

THE SWORD

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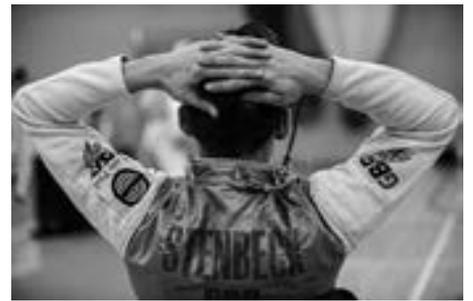
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The salute and the stretch; the skip and the hop; heads in hands, heads held high; win or lose, we were back in the room and back in the game. It was like fencing had never left us. We were fencing together, against one another. The thrill of competition ran through our veins, captured our thoughts and consumed us once more.

Action framed, viewfinder trained, exposure checked, shutter engaged ... the lens focuses, the mirror lifts, the light enters ... all goes still - to black for a split second - breath is held in ... the finger moves, the camera shoots and the drama of the piste - otherwise lost in the blink of an eye - is now with us forever.

SENIOR NATIONALS 2021





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



Happy New Year! It's a time when a lot of us make changes to our lives or make promises to ourselves. They're usually about doing something better, giving something up or even cutting down a vice. The term usually associated with such an act at this time in the calendar is, of course, a "New Year's Resolution".

But perhaps more aptly, going from 2021 into 2022, we need a sense of New Year's purpose, a true sense of direction. Knowing what we are leaving behind, shows us how to move on. Understanding what we have achieved through difficult times better determines us making our own personal road maps.

What we can be sure of is that we go into 2022 a little more awake. We are attuned to suffering, we can put problems into context – in short we have some perspective. So let's use it. Let our New Year's resolution be just that, and let us inject that sense of perspective into our collective experience. For too long recently, we've been deprived of something that we love and that connects us – fencing. Of course, it's been hard for all of us. The fencer who has missed training, competing, teamwork, fun and camaraderie. The coach who has missed their pupils. The parent who has missed watching their children succeed, fail, enjoy and grow. The referee whose cards and hand signals have lain dormant. The volunteer left without a cause. The manufacturer who had to lay down tools, or worse, lay off people. The host whose venues have been empty. There are many more, but I am sure you get my point.

The past few months have shown that we are emerging from the gloom. Events are

starting to take place, locally, regionally, domestically and even internationally. It would be foolish to think it's all over and that things will return to the way they were. The "simple" task of competing abroad now comes with extra admin – vaccination certificates or pre-departure testing for example. That said, we're talking about "competing abroad" again!

The World has changed but it always does. It's simple evolution but we are blessed that we have fencing in our lives. We need to remember that every day and the New Year represents a chance for our own evolution. You can think of it another way. We can all be forgiven for not making or sticking to the resolutions we made this time last year and/or the year before. We can make up for that this year with a "super" resolution. "Super" doesn't mean "big". For me "super" means doing something to make you or those around you better. One example of something we could all do is resolve not to shout at referees. I sense the collective grinding of teeth! Fear not. I point the lens directly at myself. I have done it myself as both an athlete and a coach. In an effort to be better though, I choose not to do it again. Instead, I will choose to recognise that referees make mistakes, or that I could be wrong. I will choose to recognise that fencing can't exist without referees. If I am part of a group that rid our sport of so-called "bad" referees then our sport loses out; we all lose out. There are plenty of other examples and I'm sure most of us don't need to dig that deep to find something in fencing that we can do better. (Hint to the younger reader: wash your own kit and learn how your weapons work!)

In an effort to lead by example, I'm starting this very special New Year with an evolution of this magazine. When I took over as Editor my vision was to give the magazine a more international flavour. I am satisfied that to a degree I have done that. The global flavour will continue but my new mission is to give more of a voice to you, the reader and member. I cannot do that on my own. I need you and your stories. We can publish stories about clubs, universities and competitions as we always do but what I really want to hear about is how fencing is making an impact in your



life and your community. The international podium stories write themselves; Muslim Girls Fence doesn't. So, my first resolution of 2022 is to ask you to tell me your stories.

I'd also like to formally introduce you to the magazine's first ever official "feature" writer, Siân Hughes Pollitt. Siân burst into my working life last year with the idea of creating the special edition we released in March 2020 to show support and recognition for our youth fencers during lockdown. I'll be honest with you, I was worried that we were taking on too much. I was right to be! It was a great deal of work and a huge challenge. The result made every late night and early morning worth it...and none of you complained. Thanks to Siân, Flair and Jacqui for making it so special. Siân's "punishment" was to come on board in a more official capacity and you'll be hearing a lot more from her in this issue and those to come. Welcome to the team Siân!

So let's now take a delve into the first issue of the evolved Sword! What better place to start than the first review I've written in a while. Before I do, I have another 'thank you'. Lawrence Burr has been contributing to this magazine on a regular basis with his witty review pieces for as long as I can remember. Thank you Lawrence. If only we could publish our email exchanges! Now to another Laurence, the Halsted kind. With the kind support of the fantastic Will Deary, we've dissected Laurence's newly-published tome which unpacks his approach to being the best athlete he can be. With all evolution comes learning from past experience and Laurence provides us with fitting experience in his guide to doing it better.

We also hear from US Sabreur and Olympian, Mariel Zagunis. Mariel is an extraordinary and dedicated athlete who has demonstrated a steady evolutionary pace achieving revolutionary results.



Siân Joins Team Sword

Then there are the Directors of Leon Paul London, Alex and Paul Paul talking about going into 2022 and what will be the company's 101st year of manufacturing fencing equipment. Again - evolution! Virginia Bailey walks us through the interesting territory surrounding BF Listening events, and as the front cover has shown, we look at how epeeist Alec Brooke is making impressive progress on the European scene with his coaches at Knightsbridge Fencing Club.

We'll also be looking back at the Senior Nationals of 2021 - both in words and in pictures, and we meet Ian Lichfield who is, amongst many other things, focussing on

how to make fencing more sustainable in higher education settings for the benefit of athletes moving into seniors. And we catch up with Dusty Miller who has been brought onto the British Fencing team to take a look at our people and our culture, and what changes we can potentially make for the better.

What else? Well, having been in the fencing world for such a long time I'm acutely aware of building a conclusion from little or no fact, that wasn't necessarily my fault but an outcome of circumstance. What would be my fault is to knowingly allow anyone else to draw the wrong conclusion when I can do something about it in *The Sword*. So my next mission is to "fill in the gaps" - the gaps in knowledge that the British fencing community may have. In this issue we start with the Athlete Development Programme. When Siân and I sat down to discuss this topic we mused over what the piece should be about and who it should focus on. The glaringly obvious didn't strike



Steve Kemp Talks ADP

us immediately but when it did the article came together quickly. In this issue we find out how to get onto the programme, what to expect when you're on it and what to get out of it. Now - over to you! What do you want us to investigate? What could we showcase or ponder upon? Don't be shy. If you tell us we may publish something that you will want to read.

I'm energised for 2022 and I plan to make it a year to remember. My burning desire this year is to be better, do better and serve better and I want to surround myself with people who want to do the same. It doesn't matter how big or small your "super" resolution is but if it's fencing-related you have my full support. Let's start this new year, this evolving journey boldly, proudly and with the intent to be better.

Enough from me. It's time for you to get tucked into this issue.



Reviewer - Lawrence Burr, OBE

Happy. New. Reading!

You can now contact us by emailing
thesword@britishfencing.com

2021 BRITISH SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS



After a year without a British Senior Championships, SportsDock at the University of East London hosted the return of fencing's marquee domestic event, 6-7 November. Despite the strict Covid mitigation protocols in place, the event was run without any major issues and was seen as a significant milestone on the return to a full competitive calendar at home.

Women's Epee

In a line-up of 64 fencers just two clubs were represented in the women's epee medal matches - Malvern Hills Sword Fencing and Salle Paul. At the top of the draw Francesca Summers (Salle Paul) and Bethan Plant (Malvern Hills Sword Fencing) met in the semi-finals having been drawn against each other in the first round. Summers won that encounter but dropped one other fight in the poule to rank 8th for the knockout stage. She went on to beat Megan Redding (unattached), Charlotte Lattanzio (Knightsbridge), Julie Henson (Norfolk) and Abagael Black (Plymouth) to make the medal matches. As well as losing to Summers, Plant lost three further first round matches. Despite being ranked 45th, she battled through Eleanor Taylor (TMFC), Lauren Ryder-Garcia (Salle Paul) Imogen Bulman (Aldershot) and Harriet Wickenden

(Truro) to guarantee a medal. She dominated her semi-final with Summers, winning 15-6.

In the bottom half of the tableau Alexandra Powell (Malvern Hills Sword Fencing) dropped one fight in the first round to rank 11th and went on to beat Katherine Townsend (Bath Sword), Jessica Varley (Salle Paul), Patrycja Krzyzaniak (Chelsea) and Jessica Rumble (Greater Manchester) to make the top four. Also in that half of the draw was British Fencing's CEO Georgina Usher (Salle Paul) who ranked 10th for the elimination phase having lost one first round fight. Despite that she also made the medal matches by beating Kiera Papadopoulos (Edinburgh), teammate Hanah Lebor, Charlie Follett (Malvern Hills) and Sophie Peat (3 Blades). Powell edged Usher 15-13 in the semis to make it an all Malvern Hills final.

Powell took control early in the final leading 8-3 at the first break. She continued to build on her lead meaning Plant was forced to chase. Powell became the new national Champion with a 15-6 victory.

Men's Foil

The men's foil event boasted the largest field of the Championships with 102 fencers taking part. At the top of the draw, the reigning Junior and under-23 British Champion, Jaimie Cook (Salle Holyrood), stormed through his poule, winning every fight and was ranked 5th for the knockouts. He went on to beat Alexander Jones (Salle Boston), Isaac Jolley (Chichester), Dario Stenbeck-Schiavo (ZFW) and Dominic De

Almeida (ZFW) for a guaranteed medal. Lachlan Jarvie (Allez) was also in that half of the draw. He dropped a fight in the first round, ranked 20th and progressed to the medal matches beating Rajan Rai (unattached), Joseph Blair (Louth), Ethan Zazo (Fencers Club London) and Ben Peggs (Fencers Club London). Cook ended Jarvie's day in the semifinals with a 15-10 victory.

In the bottom half of the draw, Kristjan Archer (Newham Swords) won all of his poule fights and was ranked 3rd for the knockout stages. He beat Ben Bates (Bath Sword), Glen Ostacchini (Salle Boston), William Lonsdale (Fencers Club London) and Joe Donaghue (Fencers Club London) on his way to the semi-finals. Facing him there was top seed, Kamal Minott (Fencers Club London) who had lost to Cook in the first round. Ranked 15th, he battled through Harry Gray (Chichester), Nicholas Williams (Sheffield Buccaneers), Callum Penman (Salle Holyrood) and David Sosnov (ZFW) to make the top four, going on to beat Archer 15-9.



Women's Epee Podium (Plant, Powell, Summers, Usher)



Men's Foil Podium (Cook, Minott, Archer, Jarvie)

Both Minott and Cook took their time in the gold medal match, demonstrating the measure of respect they have for each other. That resulted in passivity yellow cards for both of them and it was Minott that sprung into action faster. He opened up an 8-3 lead and went on to win his first British senior title 15-6 in the second period.

Women's Sabre

In a field of 24 the top four seeds progressed to the medal matches. At the top of the draw Caitlin Maxwell (Truro) eased through her poule dropping just four hits to top the rankings. A bye was followed by victories against Bridget Pleasant (Camden) and Alexandra Davies (Wrekin Sword Club) for a guaranteed medal and a shot at her fifth title. Joining her in the semi-finals was Jessica Corby (Leon Paul Project) who dropped three of her first round matches. Despite that she battled back, beating Aimee Whitelegg (Truro), Sophia Potter (Shakespeare's Swords) and Lexi Craze (Truro). Maxwell was too much for Corby in the semi and she made the final 15-4.



Women's Sabre Podium (Chart, Maxwell, Itzkowitz, Corby)

Aliya Itzkowitz (Camden) was in impressive form in the bottom half of the draw. She won all of her first round fights, dropping just five points before beating Melissa Jane (Truro) and Jenna Bray (Truro) to make the top four. She was joined there by Maria Chart (Truro) who won all of her first round fights and ranked 3rd for the direct elimination. She progressed to the semi-finals with victories against Elsie Llewellyn (Sancroft Blades) and Amy Westwell (Truro), going on to beat Itzkowitz 15-6 to make it an all-Truro final.

Maxwell flew out to a 4-0 lead at the start of the final before Chart could get on the scoreboard and by the break that lead was 8-3. The second period stayed mainly in the middle as Maxwell controlled it to win her fifth British title 15-9.

Men's Sabre

In a field of 55 Curtis Miller (Camden) made the best start winning all of his first round matches to rank top for the knockout phase. He followed up a bye with victories over Olympios Gougoulis (Shakespeare's Swords), Zachary Hamilton (Shakespeare's Swords) and Samuel Allen (Truro) to make the top four. His semi-final opponent was Will Deary (Truro) who had dropped a fight in the first round. Deary defeated Louis Bedford (Shakespeare's Swords), Brynmor Saunders (PDFA) and Luke Haynes (Truro) to ensure a medal, before beating Miller 15-13 to guarantee at least silver.



Men's Sabre Podium (Cromie, Deary, Miller, Maxwell)

It was an all-Truro affair in the bottom semi-final. Joshua Maxwell made light work of his first round to rank second going on to beat Samuel Horne (Truro), Daniel Twine (Cambridge University) and Darcy Holdsworth (Truro) for his place in the top four. Joining him was Max Cromie (Truro) who dropped one first round fight but then beat three teammates, Ethan Hilton, Bertie Holdsworth and Nicholas Howes before taking out Maxwell 15-13 to reach the final.

Defending champion and hot favourite Deary scored five straight hits at the start of the final before Cromie could get on the board. Deary went on to lead 8-3 at the break and despite a closer second period he went on to hold the title with a 15-9 win.

Women's Foil

The top four seeds all made the semi-finals in this event from a field of 59. At the top of the draw Kate Beardmore (Fighting Fit) made an impressive start, dropping just four hits on the way to winning all of her first round matches. Ranked first she followed a bye with victories over Hannah Smyth (Fencers Club London), Sarah Barrett (West Fife) and Amelie Tsang (ZFW). Her semi-final opponent, Yasmin Campbell (ZFW) dropped a fight in the first round but battled back, beating Alexandra Htet-Marshall (Edinburgh), Martha Carus Bird (Cobham), Bronwen Granville (Bath



Women's Foil Podium (Campbell, Stutchbury, Williams-Stewart, Beardmore)

Sword) and Yvonne Chart (Truro). That form continued as Campbell beat Beardmore 15-12 to make the gold medal match.

There was another impressive start from Teagan Williams-Stewart (ZFW) who only dropped seven hits on her way to six first round victories. A bye preceded victories over Rachel Shaw (unattached), Georgia Silk (Newham Swords) and Chloe Dickson (Edinburgh). Also in that half of the draw Carolina Stutchbury (ZFW) took all of her first round matches, ranking 3rd for the elimination stages, going on to beat Tabitha De N'Yeurt (Bristol Blades), Katie Castillo-Bernaus (Salle Boston) and Isabella Gill (Cambridge University) for her place in the top four. She went on to beat Williams-Stewart 12-6 for a shot at the title.

The final began tightly but with Stutchbury slightly edging Campbell in the first period, to lead 5-3 at the break. Campbell pressed more in the second period but Stutchbury opened her lead to 8-5 by the second break. With time running out in the final period, Campbell had no choice but to attack and Stutchbury eased to the senior national title 15-7, at just 16 years old to add to the Cadet and Junior titles she won earlier in the season.

Men's Epee

In a field of 98, fencers from three different clubs and two different sports made the top four! At the top of the draw Calum Johnston (Edinburgh) dropped a first round fight but battled through Morgan Cole (Bath Sword), Paul Sanchez-Lethem (Brixton), Michael Sica (University of Aberdeen) and



Men's Epee Podium (Choong, Johnston, Marsh, Cooper)

James Jeal (Derbyshire Fencing Academy) to make the semi-finals. His opponent there was Matthew Cooper (Derbyshire Epee Academy) who also had to fight back from dropping a poule match. He defeated Marc Burkhalter (unattached), Tomas Curran Jones (Brixton), Calum Maynard

(Brixton) and Benjamin Andrews (Plymouth) for a place in the medal matches before going down 15-11 to Johnston.

In the bottom half of the draw, top seed Philip Marsh (Bath Sword) lived up to his billing to win every poule match before going on to beat Alexander Truuvert (Durham University), Dylan Morrison (Edinburgh), Billy Shepherd (Skipton) and Jonathan Woolard (Edinburgh) for his place in the semi-finals. There he faced Tokyo 2020 Men's Pentathlon Olympic Champion, Joseph Choong (unattached). Choong had dropped a fight in the first round but made the top four with victories against Matthew David (Bristol White Eagle), Jamie Firth (Edinburgh), Philip Dobson (Derbyshire Epee Academy) and Gregory Allen (Haverstock). Choong then went on to beat Marsh 15-10 for a place in the gold medal match.

The final saw two attacking fencers trying to gain an early advantage. It was Johnston who opened up the lead and he maintained the pressure throughout the first period, going into the break 12-7 up. That pressure continued in the second period and he took his third national title 15-11.

After a year without a senior national championships, the efforts of British Fencing's staff, Jon Willis and his competition team, the referees and volunteers did not go unnoticed by the team here at The Sword. Thank you for the efforts you went to in such challenging times to stage this event.

HONORARY WELSH MEMBERSHIP Lyndon Martin Presented

In the January 2021 issue of this magazine we reported that Lyndon Martin, Senior Coach & former Commonwealth Silver Medallist, had been made an Honorary Member of Welsh Fencing, in recognition of his service to fencing, both as a competitor and as a coach over many years.

The presentation of the award had to be postponed because of Covid-19 regulations but the opportunity was taken to present Lyndon with a suitable trophy during the Welsh Open in November.

As Whitchurch Fencing Club, explained, "When we first put Lyndon's name forward for Honorary Membership, we thought it was worthwhile because of the length of time he had been fencing. We heard back from Welsh Fencing that they would accept his nomination but it was only when a few of Lyndon's highlights were requested, that we realised just how much he had done :

- member of the 1974 Commonwealth team
- 3 times winner of the John Warburn Cup for Epee
- 5 times winner of the Emrys Lloyd Plate for Foil

"More recently he has worked as a senior coach, latterly at Cardiff, and now with ourselves, giving advice and training to newcomers and experienced fencers alike - which has been well received by all concerned."

"That's over 50 years in fencing and I can't think of anyone more deserving to be made an Honorary Member."



Lyndon, with outgoing Welsh Fencing Chairman, Mark Ridsdale

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THE MILLER, HIS PROCESS & ATOMIC NUMBER 79

Siân Hughes Pollitt sets about getting the best from British Fencing's Dusty Miller who is ... Head of People and Culture.

Opinions on that job title, please?

Before we investigate the responses to such a smouldering question, let me mention that it has taken me some time to track down the elusive Dusty. So elusive that I was convinced he was not a pukka person at all, but possibly just a kind of 'Mrs Doubtfire' alter-ego for Steve Kemp whenever he didn't feel like being Head of Pathways for the day.

Oh me of little faith! Dusty is the real deal, having been at British Fencing since March 2021. At the same time he's a Performance Support Mentor for the English Institute of Sport. Prior to these jointly-held roles, he was a Training Manager for England Rugby; before that, a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy where he'd attended The Britannia Royal Naval College - a place that aims: "to deliver courageous leaders with the spirit and fight to win".

We won't shut the door in his face then, will we Fencing Fans? But, if that's his pedigree, wouldn't 'Head of Bravery and Fighting Spirit' sum it up better? Still, no time for a reprint on the business cards, as Dusty and I hit the video meeting-room in hard-landing mode.

In the professional zone wherever he is head of, it transpires that, if Dusty were to ban anything, he would get rid of cynicism. No surprise he views it as a negative. On another occasion Dusty was head of something, it happened to be as one of the team at the helm of the largest military training event in the northern hemisphere, where NATO countries came together to take part in a massive land, sea and air training manoeuvre. At stake in this undertaking was to be able to demonstrate the interoperability of NATO partners. There was no place for doubt and

mistrust, or even for one country to say that they were doing it this way or that way because, say for example, that was the way the Americans did it. "The best approach to get around that kind of thinking is to break down the barriers by embedding people from other nations in other units," Dusty explains. "Then you can achieve a shared understanding and the kind of interconnectedness to become better".

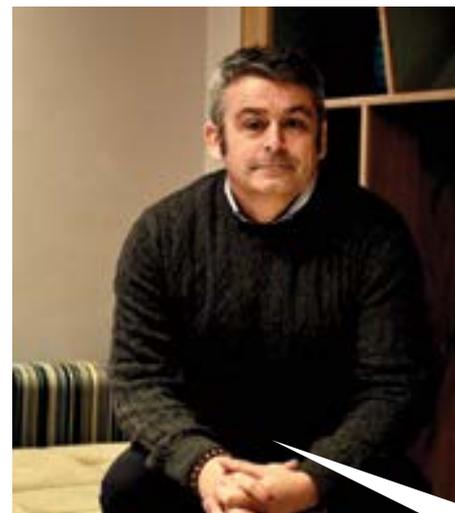
Specifically how we get better in fencing, according to Dusty, is by an interconnectedness that follows a sustainable evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, pace. Shared understanding is the goal here too, and Dusty says he's been starting with "the support and the growth of the coaching community to support our athletes in the high-performance space."

"So you're a Performance Director by another name then?"

Dusty protests his innocence in the clearest terms. "In its truest sense a Performance Director is responsible for the overarching performance of athletes in preparation for international competition. That's not my remit." But of course Dusty, like us all, wants fencing athletes feeling well-prepared for the global competition circuit. However supporting the athletes, he explains, in turn becomes about supporting the various communities within fencing and being equally focussed on the referees as on the coaches, concentrating as much on the clubs as on fencers at every participation level.

"Referees, really?"

"Yes. If we want to be world-leading. If we want to perform at the highest levels of the highest stage, we are going to have to, as a sport, want to learn and be curious about that learning." By this point, on the back of the sparse one-word question of how referees fit into the picture, Dusty's on a roll. He's walking me through quite a lot of familiar rooms that now appear to be laid out a bit differently and it goes back - once again - to shared understanding, to interconnectedness, to interoperability. At



the moment Dusty sees referees learning individually in their own discipline, he sees coaches doing the same - separately in their own space, and separately again there are the fencers. "What we need to create is an environment where everyone is learning together so there is a relationship between referees, coaches and fencers which puts performance at the heart."

In 'The Trial Of A Performance Director By The Back Door', Dusty has cleared his name. He emphasises that when he is talking about performance, he's not talking about the technical and tactical aspects of fencing, but the ability to rise to be world-class. "What I am talking about here are behaviours. The drive for continual improvement, the drive to bring our own personal leadership, the drive to bring the best version of ourselves to every opportunity so we're modelling world-class behaviours upon world-class foundations."

I once had it on good authority that the film director, Franco Zeffirelli sketched all his creative musings on the back of a cigarette packet. It seems to me here that Dusty - especially given his involvement in the NATO event - is in the habit of expressing himself more forensically. "I visualise scenarios." confirms Dusty. "My visualisation is around scenario planning. So I visualise a training camp where the referees are refereeing a training bout. At the end of that sparring session the

referee is giving feedback to the athlete saying why they might have judged them harshly here or there, and the athlete is speaking to the other athlete feeding back on what they may have used to beat them. It's creating an environment of continuous improvement."

I'm going to have to stop for a sec because chucking in the entire chunk of what he's saying about this topic in an uninterrupted way - straightforward as it is - is frying my brain. While I'm pressing the pause button, I am thinking about what Dusty has told me about breaking down the mental barriers of how we often do something because that's the way we have always done it, that we have thought something because that is the way we have always thought it or we've copied another country because that's the standard they set.

Let's un-pause Dusty. "We should be thinking about the bigger picture. We want to get to the Olympics. Wouldn't it be great if we got used to sharing our domestic training and competition experiences as a way of improving our performance? So the athlete says 'This is how I beat you. I'm going to let you know that's how I've beaten you so you're going to go away and focus on that so that next time you face me, you've got your strategy for me not to beat you. Therefore I'm going to get better.' That's how I visualise it."

All very well, except that a rather gigantic elephant has just entered the room. It prompts me to ask Dusty how he is going to talk down many fencing folk who just don't think like that. "It's not about talking anyone down. It's about taking everyone on a journey and, yes, this is going to be a fundamental shift in the current philosophy of fencing."

Dusty extrapolates that the whole philosophy element has its practical application in the ADP. "The opportunity presented to us through the Athlete

Development Programme (ADP) is one whereby we can ensure we are focussed on getting the basics right, from preparation through to performance. Our ADP is undergoing a subtle but significant shift in focus to one which is Athlete Centred, Development Driven & Competition Supported; we are laser-focused in developing the athlete for the right competition at the right level at the right time; these will be our World Class Foundations".

From his work in sport generally, Dusty is confident that the tools to enact this vision are right here at home. "The reality is we in the UK have probably got the world-leading coach support programmes available to us. All I require from any aspiring coach is the thirst for knowledge and learning as well as the ability to be humble, to reflect and understand that we're here to be the best version of ourselves."

When asked what he loves about fencing, Dusty replies immediately that it's the passion. He qualifies further, saying that passion is the epic nature of any sport, deriving from the investment people feel because of the enjoyment they get. If you have that enjoyment as an athlete, then Dusty wants to enhance your experience. If you relish the sport as a coach, or a parent, or a referee, or as any kind of stakeholder, Dusty is trying to shape your experience to be as good as it can get. Whilst he says he cannot guarantee that fencing will be bringing home Olympic gold medals in the future, he knows he can help spin the golden thread of excellence to run right through our game.

There is something known as the 'Miller Process', and it is a 150 year-old scientific form of chemical alchemy centred on atomic number 79 of the periodic table - or in other words - on gold. The procedure refines the most precious of metals to within a whisker of perfection at 99.5%. Reckon that you can just rock up and

harvest pure seams of the unadulterated treasure? Nope. The 'raw' nuggets, as they present themselves to the miner, are usually riddled with natural alloys - lesser metals like zinc, copper and iron. It is, by ore-refining standards, a more efficient and modern method for purifying larger quantities of gold. In olden times, a craftsman would sit beside a hot fire with temperatures over-shooting 1000°C, stirring molten gold in a crucible to skim off the t'other stuff that would rise to the top.

I think of Dusty and his laser focus on how the right processes inform the right behaviours and vice-versa. Returning to his job title, and I ask him whether he thinks it is the best description for what he does. "I think it's a statement of intent from British Fencing that we are looking to support our people and the culture of sport, and changing the narrative of fencing. For me, ultimately any organisation thrives and survives on its people and its culture."

And Dusty has been trained to lead with courage - specifically the courage of conviction - to embolden our fencing peeps and refine our fencing culture. He sees such courage as being "the ability to do things well and right, and to be driven by values and sense of purpose. It's about making decisions that help in our case to impact on the ability for our athletes to perform at their best."

Our whirlwind, jam-packed Zoom call is drawing to its close. If I've got it right though Dusty might just be the right person, in the right job, with the right job title. Under his leadership, fencing has the potential to be something you want to keep coming back to and enjoying for enjoyment's sake - not just for the winning. But that will make you a winner anyway - if you catch his drift.

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ON PISTE 1...

Super Sabreur - Super Mom - Mariel Zagunis

Talks to Karim

Let's get the stats out of the way first. Two individual Olympic gold medals (2004 & 2008) - the first two ever in women's sabre and the first US fencing gold medalist. Add to that two team Olympic bronze medals (2008 and 2016), a couple of World Championships titles, six PanAm Championship wins, seven Grand Prix titles, sixteen World Cup crowns and a cabinet full of other major international medals and what have you got? That's right. The USA's most decorated fencer of all time and she's not done yet!

She did however have time to take a break from competing to join me in the commentary box at the Orleans sabre Grand Prix in November 2021. It will come as no surprise to those who know her that she took to commentary like a natural. Assured in her knowledge, comfortable enough to take my lead and as energised as when she's on the piste, I'm sure she'll be invited back.

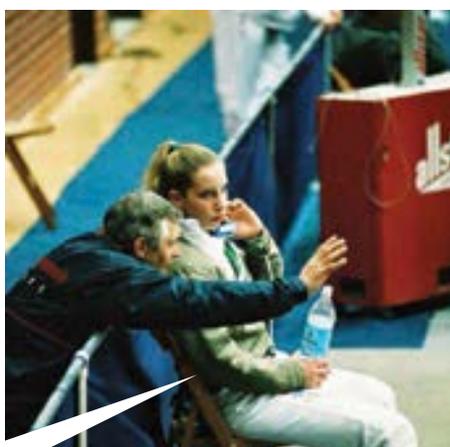
She'll only come when she's ready though. Mariel was clear from the start - she's having a "physical and mental break" but she's "signed up for the next event". Pushing my luck, having asked her to fly all the way from Oregon to Orleans just to commentate, I asked her if she would mind answering some questions for The Sword provided by ADP athletes and coaches, amongst others. Enjoy!



Mariel Commentating in Orleans in November 2021 #TeamBizzi

Your history in fencing is well told. What would you say was the biggest single early factor to your success?

I have been fortunate enough to have worked with the same coach, Ed Korfanty, for my entire 26+ year career. We found each other at the right place and the right time. He is originally from Poland and made his way to Oregon a few years after moving to the States and right about the time my family started fencing.



Mariel with Ed Korfanty at 2001 Cadet Junior Worlds where she became the first cadet to claim three gold medals © Stan Prilutsky

So what are the qualities that make the best kind of coach for an Olympic level fencer?

I cannot speak to this entirely since I am not technically a coach! However, coming from the athlete's point of view, I think it is important for a coach to recognise each fencer's unique talent, strength, and style and build on it. No cookie-cutter approach! Also, having a two way line of communication, listening and respect is very important to build success on and off the piste.

Was there ever a pinnacle moment that stands out to you as the one that revolutionised your game?

One of the greatest moments that sticks out to me was my performance in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. A few years before (2006



USA House at London 2012

the timing of the lights changed in sabre in such a way that was a rough adjustment, just two years before the next Games. My coach and I strategised many different ways to adjust and be 'ahead of the curve'. Many of the things we were working on were experimental, and as with many great breakthroughs, it took a lot of patience, trust, and for a while, failure until it all started to come together. The technique and footwork we created together came to fruition right before Beijing and I was able to perform in an unpredictable way on the piste, which helped me secure my second Olympic title. It was a process of faith and determination that made it so.

What is your top tip for the perfect performance mindset?

First and foremost - no fear and no mercy. If you gather your thoughts before a competition or a bout into a concise and clear plan, then you should feel that your mind is organized and prepared as you step on to the piste. Understanding and perfecting this comes from years of practice, and especially trial and error within a competition setting to know what will and won't work for you. But it also comes from mindfulness in many other parts of your daily routine and especially fencing practice. Put in work with intention and purpose. If you can work on mentally focusing yourself in low-pressure situations (like practice or local tournaments) it can help prepare



you for the big stage. Visualisation is key – imagining yourself doing all the right actions at all the right moments, focusing on positive reinforcement in your head, watching yourself be strong and winning. Conversely, also using visualisation to imagine tough scenarios – where things aren't going right (down many points, bad call by the referee) and imagining how you will handle these types of situations too. If you've been there a hundred times in your head, you'll be able to handle these same situations much easier when they happen in real life and under stress.

Our Athlete Development Pathway fencers are encouraged to design their own training plans. So a few of them are interested in asking how an Olympic gold medalist such as yourself designs a season's training?

Apart from what we've dealt with with Covid, a 4 year Olympic cycle tends to be pretty clearly laid out. For the most part, you know when and where every tournament will be and you can then work backwards, fitting in appropriate times for camps and practice. Basically immediately after the end of a season (after the Worlds or the Olympics), I discuss with my coach what the next 12 months will look like. Starting with the macro (international/ domestic tournaments, camps) and then micro (daily/weekly training plus periods of rest/recovery). Knowing what is expected is key because you can physically and mentally prepare yourself for the long haul of the season. Of course you might have to adjust along the way but having clear goals before the start of the season is important. Obviously the demands during a season for an Olympic athlete will be different from fencers who have other ambitions or

who are at other levels. So it is important to make your own personalised plan that is a high yet realistic bar to work towards. And, physically writing your goals down can help with accountability! You can't expect everything to come to fruition at once and sometimes it takes many years to achieve certain goals. But keeping focused, staying determined and never giving up on yourself is so important.

How would you say you approach: Periodisation? Speed work? Strength? Power? Stamina? Technical skills?

All of these things are based on individual needs and skills. Some elements might come more naturally to one athlete than another. So it's best to be honest with yourself and critical in such a way that you recognise the areas in which you can improve. All of the elements listed above are important to fencing, and they can be harnessed and honed in different ways. Some might benefit from cross training while others just need more attention to fencing footwork conditioning. A coach can help assess which areas need improvement and how to go about it, but it's also ok to think outside of the box and get creative with ways to improve. Again, sometimes seeing improvements take time but if you're consistent with your plan (for example a 12 week strength and conditioning program) you'll hopefully see tangible results. And if not, mix it up until you find what works for you.

What else do you build into a program?

Diet is definitely a big part of it, too! But it is also something that is individualized and can be utilised best if working with a professional like a licensed dietitian/nutritionist because everyone's needs are different. If you can't or don't want to work with someone, then you can start with common sense when it comes to eating whole, non-processed foods and staying sufficiently hydrated throughout the day, especially if training or competing. Viewing food as fuel and recovery for your body can help with the mindset. It's also important to be prepared going into competition day with access to enough healthy snacks and liquids. Don't forget that adequate sleep for rest, recovery, and brain function is also a huge part of performance!

What would you define as your most important: Habit? Routine? Behaviour? Process?

All of these! In general each of these areas overlap with each other like a Venn diagram. Each is important for success and

each influences the other. In some people one might be stronger but honestly I would weight the importance of each of these pretty equally for myself.

Wellbeing is a key focus at the moment in an effort to create fully-rounded athletes. Some of our athletes are assigned a mentor to support them. Did you ever have a mentor inside or outside of fencing? How did they help you?

Mentorship is so important, especially for young athletes. If you can have insight from an older, more experienced person, even if it's only one or two conversations during a rough patch, it can make a world of difference in the trajectory of your path to success. I agree that being well-rounded and looking after one's mental health is extremely important. Especially in sports, where young people can experience stress earlier on in their lives and on levels otherwise unfathomable to some. So it is imperative to have a support system that will help listen and guide the athlete, as well as provide a net of unconditional support. I have been very fortunate to have a very influential and supportive group around me throughout my career. My parents have contributed to my success more than I can put into words. The women's sabre fencers who came before me and were so welcoming and supportive when I was a teenager first coming on the scene and were wonderful people. They shaped my worldview of fencing and were mentors and role models who broke down barriers and paved the way.

Marcel was so generous with her time we have enough content left for another issue! That made for some tricky editing but I decided to stick to the fundamentals. Nothing Marcel says above is rocket-science. However, there's one line that underpins this whole interview and the time I spent with Marcel gave me an insight into why she is so special and has achieved so much. It's the discipline in which she approaches fencing (and her life), the openness to take on other ideas (or reject them) and determination to stay focussed on her goals – all delivered with effortless respect for those around her.

"No fear and no mercy." Have another read with that front and centre in your mind.

THE BACK ROOM BOYS

One Hundred (And One) Years of Fencing at Leon Paul

By Siân Hughes Pollitt

Photos Den Pollitt

Parked up in the snug Directoire Technique booth at Leon Paul London at the 84th Miller-Hallet Cup, I scan the room full of épéists. I clock Joe Choong. Who he? - said, ahem, nobody ever, given he is the Olympic Modern Pentathlon Men's Champion. Bruce Dickinson, woolly beanie atop, gives no clue as to his renown as lead singer of Iron Maiden. Bruce is riffing aloud as to whether I can help revive the telly back from standby-mode so he can see the tableau. Electronics - moi? I chuck over the remote, tell him to start pressing buttons and when the box springs back to life, say "Well done, you've got the job". With a further dollop of VIP riches, I spy ... I spy that I cannot spot the true celebrities of the place; The Very Unfamous Alex and Ben Paul - the 4th generation Leon Paul family brothers who actually run the business.

Introductions are made and Ben turns out to be an engaging conversationalist. So is Alex. So is Ben. Alex. Ben. My head moves from side to side, locked into rapid-response mode while I get the download on the long-running family fencing business. Ben begins "Leon Paul started up in 1921..." There's no-one on Planet Earth like Yours Truly here for interrupting, and I cut in with "So you're celebrating 100 years?". Me like: a) they hadn't figured it out already and b) smug because I'm suddenly brilliant at Maths. They politely confirm that my calculations are correct but say they are waiting until 2022 to start the party. To put it briefly, they are concentrating their efforts on other priorities. Alex says they're working on being completely carbon neutral as a company by the end of the year. He corrects himself, "I mean that we are going to be fully carbon neutral by the end of the year", trailing off with a gentle laugh: "even if it kills me." The Paul Brothers' passion for sustainability runs through the pair of them like rock: both in the world around and the world they create within their workplace.

What it means is that employee working conditions and the work/life balance are



Ben and Alex at The Iconic Leon Paul Wall

as important as, say, developing the eco-friendly materials that can enhance the stretchability and fence-ability of a fabric. It is as though Alex and Ben were born to do this ... yes, erm, hold on a tick: they were. Both smile endearingly at their once firmly-held resolve to resist the magnetic pull of the family firm, where their parents, Barry and Joan also worked. Alex qualified as a Biologist while Ben studied Art and Design at Chelsea. Alex confirms that he was "never going to join the business" but walked through the doors shortly before 2000 just to build a company website and install modern high-speed internet. He concedes that "I've never quite managed to leave since or, for that matter, finish the website". Ben also recalls how their mum tried to steer them both every which way other than working at Leon Paul. But his urge to override the reliance for remote orders on soon-to-be-outdated technology in favour of internet purchases nevertheless sealed his fate. "I said look, there's these programmes you can buy now so people can just place orders online. My parents were quite sceptical, saying no-one's going to just order stuff online, and you know we're currently using the fax and that's quite efficient."

Hindsight may give us all a giggle but, from commercial operations to designing kit and

equipment, the Paul Brothers by default have become innovators, putting into place landmark events from where the only motion has had to be forwards not back. Before Ben got involved with his art school ways, there had been no painted fencing masks, apart from one sporting a scary clown face. This 'It' style of intimidation was summarily stamped out but not before it had set Ben's creative receptors a-whirring in a more positive direction. "I painted a Spider-Man mask because I liked Spider-Man, I like comics and I like graphics. Everybody loved it. Then in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics, I saw these aerodynamic, country-flagged helmets that the GB Cycling team were using - they were very cool, and so Leon Paul painted this mask with a British flag on and we took it to the FIE." In this flash of progressive-thinking, what Ben did was create a design phenomenon, unleashing a growing trend. He knew that the public and the media love to identify with something visual and, because in fencing the face is covered, that connection was harder to make. The painted masks were finally investing the fencers with an identity, teasing out patriotic possibilities so pivotal for fans and spectators.

Both talk fluently about key moments in their working lives, recognising that



Marcus Mepstead Goes VR at Leon Paul

innovation can meet with the most binary of public judgements – either acceptance or rejection. The rebuffs are sometimes hard for them to understand as when they saw some of the feedback on a video of a futuristic fashion show that Leon Paul had been asked to conceptualise for an FIE anniversary in Paris. LP had embraced the brief and come up with ultra-modern outfits that incorporated the theme of video-gaming into fencing. The avant-garde end products were met by an initial comment post along the lines of: “You are the worst”. Alex and Ben are philosophical that some of their ideas are ahead of their time – either in thought or in actuality – as when they tried to fashion a foil lamé out of QTC (Quantum Tunnelling Compound) due to its electro-conductive properties. It didn't work. They talk of the potential in 3D-printing for developing custom-made handles and how when they fashioned grips out of different material, fencers reported an improvement in blisters and calluses that are otherwise considered often unavoidable in the sport.

According to Alex and Ben, the world is divided into two tribes: ‘tinkerers’ – a breed of 3D-thinking problem-solvers who cannot leave stuff alone, and those who can. They are of course ‘tinkerers’ – describing with joy their super-messy office spaces where they are surrounded by the clutter of products that are begging to be amended or updated. I sit across the oval table from them knowing exactly which bracket I am in, so I try to drive the conversation along the lines where I'll be a little more comfortable. I ask which three words they would use to sum up fencing. They look a little blank. “Erm...” Like all creative minds, they appear a tad commitment-phobic before settling upon ‘fun’, ‘exciting’ and eventually, after mulling over the value of words like ‘history’, ‘heritage’ and ‘tradition’, they decide upon ‘focus’.

The problem here is not the limits of their answer but those of my question: it is way too one-dimensional. Another ‘problem’ is that The Paul Brothers are touchingly

un-vain and rather unmotivated when it comes to volunteering quippy views simply to sound good. At first, they strike me as Renaissance Men, embracing the advancement of the social, intellectual and physical aspects of all things fencing – but then I realise that label doesn't go far enough. Rather, they are The Information Age's Holographic Humans, stretching their minds back and forth across frontiers of reinvention and re-imagination, using the past to nourish the present, always bringing the future into play.

Alex and Ben start pondering fencing's fourth dimension – how it will look years from now. In the shorter-term, they confidently assert the reality of Leon Paul's carbon neutrality, and how fencing will go fully wireless. Then longer-term, how the sport might well enter a new ‘lifestyle’ kind of space and be experienced through virtual reality. The patents for the headsets and the technology are already there; as well as the tangible buzz of the electronic controls as you press the necessary to take a parry. The brothers return to the present and how they wish to keep refining the workplace, ensuring that their employees feel valued and how they can “lead a company we can both feel proud of”. Moreover there is the ongoing desire to use the LP Fencing Centre salle as a hub where fencers can routinely come together to fence one another irrespective of club boundaries. The outcome of all this effectively represents a seismic yet smooth cultural shift where we're still focussed on fencing fun if we want to be, or fencing performance if we are that way inclined. But, whatever the emphasis, fencing as a

sport remains sustainable in every way – in short, a gift that keeps on giving.

After our conversation is complete, we depart the sleek office interior of the LP London HQ and pop over to their factory workshop to take some photographs. At one point Alex places his hand on a giant cylindrical thingymabob, like a farmer absentmindedly patting his favourite cow. “Hammertite” he announces somewhat unexpectedly, referring to the finish. “I painted it myself about 25 years ago.” Ben smiles at the recollection, and I notice that nearly every other machine sports this particular shade of green; young Alex clearly had a waste-not-want-not approach to materials even then. He and Ben look so much at home in this wondrous temple to metal, I'm half-expecting a troupe of ageless Oompa Loompas to spill out from behind the forges and turn a merry tune in honour of the productivity of the place.

I leave Hendon trying to second-guess how Alex and Ben will decide to celebrate 2022 in what will be Leon Paul London's 101st year within the fencing business. Might it be that they plump for a large-scale ‘son et lumière’? Maybe fencing pistes being laid out on monuments around the globe so everyone can pick up a sword, or even staging a great big virtual reality fencing jamboree or ...

No need to give it further thought. They always come up with something.



Ben and Alex in their happy place: on the factory floor

MONEYBALL

Fencingmetrics - The ADP Way

By Karim Bashir



Steve Kemp

The 2011 film Moneyball is based on the true story of the 2002 Oakland Athletics baseball team under the guidance of Billy Beane, played by Brad Pitt. As well as scouting for players and other traditional methods, Beane introduced statistical analysis and mathematical modelling to bring together a successful team, despite their lack of financial resources.

The film is based on a book by the same name, written by Michael Lewis, which uncovers the analysis Beane employed, now known as “sabermetrics”. The approach has led many other teams in the series to reevaluate how they go about their recruitment.

When The Sword interviewed fencing’s Beane (or Pitt, take your pick), Steve Kemp, about British Fencing’s ADP programme, this book and film were very much in our minds. We didn’t tell him that though! Instead and in an effort to dispel any myths about the programme, we went in with some pretty direct questions.

First, we asked Steve to give us his elevator pitch about what the Athlete Development Programme is.

“The ADP is an integrated programme to support the athletes moving from the entry

point all the way to their Olympic years and into retirement years. So it covers the technical and technical phases plus an athlete’s biopsychosocial requirements. It has a number of pathway stages with some common components so we can track the development of the athlete.”

“Traditionally we’ve had a hierarchy. If you’re not good enough you get kicked out. What we’re looking at now is the fact that athlete development is not linear. You go forwards and backwards when you have transition points in your journey - such as changing schools, or going to university. These points may cause your performance levels to dip, due to the change in circumstance. You may have an injury. There may be a pandemic!”

“If an athlete’s performance can go backwards and forwards, then the system around them must allow the same. The ADP does just that, so if a fencer stops fencing for a period of time, for example to have a child, they can always re-enter the programme if and when they want to.”

First you have to get onto the programme! It may come as a surprise to many that fencing’s equivalent to baseball’s scouts are already watching. Ability, motivation

(the right motivation), desire, commitment, drive, discipline and fight are the basic set of requirements. Age and results are barely mentioned.

“Certainly if we go back, the ADP was originally for 15 to 23 year olds. Prior to that it was 15 and slightly younger. Now though, the ADP has grown to become the whole pathway. So again the historic bit means that we currently have a strong connection with 14 to 19 year olds. As a programme, we’re trying to change that in the sense that the programme is from whenever you enter to whenever you leave. You’ve almost got to grow the seniors in. So the goal is to keep the athletes in for as long as it’s possible in that sense.”

Hidden in there are the subtle, important - nay fundamental - keys to this programme. It’s only just starting. It will evolve and it’s for the long term. Right now, the programme is very much in its infancy. Steve is too humble or perhaps nervous to say it out loud, but this programme is the most likely source of not only our future fencing Olympians but our next Olympic medalists. Those on the programme already are the trail-blazers and in some ways the guinea pigs.



ADP Pathway Stages

“No-one gets it right all the time and we’re certainly going to make mistakes along the way. These are our learning and development opportunities.”

And Steve is the one who will face the flack. However, no one is a harsher critic than Steve himself but belief in the objective provides him with a thick skin. Like Beane he has to ignore what’s gone before and what’s become the norm. He has to challenge, adapt, refresh and remould.



Steve Surveys the room

A quote from the film springs to mind. “There is an epidemic failure within the game to really understand what is happening. And this leads people who run teams to misjudge their players.”

Translate this into a view of British fencers competing abroad, aside from the few names that will spring to everyone’s minds, at senior level there is certainly room for improvement. We haven’t won an Olympic medal of any colour since 1964. The “people who run teams” in our game are, of course, British Fencing but also our clubs, our coaches and our parents. If we want to win another Olympic medal, everyone has to be on board. However, Steve doesn’t present the ADP as a *fait accompli*. Far from it in fact. He wants us all to buy into it because we believe in it. So, back to the question; how do you get onto the programme? We know the prerequisites but where are the magic ingredients?

“We’ve probably spotted most of the next cohort already but that doesn’t mean you can’t apply to get onto the programme yourself. Of course we have a list of requirements but there’s more to selection for the programme than that. There are the obvious candidates that are training smartly and regularly, competing at the right level and improving. They pick themselves. I’m looking for the ones that fall under that particular radar. There are many different ways to approach the goal of winning an Olympic medal. We focus on being athlete-centred.”

This is where the conversation turns to perhaps give the best insight into what Steve does. He asks “where am I at most competitions that I attend?” I answer immediately, “up in the gantry overseeing things.” He is watching for the behaviours of the athletes and coaches..

“Finding the right mix in an athlete isn’t just in the numbers. It’s an attitude, a natural behaviour. It’s something that just stands out. I spot the athletes that choose to warm up with someone not from their club. I spot the athlete who regularly checks their weapons are at the optimum efficiency for them. I spot the athlete that loses and carefully packs their kit away neatly. I watch the interactions between athletes, their coaches, their teammates and their parents.”

There’s a lot in what he says but there’s even more in what he doesn’t! The system is set up for everyone that wants to achieve but the ultimate goal is to produce a stream of world class senior athletes. So whether your goal is to win European Cadet medals or become a three-time Olympian, the programme caters for you. One of the unintended consequences of pathway programmes is the athletes being pushed by their parents but finding little joy in fencing. The symptom of this behaviour is early burnout followed by dropping out. However, it’s not really about what Steve wants. It’s about what we all want.

So, if the goal is to win more Olympic medals whilst managing the “squad” better than we ever have before, both physically and mentally, what can we expect from the ADP? What is that data that would drive Billy Beane down this path?

“The landscape has changed with a move away from a “win at all costs” mentality. That benefits long-tail sports like ours but like a good fencer, we have to spot that opportunity early and take advantage of it. We start by looking at coach development focussing on the behaviours demonstrated by multi-medal winning coaches across sports. There is a lot of good happening out there in the coach-a-sphere and the new UK Sport Progression Programme allows us to inject fresh impetus into the good.”

Good start. The programme has identified the coaches that seek self-improvement. “Better coaches make better athletes.” Translated, one could infer that Steve and his team are picking the best bits from the traditional approach whilst embracing the research-led, statistical modelling of

modern coaching, now commonplace in baseball, football and every other so-called “big” sport.

“By supporting these coaches, we can really begin to bridge the gaps that we haven’t been able to before. The coaches will truly be able to help athletes going through those transition points to avoid what has been an area of loss for the past few years. By having a network of coaches to support athletes who move away from home for their first job, go to university or start a family, we have a much better chance of building a stronger cohort of senior athletes capable of performing successfully on the international scene.”

“Then, of course, there are the athletes. The 13 year-old inspired to Olympic success by the sporting endeavour of an idol or role model, is a rarity. We should do our best to spot them but they make a small percentage of the base of any sports participation pyramid. People driven by good behaviours is a great starting point for identifying potential talent. Warming up with someone not from your club.... because you know it will benefit your performance. Warming down after a disappointing loss and then neatly packing your kit away....because you’re already thinking about what needs to be done in the next training session. Athletes demonstrating these types of behaviour are the ones that we are likely to have the most success with. And “success” doesn’t necessarily mean them winning an Olympic medal. It means that they will benefit from the programme and the programme will benefit from them.”

“The last part of the athlete-jigsaw is everything else around them or their



ADP Camp

'support team' as it's become known. Parents, friends, teachers, employers, psychologists, nutritionists or anyone who touches the athlete's life on a regular basis - each of them has to be on board with the direction and understand their role at each stage on the athlete's journey to becoming their own CEO."



Estonia Olympic Champions

"Then there's the ADP itself. The coaches are there to support the technical and tactical along with our research into game play, strength and conditioning and well-being. Every athlete on the programme needs feedback to help them on their journey. Regular check-ins are required to review, assess, and reevaluate their goals. This is to adjust the plan with the aim of accelerating learning and development of them as an athlete. We've got to get better faster than our international opponents. If you're at the beginning of the journey, this opportunity may only occur at the ADP camps. If you're Marcus Mepstead, these will happen on a weekly basis. They are critical not only for evaluating development but also for identifying those transition periods."

The conversation continues with athletes submitting training plans, development plans, videos of lessons, the autonomous athlete and what values they hold etc etc. There is a very different feel to the conversation than what has come before. There is a determination that momentum for the programme is building and that whilst there may be ADP detractors, they are the minority. Whilst the "win at all costs" model is dead, there's still a massive element of "leave no stone unturned". The difference now is that we can see many more stones. One thing is clear and Steve spells it out perfectly.

"We need athletes to be part of the learning process and coaches to be facilitators. The athletes need to be self-aware, critically honest but with controlled emotions and self-reflect with a coach that understands the right path. The need to adapt in fencing, in moments of high physical exertion and even higher emotional pressure, is critical to the outcome. Fencers need a plan B, C, D and more but more importantly they need to recognise the time to change the plan as early as possible."

Billy Beane controversially changed the plan of Oakland Athletic's coaching and recruitment approach to great success. They went on a record-breaking winning streak that turned the world of baseball on its head. It took patience and determination and Steve is brimming (albeit quietly) with both. We asked him one last question and his answer is the perfect Moneyball-related finish to this piece. Can you guarantee to make the Great Britain fencing team from outside the programme?

"Of course you can. The qualifying standards are available for everyone to see. If you make those standards, you will be eligible for selection whether you're on

the ADP or not. However, if you are vying for a discretionary place outside of the programme and you're up against someone on it, we're going to know the likely outcome for the athlete on the programme compared to you."

Can British Fencing guarantee the programme will work for everyone? Almost certainly not but perhaps a better question would be, would you even want not to be involved?

When I glance around the room at international events there is a sense of team cohesion when looking at the "big" squads - France, Italy, Russia, the USA, China. One could argue that this is born out of years of repeated success and a belief in their systems based on that evidence. So what about Canadian women's foil, Estonian women's epee or Hong Kong's men's foil teams? They also have cohesion that cannot be explained by previously repeated success. What can explain their "belonging together" is the system that preceded the success. Whether it be Paul Apsimon, Nikolai Novosjolov or Greg Koenig leading the programme, each example demonstrates that joint belief breeds success. It never happens overnight so everyone needs patience and determination.

Learning, developing and evolving underpin it all. As Beane said, "Adapt or die." A fine mantra for fencing, sport and life.

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

karim.bashir@catchsport.com

GETTING COMPETITIVE

The Not Very Unlucky Epeeist

Siân Hughes Pollitt talks to Knightsbridge Fencing Club about the secrets of success

Photos www.denpollitt.com

Alec Brooke has been fencing with Tamás Kovács at Knightsbridge Fencing Club since he was 5. Despite his tender age, Alec's mother, Marisa confirms that fencing was never just to let off kiddie steam. In fact Marisa said that Tamás, along with fellow KFC coach Julianna Révész were quite the opposite, "It's always been as though the Olympics were tomorrow. It's never been about babysitting but about giving Alec the chance to learn properly within the right framework".

Indeed, if you ever walk into Tamás' idea of a good fencing salle or high-functioning competition venue, you may find that you've been unlucky enough to stumble across that one fencer feeling a little bit guilty. Guilty because they're still standing up, not sitting down; then their guilt will be because they're sitting down and not lying down; then they'll be feeling guilty because they're lying down, but not lying down stretched out with their feet up resting their legs.

Does that sound focussed? Professional? Successful even?

Well it's the approach of Tamás' hero: the very focussed, successful, professional and historic three-peating Hungarian Olympic individual gold medal-winning



sabreur, Aron Szilágyi. Aron always makes sure that he doesn't hang about chatting with his crew at a competition but rather concentrates upon how he is getting over the match he's just done in readiness for the next one, knowing that whatever happens he will be relying on using his legs and on those legs being as refreshed and energised as they can be.



Tamás, like Szilágyi, also grew up fencing in Hungary where after some successful Cadet and Junior seasons, he stopped - never intending to become a coach. But the Hungarian system, within which he had learned to work hard and undergo a heap of mental and physical pressure, had left him with a hunger and a dream that wouldn't desert him. Then a chance meeting with former Hungarian épéist and European and World medalist Julianna Révész on the King's Road in Chelsea led to them founding Knightsbridge Fencing Club together in 2009.

Julianna and Tamás see their role in educating fencers on how to rise to the task, on how to be effective in the sport - in essence, how to get competitive. Julianna talks of how they are "raising champions" saying how proud she is of that process. And that process is a well-oiled machine of hard work. Tamás mentions that his least valued turn of phrasing consists of the words: lucky/unlucky. He doesn't believe in making excuses. Instead, he believes it's kinder and more productive to always be honest in his advice to fencers about what it takes to get good, and to base such honest guidance firmly in fact and in experience.

This is simple - at least to Tamás. He explains, "There is nothing new in what I am doing but I have known the reality of fencing in a country where there are expectations and pressures that there may not be here. I went through these competitions and I try to replicate the elements of those rooms. I therefore create a bubble that is a bit more serious than it is recreational. I am clear: 'This is the job'. This is how we step up."

ADP Athlete, Alec Brooke, now 16 years old and British and European number one in Cadet Men's Epee, is eleven years into his fencing journey. Encouraged to realise that the challenges that he will face in the competitive game cannot be navigated by explaining everything away with an 'unlucky approach' forms a mentality that has prepared Alec well for the 2021/22 season where, before going to press, he has taken individual gold at EFC Cadet Circuit events in Budapest and Belgrade as well as winning bronze in Grenoble. Alec's father, Stephen says, "Tamás is always honest with Alec and they have a trust, a bond that has helped Alec to become very focussed, and to keep that focus under pressure."

Alec confirms he finds Tamás' approach 'passionate and inspiring'. He also mentions that his coach is "a character - in a good way." You can see what he's getting at when Tamás teases Alec, asking whether he has a nickname. "No", replies Alec.





Alec Celebrates Budapest Gold with Tamás
(c) Dan Kew Facebook

"Well I would nickname you train," says Tamás, "because you know only how to go forwards but not how to go back." In the next breath, Tamás is complimenting Alec, describing his fencer's talent in playing the drums (he is Grade 8 standard) as key to his timing in épée, allowing him to adopt a dominant rhythm in the fight.

Equally, Tamás does appear to be a practitioner of the emerging skill that could be described as 'Fencer Coach Practical Maths'. Taking the numbers on the table worldwide, he knows that, say, in a country like Russia, a Cadet team of three is selected from a competition of about 500 fencers. In Great Britain you are probably looking at an entry of more like 40 competitors. His view is that you have to work with that, and around that.

What follows is that Tamás doesn't miss a trick. According to him, the individual's performance can actually rely more on their competitive trajectory being helped by the presence of a good, functioning team dynamic. Coach Maths kicks in again as Tamás deconstructs the caps on qualification as well as the number of athletes allowed at any given Olympics, thereby showing how the team route can open up more possibilities. "This is

the format that requires discipline. It is not about having the best three fencers; the fencers within their team have to be organised and understand exactly what is required. I tell them 'If you cannot win your match then do not lose it. Do not lose it badly. Stay alive.' That's how I send them to the piste".

Telling the fencers to prioritise a whole host of secondary aspects as well as the pure technicals and tacticals of the game meant that in Belgrade in October 2021, the GBR Cadet Men's Epee Team of Alec, Cador Beautyman - also at Knightsbridge, with Liam Kew, and David Perkins from Crawley Swords won an EFC Cadet Circuit Team gold medal. Realistically deploying 'staying alive' strategies was something that the team more than accomplished. Cador, who is 2021/2022 British Cadet National Champion, relates how Tamás emphasised to him that it wasn't about winning individual fights but more about not letting the score run away. Combining this advice with the urge not to let his team-mates down, Cador - with the rest of the GBR Cadet Men's Épéeists - secured the win. Tamás gives them due credit in acknowledging that, "not only did they survive, but they did an excellent job."

Rather than mining for gold, Tamás and Julianna appear to be nurturing the mineral grit that gives birth to pearls, wanting to encourage fencers firstly to have a goal, and then to attack that goal as a person as well as a fencer. "The aim is to be challenged. It is not to see the end destination but just to focus on the aspect to do better, to do one's best." Tamás' favourite motto is one that emblazons



Julianna Révész



the wall of a Hungarian fencing club. It translates to: 'Do it properly, or not at all'. When asked if this is the same as a kind of 'go hard or go home' thinking, he disagrees. The defining difference is not ever the quantity of input but its quality, its rigour, its real-life efficacy. Julianna echoes the sentiment that coaching has to take account of the whole fencing journey, and that's not just 'raising champions' but also - she says - about helping to shape "nice, kind human beings" within the sport.

Walking into the Knightsbridge Fencing Salle and there are no fencers lying down with their feet up. What you are lucky enough to stumble across however is a place full of focus and activity. Julianna explains that it is the result of 'day and night' management. "It's not just the coaching - that's our pleasure. We have to be very organised in planning the logistics of attending competitions, looking after our kit and equipment, membership, training ..." Her list is exhaustive. Interestingly as a fencer, when The Sword Editor, Karim would commentate on her matches, Julianna earned the nickname of 'The Pocket Rocket' as she always, despite her petite frame, turned up an explosive velocity and power on the piste to great effect, as her impressive CV demonstrates.

Back to Alec, and this sport-mad, cricket-playing, school band drumming, maths and science oriented épéeist speaks of his ultimate ambition in life which is to one day win the Olympic title. "But that is a long way off and there are A levels and university first," he says philosophically. What doesn't appear to leave Alec is his sense of purpose in life and in fencing which is reflected within Knightsbridge and its other fencers, many of whom are achieving highly and well. Hopefully fortune will be in their favour. But, take it from them; they won't be relying on luck alone.

WHEN WORDS FAIL US

Language Learning with British Fencing's Virginia Bailey

Siân Hughes Pollitt

In a world where 'semantic bleaching' is a thing; where every time we say "I am literally going to ..." is normally not anywhere near what we are literally going to do, we can find ourselves getting a little lexically jumbled up at the best of times. That in itself is not the end of the world - or word. Words will always live on, and their meaning and impact will change fairly organically. So daydream I, until ...

I'm chatting to V. V is Virginia, Virginia is Virginia Bailey who is Head of Participation at British Fencing. Her portfolio is exciting - dynamic. She's the one blasting out the great messages about our great sport. I consider us pretty much on a par - her being excellent at inclusion and building community and me, at least hoping to be good at representing all that through the written word. So whenever we talk, we're very animated. But one time, as I am quite confidently trilling away, I mention the phrase 'hard to reach groups'.

An almost imperceptible pause follows. An oops moment. V explains that calling any one particular group 'hard to reach' puts the onus on them. Rather it's on organisations like ours to find ways of connecting with the whole fabric of society. Somewhat obvious really, and I kick myself for not thinking of this before. It's more neurolinguistic than plainly linguistic - a gentle flipping or reshaping of acquired attitudes.

One slip of the tongue is followed quickly by a second. I utter the acronym BAME that I've been using recently, having heard it to describe 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic'. I use it well-intentionally - so surely it's right, isn't it? V once again is very patient as she explains how this catch-all term gets used for all individuals who aren't White; in her words, "We put everyone into the same category who isn't white without thinking about an individual's identity, or the consequences of how that might make them feel." Some individuals may be grouped into 'BAME' without having any connection with such identities - like those with mixed heritage. I panic, thinking 'What acronym should I be using then?' When

I confess this, V laughs at my misguided distress. Of course acronyms, by their nature, lack enough nuance to distinguish and differentiate between cultures, lifestyles, prejudices, and historical or lived experiences - all of which vary so much. I can now see why the campaign #endBAME gained so much traction. To my relief, V suggests that I use a phrase such as 'ethnically diverse communities', but perhaps after asking myself first if one is even needed at all.

Starting by asking how others would like to be identified is the common-sense thing to do, and it takes us on to a whole host of other areas where terminologies and referencing mean a great deal. At the start of the pandemic British Fencing began staging 'listening events' to turn up the volume on where and how to offer further support to different communities in their experiences in the sport. Listening Events are scheduled throughout the year and focus on areas of diversity, such as ethnicity and LGBTQ+, where a better understanding of the personal experiences of members will improve the work that BF do. This development of a better understanding is vital and the sessions are designed to provide a safe space for discussion, observations and requests, thereby enabling BF to anticipate any action plan to be put in place following the meetings.

Back to Virginia. When she thinks about this topic she always tries to bring it back to herself and how she can address her own verbal behaviours: "My first step is to always remember that I am not an expert but I should accept that I continue to be on a learning journey. I really feel like I don't know it all and that makes me want to know more. My lived experience is as a gay woman, for example, but I myself still have a lot to learn in the LGBTQ+ space".

Findings from the British Fencing commissioned 'Behind The Mask' survey of its members' views are being processed. Early days, but suffice to say that there's always work to be done in tackling issues and perceptions which ultimately will result in whether our sport continues to grow, as society continues its speed of rapid change. V says it is about not just starting conversations as a National Governing Body, but showing that we're comfortable having those conversations. "The consequences even of flippant - not necessarily racist, or discriminatory - language can result in the most negative of impacts. We have to realise that, as a sport, if we don't think about the person and allow them to identify with who they are, then we do not understand our community and we're making the sport even more exclusive".

If V accepts that she's at the beginning of this linguistic journey, then I can too. Fencing has to show that it means what it says: sport is for everyone - regardless.

Since this piece was written the UK's main broadcasters have committed to avoid using the acronym BAME. Report [here](#).



ACROSS THE FENCE

*'My asthma is constantly triggered
By the hatred
From time-wasters imposing thoughts
Such as 'You can't even play!
Why were you chosen anyway?' ...*

The verse above was written by 12 year-old Sara, and is taken from "Battling Expectations" - a collection of poetry written by young fencers involved in the project Muslim Girls Fence (MGF) - the partnership between British Fencing and the charity Maslaha. Reha Ullah who has recently been appointed as MGF's Project Manager, knows the feelings all too well having been involved previously as a coach in the programme. She also knows that MGF is all about starting to have tricky conversations about topics we find difficult.

Reha remembers the very first time she picked up a sword. "I felt like a warrior princess - so different in my movement and my thinking. I was all of a sudden learning to attack with a weapon and thought 'Wow I can actually do this'. It was very freeing." Reha confirms that this sensation was above all empowering and helped her feel stronger in what is - irrespective of race or religion - still very much a man's world.

Were it just that we were worried about it being a man's world... Asked for anecdotal stories about the society that British Muslim girls have to face, and Reha - who also works as a teacher in a Muslim girl's school - recounts a recent school trip. One of the girls was approached by



Reha

a man aggressively asking her why was she dressed like that? Why was she in our country? On another trip some of the girls were told by a group of men that they would run them over. It's horrifying but when you encounter even the most mainstream of media literature and reporting around British Muslims, you can see that this is the most systematic of inequitable conversations. One man is quoted as saying that he considered Muslim women to be 'traditionally submissive'. He is a former Prime Minister. Another said that women who wear burkas look like 'letterboxes and bank robbers'; those words were from our current Prime Minister.

Muslim Girls Fence does open up safe spaces where Muslim Girls can explore their feelings and reshape their own narratives. Reha confirms that the girls come alive in these kind of environments as they feel valued and engaged. The fencing, and the opportunity to participate in what has historically been an elitist male sport, gives the girls an appetite to do more, and to progress. Reha moots whether to introduce competitions that could offer an interim support stage for such progression - whether that is a MGF leaderboard of its own, an annual event or integrating aspiring fencers into clubs.

Reha also makes an interesting point about how the developing shoots of this specific project could have far-ranging ramifications. Through her work as well as her personal experience, she is convinced that we are not just talking about one 'fenced off' sector of society. Rather she chooses to identify the commonalities. It follows therefore that how to feel good as women is very relatable in a wider sense. "What British Muslim girls feel can be the feelings of Sikhs and Hindus too - every group has its struggles. If we encourage everyone to accommodate these conversations, we'll be starting to break down boundaries."

Practice, Public Imagination and Policy are the three areas where MGF potentially can help to make headway. Practice is the picking up of friendly, sporting arms at a grassroots level. Capturing the public imagination is done by having the story told loudly and proudly. Policy is effecting change in a political way where the right kind of 'levelling up' can be achieved. It can be done. We all stand in awe of Ibtihaj Muhammad, the first hijab-wearing woman to fence at the Olympics, winning a bronze medal at Rio. Ibtihaj speaks of a life filled with 'untold blessings and endless opportunities' because she was given the chance to pick up a sword in high school at the age of 13.

Reha remains optimistic. She's confident that sport and fencing can be unifying. Although much of the activity can be within an individual-to-individual fight scenario, the feeling of sportswomanship achievable within fencing breaks through and beyond. Reha's name itself rather poetically means 'freedom' - it is so apt for her work: where fencing can be the means of liberating many from invisible segregation and showing that fencing should not be fenced off.

More information about Muslim Girls Fence can be found on their [website](#).



THE FUTURE LOOKS MENTAL

“It’s ok not to be ok,” we’re told. OK then, but how are we meant to feel OK ... views on that, anyone?

Almost a quarter of us tell of suffering from panic disorder, melancholy or anxiety. At a time when depression is the largest single source of disability reported in the UK, as well as globally, Siân Hughes Pollitt talks to the academics who are going mental about physical activity and exercise in the young.

Imagine a time when you or your nears and dears are feeling low, anxious or depressed. You need to seek help. Local mental health services, your GP practice or talking therapists and telephone support networks are the obvious choices on the table aren’t they?

They might be now but might not be the first port of call in the not-so-distant future when we could find ourselves directed along to our local sports centre for a bit of movement as medicine in the correct dosage to get us back feeling mentally match-fit for the lives that we lead.

You may feel that you are not hearing anything here you didn’t already know –



Spearheading Study - Epeeist Lindsay Bottoms

that exercise is of course good for us all. Dr Lindsay Bottoms – a former épéist and Head of Centre for Research in Psychology and Sports Science at the University of Hertfordshire agrees. “Personally I think sport and exercise can help with everything but we need to change a mindset in the clinical world and prove that physical activity is beneficial.” What Lindsay is referring to is that the corroborative evidence for whether sport and exercise are good for mental health is surprisingly weak on the ground – especially in practical detail. Also any research has predominantly been carried out in studies of adults. So that is why the University of Hertfordshire is spearheading a study that will scrutinise the benefits of exercise in lifting mood in young people – between 13 and 17 years old – and specifically look at what level that physical activity should be set.

That study is entitled “A randomised control trial of energetic activity for depression in young people – The Ready Trial” (<https://readytrial.co.uk>). Claire Rourke is the study’s Clinical Trials Manager and she echoes what Lindsay says. “Yes we accept that exercise is good for you – that’s just obvious. But if you want to engage stakeholders then you need evidence to prove your point and that is why we are staging a randomised control trial that will examine what kind of exercise and, importantly at what kind of intensity, helps mental health.”

This is where the study, funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), starts to lift off the academic pages and into a more experiential zone. The study will have three arms and roll out exercise activity for teenagers under 18 in terms of high intensity, low intensity and ‘social’ activity. High intensity exercise has been proven to reduce inflammation in the body; and inflammation has been found to be a key factor in depressive illnesses. On the other hand, there is a school of thought that recommends low intensity exercise as a mood-enhancing tool. Then there’s the whole realm of board games – like tiddlywinks or such like – which could have a positive effect on socialising and energising individuals who find themselves feeling down.



Claire Rourke, Clinical Trials Mgr

The academics have hit upon a sizzling nerve-ending of the times. Far from being observers aloft in their ivory towers, they have connected with the issue from a very pragmatic point of view, wanting to seek and effect fundamental change. Claire says it is frustrating to see how overwhelmed mental health services are and how they are needing to turn away all but the very extreme cases, which then leaves a vast number of young people falling through the net. There is also a base of options to treat mental health that have been long since exhausted. Talking therapies can take a long time to play out in their effectiveness, medication is sometimes not appropriate – and that’s the list pretty much petering out there. There’s another factor too. Talking to and with teenagers is an almost unconquerable skill that many find hard to acquire and for that reason alone, they have become a group that have just been left to their own devices – literally; the mobile phones and computers that sponge up their spare time. So it is a testament to the academic rigour of the READY trial team at the University of Hertfordshire that they have not been cowed by the potentially complicating elements of looking at this cohort. Will the teenage males opt for high intensity full-on exercise, for example? No they don’t have a say – each individual is randomly allocated the activity without getting to choose something they already think they prefer. That way the ‘pure’ effects of the undertaking can be measured.



Georgina talking to fencers

The study is described as ‘robust and large-scale’ and will be conducted in three phases. It is currently at the feasibility phase, recruiting 81 young people before it moves on to the main trial phase looking at a group of over 1000 teens. Recruitment to the trial was stalled by lockdowns but the researchers have been busy getting referrals from GPs and from secondary schools where pastoral staff have been keen to connect with the project.

Lindsay and Claire talk about the need now to be creative in approaching teenage mental health. Of course, they are trained researchers and academics but also they are human beings who recognise, just like everyone else, the fundamental need to have sport and exercise in their lives. When this article introduced Lindsay as a former épéist, that was not entirely true. Lindsay did retire but missed fencing so much in the lockdowns, she decided to come back with the aim of training up for this year’s Veteran Commonwealths. “I have Crohn’s which is an inflammatory bowel disease,” explains Lindsay. “So I am always going to have moments of being depressed. Exercise and sport has kept me alive, helped me through any mental health problem – sport has been my lifeline.”

For her part, Claire loves dance-based exercise classes, enjoying the social aspect of being in a group. They both on a micro-level show the very purpose and significance of doing a research trial. Once the findings are published, such conclusions may allow us all to dial into sport and exercise in a more legitimate

way. We will be able to turn round to schools and workplace bosses and indeed any kind of setting and politely ask where their basketball court is and whether breakdancing is scheduled before or after physics on the timetable. Imagine being able to walk into any facility and asking “How many fencing pistes do you have?”

We are fencers and everything – however general – always leads us back to the piste. So by now you’re probably thinking what BF’s CEO Georgina Usher is thinking, and she welcomes the trial enthusiastically. “Studies like this are crucial to proving and developing a better understanding of the positive impact of high-intensity exercise like fencing on people’s lives. It is one thing to have a belief about the potential for positive impact and so many of us can already attest to a ‘lifesaver’ personal experience within our amazing sport. But it is another thing to have the data and evidence that allows us to consciously and systematically build improvements into the experiences we offer others particularly as we rebuild our sport.”

Going into 2022, it is heartening to think that we are seeing green shoots of growth that are growing at a pace that will ultimately make the world a happier place, and make that place happier through sport. It can perhaps be one silver lining of the pandemic that the growing anxiety amongst young people is now finding its way into our hearts and minds as a priority to be addressed in every way that we can.

Georgina further expands on how, when it comes to varying levels of intensity,



Boxing up to fitness



Fencing can be in every intensity

fencing might be ahead of the game. “So much of what we do at BF (whether through our social impact, grass roots or pathway programmes) is about providing (and helping others to provide) the right fencing experience at the right time, better meeting the needs of participants. From research like this we can start to identify how elements of fencing (from footwork games to technical lessons, to tactical sparring,) can be used in different ways and at different intensities to effect meaningful change in participant mental health. Remembering this isn’t just about the benefits from the physical aspect of our sport - we should recognise the social benefits of the structure of our sport which enable so many people to participate in different ways, whether volunteering on club committees, running events, coaching or refereeing.”

The findings of the study will be published in sports science, psychology and health journals and presented at conferences. The team will also hold events to share the research with stakeholders, the public, patients and local or national support groups.

The READY trial is being funded by the Health Technology Assessment funding stream of the NIHR (Reference Number: 17/78/10). The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

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THE WANDERINGS OF THE WILLIS

How Much Further Would You Go for World Cup Points ... along with the improbable statistic of a bye to the L32 and consecutively meeting two Armenians in the draw.

As much as The Sword newsdesk is overwhelmed with stories to fill the column inches, there's always space for a succinct, punchily entitled submission from everyone's favourite DT aficionado, Jon Willis.

We pick up the story of Jon's quest for easy World Cup points after a six-month injury break following a successful hip arthroscopy. It's January 2010 and Britain's self-styled 'world class epee fencer & international jet-setting playboy' has gained access to the Iranian Paradise known as the Beautiful Island of Kish following a minor misunderstanding at immigration ...

Upon arrival at the official competition hotel, my Australian and Irish colleagues insisted on going out for a walk to explore our new surroundings. I instead chose to stay within the safety of our triple-bed hotel room and watch a mixture of the 24hr rolling Al Jazeera news as well as a 'livestream' of paint peeling off the walls.

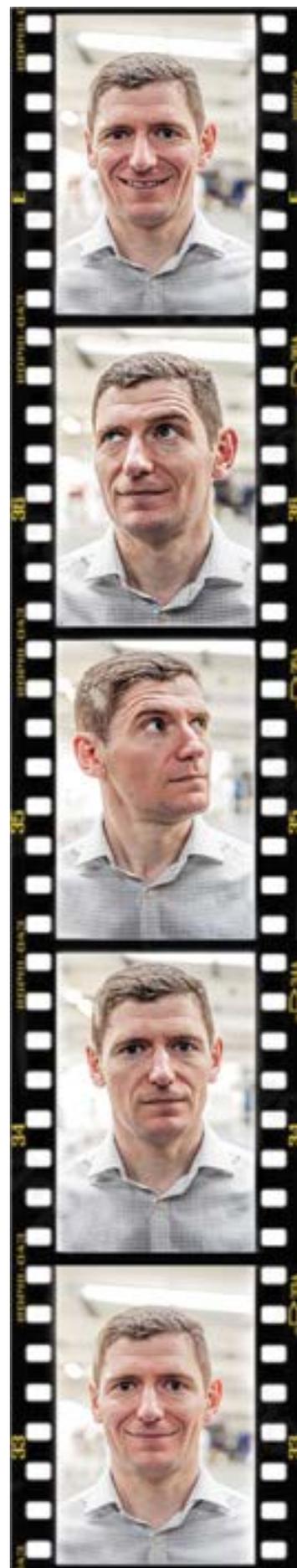
Later that evening, things started to change for the better. Not only did all my weapons

and kit pass the weapons control first time round but I got a look at the initial competition rankings where I was seeded 8th. For a senior World Cup, being in the top 16 at the start meant no poule matches for me and 'Hello World Cup points!' for just turning up.

Day one of competition was uneventful, especially as I was now the water boy and weapon fixer for my fellow fencers. My roommates both won enough fights in the poules to progress to the second day without the need for a preliminary DE match. With that, we three Amigos left the venue clutching a copy of the L64 tableau in our hands and a spring in our step.

Day two however was far from uneventful. Things didn't start well as my alarm clock didn't go off due to my phone being plugged into a power socket that was apparently 'just for show' and not an actual power socket. I finally woke to find a snoring Irishman in the bed next to me and the Australian nowhere in sight. Despite getting dressed faster than Superman in a phone box and running down to the hotel lobby in a time Usain Bolt would have been proud of, we missed the official transfer bus. "Not to worry," said a very helpful hotel receptionist, "I'll call you a taxi." Moments later the brother of the hotel receptionist turned up in something smaller than a Smart car. There was no time to lose. So - showing that we were of the Tetris generation - we expertly fitted two fencing bags into the boot and set off in search of a 'sports venue'.

Sadly, 'sports venue' was about as accurate as we could be to the driver, as we had left



the competition information, including the venue address, in the hotel room. Luckily for us, the beautiful Island of Kish is a relatively small place but we still got the full tour of all the sports venues it has to offer. Should you ever choose to take a little break on the Iranian paradise, I recommend both the tennis club, and the marina. The football stadium is a little small, but perfectly fine, and the golf course looked delightful. Unfortunately, none of these outdoor venues were hosting a fencing World Cup that day and with some expert sign language we finally convinced the driver to take us to an indoor venue. Upon arrival we realised in horror that we didn't have anything smaller than a fifty-dollar bill and the driver was not in the game of giving out change; not to worry though, the cost of arriving in time for the start of our DE matches - priceless!

The fencing venue was set up in the classic configuration with a splendid finals piste at the centre of four coloured quarters, carpeted in red, yellow, blue and ... beige. Who likes green anyway? As I had a high seeding and the event was small, I had a bye straight to the L32 where I started my campaign on the red piste winning a fight against a fencer from Armenia. I then had to wait several hours until my next fight where I found myself magically transported to the beige quarter of the competition to fight another Armenian. A second win saw me progress to the L8. Target achieved;



whatever happened now, I would walk away with at least 14 world cup points and a solid start to the season.

Still in the competition of course, and I returned to my faithful red piste less than five minutes later. As the organisers tried to catch up on a slipping timetable, I went up against Hughes Boisvert-Simard, the No. 1 seed from Canada who was over in Iran for the same reason I was - chasing easy World Cup points. He was looking to protect his world top 16 ranking before the World Cups in Europe started, where the only way to be sure of making the second day is not to fence on the first.

As I was convinced that I was going to lose this one, I went into the fight with a

carefree attitude only to find myself 14-10 up halfway through the second period. This certainly wasn't in the plan which showed as he pulled back four hits in a row to level at 14-all. The referee called us to the line for the final hit and I stood there trying to work out how I was going to explain this epic episode of bottling to my dad when I got home.

Whenever in doubt though, I like to go for my favourite move. While it had failed me the four hits previously, it's a well-known fact that the fifth time is the charm. Sure enough, expecting me to do something different to a move that had just lost me four hits in a row, he attacked. I whipped out the old circular-sixte parry and scored the winning hit. Hughes and I had a post-close-match-man-cuddle following the salute. "I can't believe it", he started, "only an idiot would go for the same move five times in a row." Well, he clearly didn't know who he had been dealing with.

I suspect many people reading this are hoping we've reached the end of the story. We haven't. An incident packed medal match, post-competition TV interviews and a mad dash to the airport are still to come!

Jon leaves us wanting more but we'll only have to wait until the April issue to find out how this story ends!



WORKING IN PROGRESS

With Ian Lichfield

Siân Hughes Pollitt

We see Ian at British Fencing events; he pops up on our Zoom calls, on our WhatsApp groups and is the face behind many a SmartSheet form. He takes a moment to tell *The Sword* more about his role.

Who am I? Well, I'm a dad and a fencing coach and I work for British Fencing, doing loads of stuff that's beyond my job description. It's interesting! Officially I am a Project and Programme Manager for Education. Part of my role is to help develop university fencing, but also get athletes from the performance side to retain a focused direction by going to universities that take fencing seriously.

Within the first two weeks of being in this job, I had the opportunity to change the ranking scheme and selection policies that needed to be reviewed. I wanted to make the pathway look clearer, which is why we now have one selection document, not multiple ones. We have one ranking scheme, not multiple ones.

That meant I then started connecting with people, understanding the sort of war stories coming out of some of those areas, and also linking it back into the university space. So there wasn't an U23 ranking scheme, for example. That now exists and people joining fencing at university have got a better idea of how they can get themselves on the national rankings.

It helps fencers think longer-term. Many fencers give up too soon, because they don't recognise the journey. Often high-performing juniors would take four to six



years to transition over to senior events. Some fencers do that sooner but they're outliers. The problem is that people benchmark themselves against those outliers.

Seeing that high performing young fencer, they say, 'Well, I'm not good enough. I'm never going to catch up with them. They're so much better than me', and then they finish fencing. But in reality they're just on a different learning journey.

Ever since I started coaching, I tend very much to look at performance rather than the result. Quite often the performances will indicate when the result will come. As a coach, I can support the process to increase the probability of fencers getting the performance and the result, but I try not to take it personally, which is what I've seen a number of coaches do. The emotional reactions that they have at the side of the piste can cause the fencer to feel that the coach's expectation falls onto them. That to me can be quite damaging to the athlete.

Though I have personal goals, I don't want the fencer to be concerned about what my goals are, or what I believe their performances could be. I often cross my arms when I'm coaching and a few times people have commented that I look intimidating. The point is, I'm doing it to

hide any body language or gesture. I don't want to give the athlete any visual cue or make them think that I'm disappointed in them. Most athletes know whether they're performing well, or that they've made a mistake. They don't need me to tell them that. Nobody goes to work deliberately wanting to mess things up. And athletes don't intend to go to competition and have a bad performance.

Life - destiny in a way - has always brought me back to coaching, even if I've wandered away from it. I was really reluctant to take the job for British Fencing, because I wondered whether it would be too much if I was coaching as well. On top of that, if you make a mistake in fencing, everybody knows about it. Making mistakes in that environment would present quite a challenge for me. On the plus side, I thought I had some positive ideas which could help British Fencing become better. And that's why then there was no point in me sitting on the outside.

But it means there's practically no time to switch off. Getting ready for the 2022 European Cadet and Junior Championship is only eight weeks after Christmas. What's more, we're getting good performances in the cadets and juniors, but it's after that where we need to influence and support. It's about making sure the senior spaces are positive, so that fencers see fencing beyond the age of 19.

I suppose in this sense I'm quite pragmatic. I'm also quite a hopeful and enthusiastic person. I can see positive change and I like to influence that change. Many times, I've been approached by fencers that are vulnerable and who ask for my support. The outcomes have been amazing. I think caring is probably where people wouldn't necessarily see me, but I definitely am compassionate with my athletes. That's massive for me - just always making sure that they are okay.

ROB CAWDRON - LISTENING TO CRICKETS

Siân Hughes Pollitt speaks to BF's ADP Project Officer and Sabre Lead about looking backwards and forwards into 2022

'Bob! bach!' It turns out my favourite Welshman in fencing isn't a Welshman at all!

My first memory of Rob Cawdron is of him some years back blithely striding around Sports Dock with the Ddraig Goch (Welsh flag) knotted around his neck. It turns out however, rather than a Caped Celtic Superhero promoting The Land of my Fathers in the Docklands, he was being vicariously patriotic on behalf of his fencers competing that day - some of whom happened to be Welsh. I hear a cry go up from all the Home Nations - let's grab him!

Too late. BF snapped him up first. They know Rob's like this - a man for all seasons, for all folks. You can rely on him to make the world of difference through the smallest of stuff: visiting your club, setting up ADP camps, working out ADP timetables, devising training schedules, helping with sabre selections ... any number of things. Oh and later this year, he'll be in the commentary box at The Commonwealth Fencing Championships (CFCs).

"I always love listening to commentary", says Rob referring to many sports he tunes into as well as fencing, but particularly the joy of listening to the cricket. "A commentator should give the person watching a reason to keep watching. It's about telling stories that are unfolding on the piste." Rob elaborates that it's of no appeal to him to be negative or critical in his commentary and that he'll be reporting on it as 'a bit of a fan'. Certainly he talks with eager anticipation for the fact that the 2022 CFCs will be an all-weapon jamboree of Cadet, Junior, Senior, Veteran and Wheelchair fencing. So we can expect

his running analysis to be redolent of the warm, sunny afternoons spent in the small beauties of batting, bowling and all-outs rather than the longer, empty silences filled by the distant chirruping of insects.

Oh I wish he were Welsh! But no, Rob was born in Harlow, Essex. His relish for getting to the Commonwealths and mixing it up with a cauldron of nations is that Rob can indulge his New Year's Resolution for 2022 which is: Get. Out. More. Having spent a childhood before he was nine years old globe-trotting - namely Paris, New Jersey and Bermuda, he settled into fencing whilst growing up in Halifax, West Yorkshire. At Leicester University where he tells me he 'studied History badly', he felt an immediate pull towards the fencing club and an instant sense of belonging. Spurred on by the enthusiasm of his own coaches to get Rob into coaching himself, he started teaching fencing at schools in and around Halifax. He then moved to King Edward School and Shakespeare's Swords before developing his part-time role at British Fencing in the ADP into a full-time position.

Rob loves the environments he's helping to create within the ADP. Places and spaces where fencers and coaches come together and express themselves - feeling challenged without feeling overwhelmed. He's noticed how fencers have become a lot more 'gamey' in how they talk about their fencing in terms of conceptualising its competitiveness. "Their connection with fencing is very much in tune with their world now. When I was a fencer, my only source of information was my coach. These days young fencing athletes can access pretty much any senior match fenced. Consequently they start to experiment and play around with stuff more - it's almost as though they're at a huge digital skate park in their imagination." It's a lovely image which Rob says never seems to leave the fencer even as they get older. Although they may get more selective, they remain in the habit of deconstructing the sport.



Rob Cawdron Looking Ahead

Rob confirms that when the ADP gives the fencers the space to do that, they make sense of fencing in their own time and in their own way which is "really cool to see".

Into 2022, and Rob says it's as rewarding to be working with coaches now, understanding what can make their fencing worlds better, describing them as "the most passionate and creative people". Rob's wish to get out more is not just rooted in being able to breathe in some fresh air but concretely in visiting clubs and talking to those coaches and their fencers and parents on their own terms - that way breathe in some new ideas himself.

"For me it's not really about getting my head around the big stuff, it's always the little bits that stick with me and help form my thinking and decision-making. I don't have a clue about what's going to spark something and that is the way I love to work."

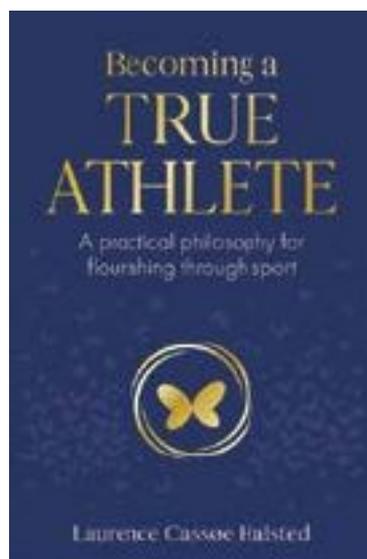
And with those words, the Welshman, who was never a Welshman, is heading with gusto into the new year.

REVIEW

Becoming A True Athlete - A practical philosophy for flourishing through sport

Author: Laurence Halsted

Karim Bashir



When Laurence asked me to review his book personally I was slightly nervous. My first concern was about the value of so-called “self-help” books. I’ve read a few with the goal of self-improvement whilst still achieving my life goal and only one stuck with me, Steven Covey’s “The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People”. Reading it became an annual ritual for me between Christmas and New Year. Nothing else has come close since.

The second worry was my strong belief that a philosophy that encompasses “well-being” or “being kinder to yourself” would blunt the ruthlessness required to achieve at the top level in sport.

A challenging starting point, to say the least. Solution? Get someone else to review the book – enter Will Deary! For those of you that don’t know Will, he’s GB’s leading men’s sabre fencer who came from the Truro stable. He’s been part of the World Class Programme and in recent times has been living and training in Germany. His aspirations are to achieve at the top level of sport but he’s also a reasonable chap who is completing his university degree and is always searching to do things better. So, having read the book myself, I set about

asking Will a number of questions and here is what he had to say.

Before you read the book, did you have any preconceptions about whether it would help you or not?

There are stats out there suggesting that a large percentage of those that read “self-help” books finish them in a worse place than they started. You have to be in a certain place in order to gain real value from them. I certainly don’t want to be told that I’m living my life badly. Laurence handles this very well by bringing in a personal touch and that makes it real.

The first part of the book lays out the negative outcomes of a “results-only” driven approach. Can you relate to that?

The loss of UK Sport funding hit us very hard. It ended some people’s fencing careers. I certainly think that if we’d read this book before that happened, we may have been able to cope with that better. I wouldn’t say that it would have saved anyone’s fencing career though.

Overall, what are your impressions of the book?

I really enjoyed it. If I’m completely honest, I found the first part of the book a little



Laurence Halsted

repetitive but there is good reason for that. I have been part of the True Athlete Project for some time now so I understand and fully support the philosophy. The value in the early part of the book is making sure the reader understands why a shift in thinking could benefit them.

I found the final part of the book (the practical section) the most rewarding. I recognised a lot of myself in there and was pleased that some of my approach is similar to what Laurence is advising. There were a few things that really stood out for me. I don’t need to be so hard on myself and should really appreciate what a privilege it is for me to be able to do what I love doing. I also see a great deal of value in taking the time out at the end of each day to note what you can be thankful for.

That subtle mindset change from “I’ve got to go training” to “I get to go training” is something that I believe will have a fundamental effect. This will have a positive effect on my mental health, especially during training.

Tell me about your thoughts about the importance to athletes of “well-being” before you read the book and whether/how your understanding changed as you read it.

I developed an app with Chris Buxton for schools to monitor the sports performance/activity of their pupils. I truly believe in us all being more in tune and aware of our wellness or well-being. Every day when I was at school a register would be taken and I always thought that more could be made from that time. With today’s technology it would be so easy to automatically record how much sleep each pupil had the night before and measure their mood. It would be so much easier to read or even predict patterns of behaviour and the onus would no longer be on teachers, who more often than not have already got too much on their plates.

You don’t have to sell me on how critical I think this is and Laurence demonstrates in the book his thoughts on the matter.

Marcus Rashford’s campaign for improvement in school nutrition is mentioned in the book. Is Laurence on a similar campaign here?



Will Deary #TeamBizzi

The book highlights that we have a degree of influence on those around us. I'm passionate about addressing and improving peoples' wellness, hence the app. Laurence clearly is also and this book will be seen by many. Neither of us can compete with the amount of influence Rashford had but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't try.

The book suggests that if athletes become "better" people, they will become better athletes and perform at a higher level. Did the book convince you of that?

I think the book has a far bigger reach than athletes. For me it's about improving your performance so could be applied to almost any walk of life. I was reminded of a great book written by Matthew Syed called "Bounce". It was sports-related but spoke to a much wider audience. I think "Becoming A True Athlete" speaks to that same audience.

For athletes; I think you first have to understand the distinction between being respectful and being nice. When I fence anyone, I want to beat them 15-0 because I respect them enough to not want to let them into the fight.

Would you recommend this book to fellow athletes (or will you be keeping it to yourself to give you an advantage)?

I'd recommend this book to everyone, especially younger fencers. Not everything will chime with everyone but I think there is something for everyone in the book. If nothing else, it makes you think about your values and that alone is good, even if you disagree with the underlying philosophy.

I particularly liked the practical section and will refer to that on a regular basis. As Laurence says, you have to take the time to implement this into your life. The quotes at the beginning of each chapter and the summaries at the end are also useful for jogging your memory.

Finally, do you believe that this book can contribute to making you a better performing athlete?

Yes. Realising the bigger picture beyond my sporting career will make me value this time more so than otherwise. Respecting myself and others can only make me better.

As expected, Will gave a fair and balanced view of "Becoming A True Athlete". As he says, there's a bit of groundwork to lay in the first two parts of the book but the

reward is the practical guide at the end. Furthermore, if this is the first book you read on the subject of sporting philosophy, the foundation has to be laid.

This is not a bible and doesn't pretend to be but I agree with Will, that this book goes well beyond the sporting field of play. Laurence is well ahead of the curve on this one. My two concerns have been addressed. Becoming a true athlete doesn't mean that you have to lose your ruthlessness. Adopting this philosophy allows you manage your competitive mindset without being disrespectful. Furthermore, a deeper appreciation for the "bigger picture" combined with an appreciation for your opponent, could allow you to perform at a higher level by lowering your anxiety of losing.

10 out of 10 - a book that everyone should read at least once.



REVIEW

Samurai Strategies for Fencers

Author: Quincy Day Rabôt

Lawrence Burr, OBE

This review is very apt considering that I was writing it during the Tokyo Olympics whilst watching the progress of the various fencing team and individual events - with particular interest on the epeeists of course! With a book title like this, I was drawn to see whether or not the Japanese and Chinese teams might be using a

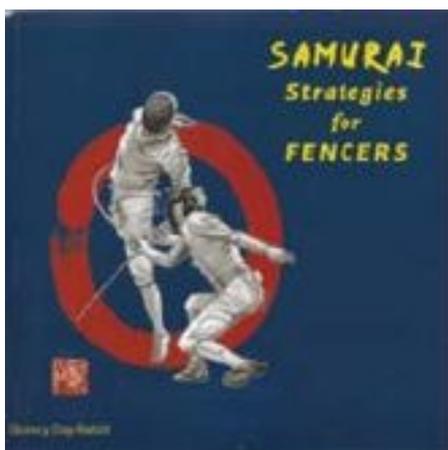
different style of swordsmanship that could be identified with the Samurai Warlords of the past and if "strategy" really was playing a part in winning. Well, it certainly may have helped Sun Yiwen (China) in claiming the gold in the Women's individual epee and Cheung Ka Long (Hong Kong) in the Men's Foil; but, as our editor's final post-Olympic report showed, China was also well on track with a fourth placing for

both their Men's and Women's Team épée. It would have come as a huge surprise to some of the Samurai Warlords if they had seen the women's sabre (a 6th place in the individual and 7th place in the team) battling in the fencing arena on the same

footing as men. Despite Disney's depiction of "Mulan", I have not read any reports of Samurai women warriors. Times have certainly changed since the days of Sun Tzu!

I once remember discussing with the sports editor of the Daily Telegraph back in the 70s, the reasons why his paper had suddenly stopped reporting the results of the AFA National Fencing Championship results along with all other fencing matches, including the Combined Services Fencing Association competitions at the Royal Tournament with which I was involved at the time. His answer was somewhat surprising. Fencing was suddenly being looked upon as one of the "Martial Arts" and because of recent incidents involving serious injuries on the streets, caused by weaponry more closely associated with Bruce Lee and the Chinese Kung Fu movies, the paper did not want to be seen as supporting such a dangerous pastime. The fact that fencing was still one of the original Olympic events and very much a popular sport had evidently passed him by!

So, it was with some amusement that I picked up Quincy Day Rabôt's latest book that places fencing slap bang in the centre of the martial arts debate once again. His book launches the modern fencing competitor into the world of some of Japan's most renowned swordsmen and strategists over the past centuries, whilst linking their words of wisdom to a 2500 year old military treatise entitled "The Art of War" by the great Chinese military theorist, Sun Tzu. For many, this will be a bit of a mental leap when placed alongside other more recent books by the likes of Ziemeck and Steve Paul who promote technique, fitness and agility as winning tactics in a fencer's armoury. But here, Quincy is trying to take fencers beyond these "Western" ideas to focus on developing combat strategies to win, based on knowing both yourself and your opponent. These strategies are distilled from the writings of a variety of East Asian strategists - regularly quoted throughout the book - starting with Sun Tzu. If one strips away the rather terse and aphoristic style of this ancient Chinese general, his observations become very relevant to a fencing match. Ponder the following; "If you know yourself and know your opponent, you need not fear the result of a hundred



battles. If you know yourself and not your opponent, then for every victory you will suffer a defeat. If you know neither yourself nor your opponent, you will succumb in every battle." Ring any bells?

This is Quincy's second book relating to fencing and Chinese philosophy (see his "The Fencer and the Zen Body") and is probably the better of the two in that it provides a number of interesting insights into how to approach one's opponent, not only on the physical level but on a neuropsychological (look it up on Google!) one as well. He combines his own numerous skills as a martial arts instructor, fencing coach, certificated sports injury therapist, osteomyologist and sports training instructor to good use. He makes that causal link between what lies behind the somewhat spiritual world of the ancient samurai warriors and today's performance athletes. He delves deeply into the various treatises on swordplay across the centuries and across the globe; on the one hand quoting Leon Bertrand and Aldo Nadi and in the next, Miyamoto Musashi, 1584 - 1645, (author of the "Book of the Five Rings") and Yamaoka Tesshu, 1836 - 1888, the last Japanese Samurai (not to be confused with Tom Cruise!).

The book is laid out in five parts that roughly correspond to Musashi's "Book of the Five Rings" depicting various areas (Scrolls) of strategy that would have been known to every Samurai warrior - Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and the Void - and then cleverly describing their relevance to the modern fencing "warrior" for obtaining victory in his or her bout. I must admit that at first sight, it appears somewhat difficult to comprehend at a single read. However, as time went on, I started going back and rereading certain sections that I

deemed relevant to my next competition. For instance, "The Scroll of Water", aptly describes five different types of fencers one meets on the piste and was surprisingly illuminating - I found myself trying to identify my opponents to see whether they were "the aggressive, the clever, the technical, the calm or the masterful" and then working out how a Samurai would have dealt with each in turn with his "combat mind". Not too sure that I was impressed by the comment that if I met a "masterful" fencer, my efforts would be woefully inadequate!

There is lots of good fun to be had in reading this paperback book. It is totally different from anything on the market at present. Despite the fact that it relies on fascinating black and white calligraphy rather than colour photos of coached fencers to break up the text, I really consider that there is much to be learnt in these chapters to help the modern fencer. They provide an understanding of how to approach each and every modern competition, whilst also equipping fencers at all levels with the mental technology to create an effective "Grand Strategy" which would help to achieve victory on the piste. As Quincy states in the final chapter, every competition should be approached as if it were a military campaign. But then again, as Kimura Kyuhou (1704 - 1764) wisely points out, "When you come to cross swords with the enemy, the time for thinking is already past.". Be warned!



Lawrence Burr, OBE

"Samurai Strategies for Fencers" is published by SwordPlay Books and is available through Amazon priced at £14.85.

DENNIS HUNT 1931 - 2021

Siân Hughes Pollitt supported by Marcia Stretch

The flood of tributes on social media following the death of Dennis Hunt show the kind of character that the fencing world has lost. We will certainly miss him.

Although Dennis' first love was sabre, he had taken up foil in his late teens at Bristol Fencing Club among other activities such as Sea Cadets - or 'mucking about in boats', as he put it. He was also a great swimmer and tennis player yet his all-round capabilities in sport were dominated by his success in fencing at major national and international competitions. He equally turned his skill as a fencer to coaching - both in foil and sabre, and he was responsible for guiding many fencers, including his own son Martin, to success on the piste, which he coupled with teaching fencing students at Badminton and Downside Schools.

Dennis' own enthusiasm for competition infused his love for coaching - to last until he was nearly 90 years old. Whenever he was competing at an event, he was well-known for rushing in at the very last minute, picking up his sabre and setting to work. It was a successful strategy on many occasions, and Dennis was the winner of the South West Sabre championships nineteen times - a record that still remains to be beaten. In his veteran fencing years, he continued to win podium plaudits, including the gold at the European Championships as well as silver and bronze medals.

Dennis' rich fencing CV took him around the country and around the world, competing in The World Masters individual and team events in Europe. On home soil, Dennis won the Welsh Open, as well as county championships where he was not only content winning in sabre but in foil too, as seen in his multiple victories in both weapons at the Excalibur inter-county championships. For many years, he was an England team member in the Quad match contested between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. On one occasion he and his son, Martin fenced in the same Quad team, making history as the first son and father to do so.

He was as keen at his coaching as he was at his fencing and Dennis coached his son



Dennis Hunt

to win the title at the British Junior Sabre Championships, as well as to a silver medal at the A grade in Dourdon. His coaching career had started at Salle Roeder (formally Phoenix) in the 1960s as a voluntary coach, and Dennis had turned professional by the early 1990s. He qualified as a sabre coach with the British Academy of Fencers and went on to qualify as a Maitre d'Armes. Numerous names emerge when inspecting Dennis' coaching list, and he trained many young, as well as veteran, fencers to national and international standard. The impressive reel of names bears testament to Dennis' dedication to trying to centre the individual - and not the lesson - in his coaching.

Dennis' own fencing career went on well into his veteran years. He was a gold medalist at the European Championships, Liege and a silver medalist in Moscow in 2003. He took the bronze medal at the World Vets Championships in Hungary, as well as in championships in Denmark and Martinique. Dennis was also British National Vets Age Group Sabre Champion three times. Former British Academy of Fencing President, Professor Liam Harrington has fond memories of Dennis on the same BAF team at the 2010 Fencing Masters World Championships. He recalls a teammate who was "clever and convivial, fond of telling long-winded jokes that were almost sure to be unrepeatable in polite conversation." He also remembers Dennis as a very efficient and intelligent sabreur whose qualities were "a knowledge and a love for the sport and a reputation as a very good coach always putting his pupil first."

Dennis' legacy will live on in our memory as a great coach, a great fencer and, most importantly, as a true gentleman. The

outpouring of loving memories of Dennis smoking a cigar or a pipe, and hiding his tracksuit under a three-quarter length camel coat put the final brush strokes to a portrait of a legendary fencing figure. He will be greatly missed by all who were fortunate to know him and to have been taught by him.

Dennis died on 24 October 2021 after a long and painful illness. As well as some funny and fantastic memories, he leaves behind his son Martin, his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren, as well as his partner of over thirty years, Marcia who looked after him to the end.

"Dennis sported his trademark three-quarter length camel hair overcoat with a flower in the lapel and the ever-present pipe in his mouth. I have only one memory of that first encounter with Dennis (apart from the coat) and that is of being stunned by a prime parry riposte with a circular cut to chest - Zorro himself could not have delivered a more spectacular hit - that felt like I had been cut in half. From that day we remained lifelong friends."

Jim Philbin

RESULTS



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

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

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by den pollitt

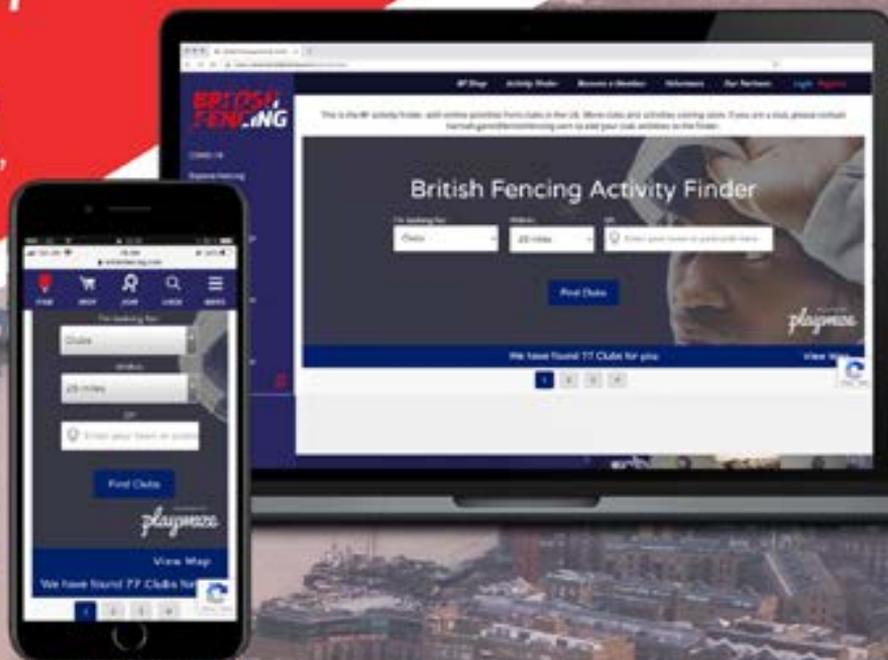
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