an engaging character. He took fencing and us fencers back down to its roots and had us question why we fence and what are we doing it for? At the heart of it is of course a desire to win. Having worked with James before at a competitive team event in Hungary, his style is to inspire courage - and a conviction to go into the fight. He succeeded in putting fire in our hearts, win or lose. That kind of motivation meant that we went about the match in the right way.

Curtis focused on tactical analysis with us at the camp. He showed us the importance of watching other fencers, seeing situations develop and how to counter them. Certainly, Curtis' own time on the international Senior Circuit and how much experience he has means that he knows how to prepare to go into the fight. He transferred that knowledge, teaching everything brilliantly.

Beth Davidson too used her wealth of achievements and experience to again bring us back to why we fence and the process of training. She could put everything into perspective and did that so thoroughly. Fran carried on this expertise. Her background in theatre encouraged us to adopt completely fresh and new approaches to our fencing style. She had us reimagine our game, giving us some points to try new ways to fence - like being fluid in our movements or pillaging on the attack. What happened was that we became agents in making our own decisions; we were choosing how to fight. That variety means that you can catch your opponent by surprise. It is also an approach that forces you to be confident in your own ability to put your mind to the match, and follow through on any one particular action. I got so much from working with all of them.

The online training gave me the chance to see the scale of the ADP operation but being present did solidify things. We were given a talk on the number of days between now and the Paris and Los Angeles Olympics. It was emphasised how important the process is in working towards what we are aiming for and how we should be making the most of ADP. GBR's future Olympians could be any one of us. It was very inspiring and made me think that I want to be one of these people who represent their country at the highest level. It justifies why I am fencing now.



WOMEN IN SPORT

Painting a Picture of the Current Landscape

Virginia Bailey, Head of Participation at British Fencing has worked in the sports sector for over 18 years. Virginia has always had a passion and interest in women's sport, from participation through to representation of women in leadership positions. She is a firm believer of equality for all in sport. In this piece Virginia shares her thoughts and reflections on the current landscape, the impact of Covid-19 on women's sport and how we can work together to get more women involved in fencing.



Covid-19 has presented many problems and challenges in what feels like every aspect of our lives, as well as shining an even brighter light on the many inequalities that exist in society today. When we look at the impact that the pandemic has had on sport and physical activity, we have heard more loudly than ever messages from ministers and health leaders about the importance of staying active, for both people's physical and mental wellbeing. Throughout the pandemic England's Chief Medical Officer has discussed on numerous occasions the role that physical activity should play in our daily routines and at Sport England's launch of "Uniting the Movement" earlier this year, Public Health England welcomed the new strategy, highlighting how the pandemic has shown the importance of being active to support both our physical and mental health.

The question I ask is, at a time when we are being encouraged more than ever to take seriously the role of physical activity in our lives, why are we seeing women's

sport being affected so much more than men's sport? Research undertaken during the pandemic by the charity **Women in Sport**, has clearly shown that "women have been disproportionately impacted by the lockdown, especially those women with children juggling home-life, work, and schooling, and women aged 70 plus who have suffered the greatest isolation." In December 2020, the **Women's Sport Trust**

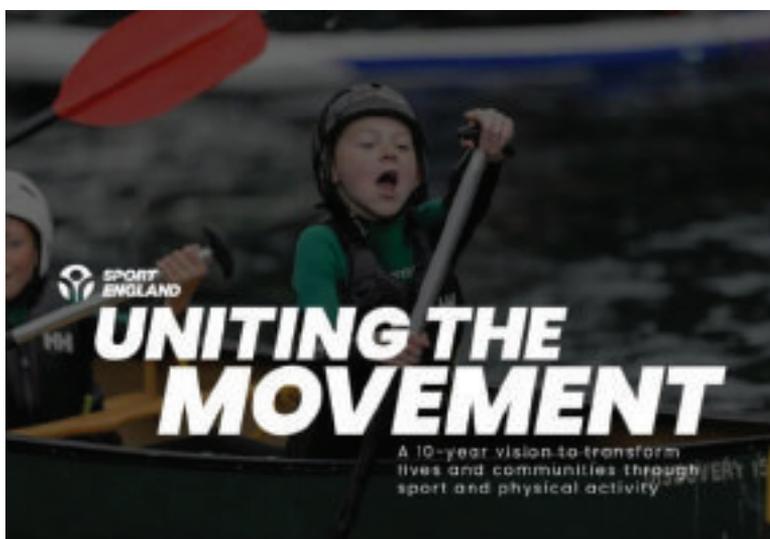


released "The Ambition Project" which makes a series of recommendations for the future of women's sport. Within the report they note how the pandemic "has reinforced or highlighted many pre-existing barriers and systemic issues that have been holding progress back for years", barriers that we as a sport must, where possible, address and find ways of overcoming.

If we rewind back to April 2020, you may have noticed the positive news from Sport England's pre-pandemic **Active Lives Adults Survey**, highlighting that although more men than women are active, importantly the gender gap in sport was continuing to narrow. The numbers have also been positive across BF's portfolio of Projects and Programmes: 47% of young people engaged in programmes such as Sabre:Lite in the University space and London Youth are female, with 60% of those being retained in regular activity. When we look closer at our work with London Youth for example, it is particularly positive to see that of those females aged 14-17, notoriously a difficult age group to engage with, 77% of them were retained in regular activity.

If we look at BF membership over the same time period (2017/18 onwards) the gender gap is wider and does not appear to be closing; with only 30% of our membership female, year on year. Why is this important though and why do we need to look at what we can do to both encourage more females into fencing and importantly want to stay in it? There is a plethora of research that aims to help us understand what we do to try and engage more women in sport. From addressing barriers that both sport and society can put in place, to understanding what and how we can support women and girls both into and through their journey of embedding sport in their everyday lives. Encouragingly, the Women in Sports research found that 61% of those surveyed wanted to put more effort into becoming active as we come out of lockdown and the pandemic. With campaigns such as **This Girl Can** and the sports sector working more closely than ever to share best practice, challenges and ways to engage women in sport, now is the time to stop and reflect on what we can do as coaches, clubs, volunteers, athletes and custodians of the sport to offer more women the opportunity to get involved.

Over the coming months we will be sharing further insights, tools, case studies and opportunities for the community to virtually come together to tackle the gender gap in fencing and make sure everyone has the opportunity to get involved.



REVIEW

“On the Edge”

Lawrence Burr OBE

A film about fencing that doesn't involve Napoleonic uniforms, buccaneers or earnest young aristocrats defending a lady's honour- surely not? Well, sorry to disappoint you, but yes.

We all know that the Russians have always taken their fencing very seriously (just ask Jim Fox and Boris Onischenko!) and they just love to watch films about it, some of which reach our western small screens, usually on DVD or streaming. In the past, we have had “The Fencer” in 2017 which was the subject of a Sword Review in that year. That was all about an Estonian foil coach falling foul of his past in the USSR and having to choose between his pupils and being imprisoned in the Gulags. Before that, there was “Pentathlon” with an East German pentathlete defecting to the US in 1988 but being pursued by his Russian mentors. So that covers foil and épée, so now we can complete the disciplines with a drama about the Russian Women's sabre team; and what a team they are, with almost everyone of them potential candidates for Love Island! But do not scoff too early. The film is a startlingly good drama with wonderful high octane sabre fights, many of them depicted in and out of slow motion with the sound effects to go with them.

The story line is familiar - good rich girl versus bad poor girl - with the Russian Olympic champion, Aleksandra Pokrovskaya, wanting to go down in history by finally winning gold in her third Olympics but being challenged by a young nineteen



year old kick-arse upstart from the provinces. Young Kira Egorovova becomes an overnight sensation in the country, winning against all-comers and being feted by Moscow Society as she hunts down her older rival, mentally and physically - sabre in hand - so as to ensure she is chosen by the selectors for the chance to win Olympic gold at the Rio Olympics in 2016.

However young Kira, now nicknamed by the media as the “Russian Panther”, has first to be accepted by the National coach - Gavrilov - and the remainder of the team. Suffice to say that she finally becomes the champion she has longed to be, with the help of some hard talking by

her steelworker father (what else!) and the surprising friendship of her rival. The final fight scenes at the Rio Olympics are fantastic - how did they get this footage? - with the fencing fast and furious. Product placements are littered all over the fight scenes which are amusing considering the lengths that SEMI went to in the 2012 Olympics. There is Allstar kit at every turn and all the main characters drive BMWs!

There are dramatic sabre fights with steely stares, stern referees and hard-hearted coaches mixed in with great camera shots; although, I was not too sure about the slow motion cuts across the chest seeming to draw alarming blue electric sparks - I always thought that the épée was a much safer weapon! But the final outcome is very satisfying all round and even a bit of a tear jerker, so get out there and watch this.

As a final truism, the last shots of the film are taken from the actual outcome of the Rio Women's Individual final between - you guessed it - Yana Egorian and Sofiya Velikaya, both from the Russian Federation. That was hotly followed by scenes of the victorious Russian Federation winning Women's sabre team receiving their gold medals after beating Ukraine in the final match. I will leave it up to you, dear reader, to work out which film character played whom in that final!

Russian Film with English subtitles. Released November 2020. Director and Writer Eduard Bordukov. Available through Amazon Prime Video.

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

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GILLIAN DONALDSON (née SHEEN), MBE: 21 AUGUST 1928 - 5 JULY 2021

Despite winning a bronze medal at the 1950 Team World Championships and becoming World Student Games Champion the following year, Gillian Sheen, who has died at the age of 92, was a surprise gold medallist at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. She only just qualified for the final of eight after barraging for fourth place in her semi-final pool, but the final was the next day and she suddenly found brilliant form, sweeping through the pool and losing only to Olga Orban of Romania. Orban had beaten her in the two previous rounds and also had just one defeat, but in the barrage she rushed in too impetuously, anticipating a quick victory. Sheen was able to predict her attacks and calmly parried and riposted to win 4-2. "I've never been so surprised in my life," she said modestly later.

She was a member of the women's World Championship team in 1948, 52 and 56, Olympic years when women could fence only in the individual foil event. She fenced in the 1950, 54, 55, 57, 58 & 59 World Championships, winning a team bronze in 1950, and took part in the 1952, 56 and 60 Olympics. She was Commonwealth champion in 1958 (runner-up in 1954) and jointly holds the record for winning the most British Championships - ten - which she won from 1949 to 1960, with Mary Glen Haig runner-up on eight occasions. She also won the international Alfred Hutton/ de Beaumont Cup six times and the Jubilee Bowl five times. Abroad she had victories in Mondorf (1951), Copenhagen (1954 & 1957), Ostend (1959), Amsterdam and Brussels (1960).

Gillian Sheen started fencing at North Foreland Lodge School at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire, where the school had been relocated for the duration of the war from its original site near Broadstairs, Kent. She was taught by a strict Czech master, Karel Pollak, and in 1945 won the British Schoolgirls' Championship. Returning to London, she joined Salle Bertrand and became a pupil of Professor Leon Bertrand. A classic technical fencer with a naturally athletic style, she had great powers of concentration and an ability to anticipate her opponent's attacks. Charles



1956 Olympic Champion with Her Bouquet - from Charles de Beaumont's Scrapbook

de Beaumont, Team Captain when she won her Olympic gold medal, said she had a flair for applying extra speed and effort at the critical moment, the hallmark of a champion. Among her favourite moves were a bind into low quarte and riposte to flank and, against left-handers, a cut-over disengage attack.

A dental house surgeon at University College Hospital, London, she married an American orthodontist, Bob Donaldson, after the Commonwealth Games of 1962 and moved to New Jersey, USA. She did some refereeing at local universities and for the Empire State Games before bringing up their four children Bruce, John, Jane and David. In the late 1980s, when her children were out of school, she opened an Orthodontic Clinic on Montserrat, a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean, where her British dental qualifications were accepted, and worked there every year until the Soufrière Hills volcano erupted in 1995 and the capital, Plymouth, where

she had her clinic, was buried in ash. She continued to coach at her local community college until she was 80. In 2019 she was made MBE in belated recognition of her Olympic gold medal, all other individual gold medallists having received their award years earlier.

Despite being away from the UK, she kept in touch with British fencing activities, flying back for special events, such as the British Fencing centenary gala dinner in June 2002 and the 2012 London Olympics. "I still think fencing is the best sport for agility and concentration, though it has changed a great deal since my day", she said on her last visit to England.

Her husband Bob died in 2004 and she is survived by their children and 11 grandchildren.

Malcolm Fare

DANIEL SOSNOV: 29 APRIL 1973 - 31 JULY 2021

Fanfare for a Fencing Parent

Siân Hughes Pollitt & Moe Raichelson

We understand what makes a committed fencer and fencing parent: a thoroughly sound knowledge of sporting principles, a grasp on logistics and organisation, great timing and a respect for the rules. In all these areas, Dan Sosnov had got it sussed.

Dan first dedicated himself to fencing around age 7, at the Avangard Sports Club in Kiev, near where he and his friend, Vitaly lived. They 'fenced' at home too: Vitaly with a 30cm ruler; Dan with his index finger, invariably resulting in Dan poking Vitaly in the ribs while creasing up in laughter. It wasn't all about the giggles though. Dan focussed on serious cross-training with an innovative exercise regime. The discipline of 'Egg-Throwing onto Unsuspecting Passers-By' may be unheard-of outside early-1980s Kiev and, in fact, little-known much beyond the vicinity of Vitaly's balcony. Nonetheless it was a target-practice that allowed Dan to showcase his athletic precision by excelling in the distance category.

In the fencing tradition, Dan's sense of timing was superb. With his heart set on attending an American college, Dan - by now an Israeli citizen - had to grapple with the conflicting reality of army conscription. He scheduled his draft-dodging to the day, getting released from military prison just in the nick of time to begin his first semester at Syracuse University, New York State - a seat of learning carefully chosen because of the photo of the attractive girl on the prospectus' front cover.

Dan was a sublime team player. Before Syracuse, he'd twice attempted incursions into higher education at the Israeli universities, Bar Ilan and Tel Aviv. At Bar Ilan, Dan majored in partying, cards and football until rudely interrupted by having to sit a Maths exam. His friends, Alex and Dima were deployed to the loo, waiting for Dan to excuse

himself from the examination room for a pee-break and hand them the test questions. Demonstrating performance under pressure in less-than-favourable conditions with Dan still managing to take all the visible credit is, as we know, the stuff of a legendary fencing team captain.

Dan was unflappably organised - in his own, inimitable fashion. Viewing an international flight like hopping on the Tube, Dan would favour a one-way ticket, buying the return portion when he was done. His prowess at ... ahem ... masterminding travel plans was also clearly discernible when his American chum's Czech girlfriend found herself without an entry visa. She made it to Canada. Dan drove over the border, collected her and (only now disclosure-able as the statute of limitations has surely expired) smuggled her into the US.

Referees would have delighted in Dan's sporting eagerness to abide by the rules, as seen in steadfastly complying with his own decision not to boast possession of a UK driving licence for the near-20 years that he lived here. Yes, Officer, that would've been Dan's consummate fencing game face you encountered whenever you or your colleagues pulled him over.

Friends of Dan will tell you how he was a fighter away from the piste, innovating dinner-party showdowns by brandishing blue-cheese dressing as his primary weapon. They will tell you of his performance-

maximising nutrition: a go-to favourite being Shmaltz: baked goose fat with rye bread - 300% compacted cholesterol. They'll also tell you of his over-spilling, heart-on-sleeve love for his wife and children, the same for his father and the same for his mother. They'll recount so many heart-bursting stories of this Ukrainian junior fencing champion who became such a first-rate fencing parent and a stalwart coaching support feature of many a foil competition room, representing the club ZFW. Dan was the ultimate fencing dad, encouraging his son, David and daughter, Claire to enjoy the sport as he had, using it to enrich and empower themselves, using it to grow.

Without his sense of adventure and yearning to live life to its fullest, Dan might have made it - albeit bored out of his mind - to be 100 years old. As it remains however, he spent every single moment pro-actively in the present as a dearly-cherished, genuine-listener of a friend, magically inspiring partner-in-crime papa, devoted husband, family-doting son, insatiably inquisitive intellectual and pranking, belly-laughing, bear-hugging, beautifully charismatic Spurs fan until - aged 48 years, 3 months and a few days - he so suddenly and so tragically died swimming while on holiday in Israel.

We'll forever remember you as an exemplary fencing parent, Dan. How would - how could - we possibly forget?



RESULTS



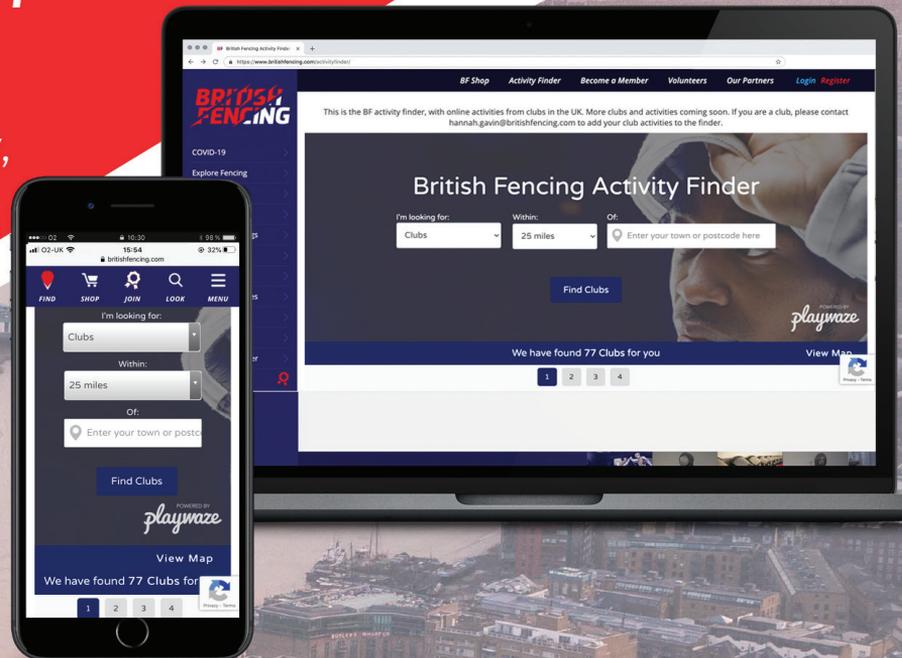
The up-to-date 2020-2021 season latest results are now listed online and can be [accessed here](#)

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