

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
JULY 2022

*Bringing It
Together*

ATHLETE A-Z PP5-6

MBE FOR CEO P9

SEASON REVIEW PP10-15

**BRITISH
FENCING**

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WELCOME TO THE SWORD



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Images within the magazine depict moments with differing sanitary protocols.

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Next deadline: 14 August 2022

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



I am bringing it.

Well what I actually mean by that is that I am trying to bring it together. In an editorial way, in this issue, I am bringing together the random, wonderful, special, incredible, new and old moments of fencing to grasp the bigger picture.

It's not just me who can bring those elements into some kind of meaning. First, it's you - our fencing community - who are the ones who give those moments. Alongside me, at The Sword, Siân - an unstoppable creative whirlwind - with the help of contributors and guest writers, all make it a strong and energetic collective effort.

This summer edition, as always, coincides with the season-ending World Champs. This year there is the bonus of the Commonwealth Fencing Championships in London keeping the season going into August. Majors are a prelude for a natural point of reflection to make sense of the past cycle, and to see how we have grown and developed - whether as an individual athlete, as a coach, as a club or a community.

As the Commonwealths loom, I take a trip back down memory lane into my own fencing history, sharing how much the Championships meant and still mean to me. I used to look back on my career in terms of having failed in getting a second Commonwealth medal - having gone after trying to gain that gong twice. But having

collected a box of memorabilia from my parents' loft, I opened a suitcase of old polo shirts and tracksuits in my national colours. Immediately seeing things through a different set of eyes, I realised what I'd achieved - having acquired a more precious stuff than metal. I was in the very proud possession of special and unique memories that could never be taken away from me by anyone. What is perhaps most valuable of all is that I am sharing a journey that is very personal to me with all of you. Though maybe even better still ... I continue to make such memories in the sport - just from different viewpoints. Once a fencer, always a fencer - they say. It's perhaps not true for everyone, but this is a feeling that fencing can give us. It's also a feeling we make for ourselves through the many experiences we have.

As I've been delving into how recollections can bring the here and now to life, Siân has busied herself with looking at aspects of development. Her article on Dusty Miller's innovative coaching practice workshops involving performance, and specifically clowning, is filled with fun. We learn about 'First Followers' and how getting on board with the right ideas in the right way contributes to bringing the whole thing together. Dusty's vision is complemented by Steve Kemp's whose thoughts and efforts are trained on facilitating the needs of the individual while still thinking of the wider group. He talks and walks us through another flexible model created through multiple unique versions of the same template, while Ian Lichfield also starts joining the dots with views garnered from recent experience. All pieces cover one of BF's core values - that of honesty. Whether it's via coach education or competitive season planning, the journey is an easier and smoother one if we are honest in our ways of working and about our goals.

If that covers the 'Fencer-Focussed' and the 'Development-Driven' components of BF's development approach, then I settle on the

final part of the picture and give my views on what's the point of being 'Competition-Supported'. I can't help but wonder that with all the things I have lived, seen and heard in fencing, how would I approach things now?

We have seen a fresh take on competition-planning too with the first integrated British Senior National Championships. It was special to see a B Competition running alongside the main tableau to allow for a second bite of the cherry in the elimination rounds. In addition, we had the joy of welcoming para fencers on piste in Sheffield, only very shortly after responsibilities for para fencing were transferred to BF. Long may these fuller, thriving, bubbly, atmospheric, lively and very professional, truly all-fencing-dedicated tournaments continue!

The Senior Championships were held over the Platinum Jubilee Weekend where BF also received some news, both excellent and surprising. It was the date we learned of CEO Georgina Usher's MBE award from the Queen for Services to Fencing. Sword Guest Writer, Laurence Burr pens an article with knowledge and enthusiasm on what led to Georgina's accolade.

And finally to others who inspire awe. Read about the fencing mum who has been spearheading the effort to bring Ukrainian fencers and their families here so they can continue to fence while unacceptable hostilities continue in their homeland. That lends even more meaning to 'bringing it all together'. On that note, putting the welfare of one and all front and centre is the foundation of any sport; BF Safeguarding Lead Liz Behnke talks to Siân about exactly that and how essential it is to stand together, acting together, so that we can bring it ... together.

Enjoy the read!

PS: Congrats Ma'am!

Exclusive! Read the new BF Commitment on pp30-31.

ATHLETES A TO Z

Waking up to Welfare. Siân walks the landscape of well-being in sport

Photos: © denpollitt

In July 2020, a number of British gymnasts, and parents of gymnasts, made allegations about mistreatment within the sport of gymnastics. Some concerns alleged that British Gymnastics had failed to deal appropriately with complaints. In response, UK Sport and Sport England appointed Anne Whyte QC to undertake an independent review into the issues raised. This follows on from the Sheldon Report, initiated in 2016, which delivered its findings in March 2021 concerning allegations of severe abuse in football.

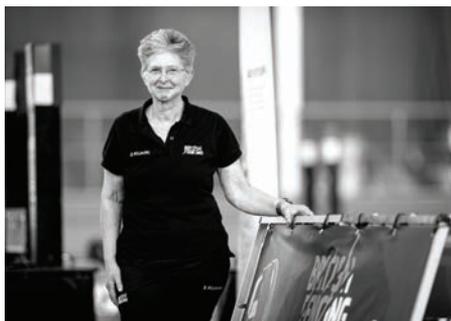
It was Nelson Mandela who said, “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

How should we then regard the responsible adults who are tasked with looking after children and young people in the microclimate of sport?

But, wait. That’s you and me. Us. That’s all of us.

As it currently stands, there is quite a spectrum of thought and deed in the fencing community when it comes to the welfare space. On one hand, there are a good number of volunteers who are fully-trained welfare officers or many who have undergone Safeguarding and Protecting Children training. On the other hand, there are some who think this role is only for ‘others’, and steer clear of its demands.

“As soon as many of us step into a sports environment, we seem to forget that



Liz Behnke

we’re dealing with children.” So says Liz Behnke, Safeguarding Lead for British Fencing. Liz herself has held various senior safeguarding and governance roles in Taekwondo, Gymnastics, Rowing, Table Tennis and Snow Sports and is more than well-versed in what welfare means and how it should translate to the sporting environment.

Liz is an cheerful, approachable personality. As we talk over video-call, she inserts a background photo from one of her trips to Jordan and later from a three-month long trip to South Korea when she had volunteered at the Winter Olympics and Paralympics. Both physically and metaphorically she is guiding me through unfamiliar worlds - assessing the topography of well-being and well-being’s evil opposite number, abuse.

Liz points out that the overwhelming number of abuse cases are emotional, not physical or sexual. These are the instances where there has been an often undetected movement from good to borderline to poor practice, resulting in cruelty and damage. It is perhaps because of the lack of outright physical violence that people are reluctant to report them.

The same day as I speak to Liz, I complete the UK Coaching Safeguarding and Protecting Children course. The course leader, Adrian is a dedicated sports professional who has coached across many sports, including fencing. He is a tad frustrated that on the course before mine, an attendee had scored him zero out of ten for having spent too much time on mental abuse.

People grading mistreatment so it fits their own set of criteria can be in itself an obstacle to understanding as well as their need to put themselves first rather than the child in question. “What is often frustrating is that people contact me anonymously to alert me to wrong-doing”, sighs Liz. “I rarely need to give away who my source is”, she continues. “But I do need to know

where the information has originated so I can trust it, get the necessary details and then take it to where I need to.”

Liz says that people tend to erroneously group themselves into one of two categories when it comes to abuse - either ‘bystander’ or ‘enabler’ and feel that it is the lesser of the two wrongs to be in the bystander camp. “The truth is that if you opt to be a bystander you are also choosing to be an enabler of abuse. You are letting it happen and become normalised.”

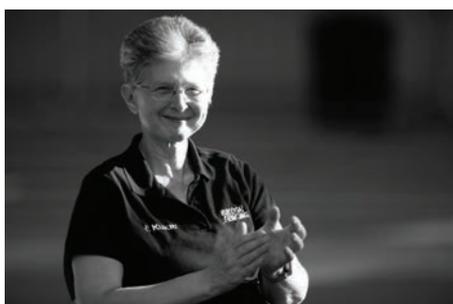


Happy To Talk It Through

So what if, too scared about anonymity for themselves, nobody were to get in touch with BF Safeguarding about an issue?

“The child would continue to suffer and struggle”, responds Liz simply. What if one person were to get in touch? “Then we can get care and support around that child and make sure they get exactly what they need and is going to help them.” What if three hundred and fifty people were to get in touch about the same issue? “No different”, says Liz with her characteristic directness. “All it takes is one person to let us know there’s a potential concern to mean that changes can be made for the better.”

Liz has a strong belief that any lack of care is linked to prevailing attitudes. “In my view, there is the commoditisation of children and athletes in our society”, expounds Liz. “People see the child as a commodity that they have invested in and that investment must yield a return.” Sometimes Liz has parents contact her, saying they have a welfare concern, who are actually raising something completely



Applauding Good Practice

different. “There are a good number who let me know that there’s a problem because their child just lost or didn’t get selected. It’s worrying as those parents could be heaping damaging and straitjacketed expectations on their child rather than allowing them to use sport as one of the best learning tools of life to develop resilience.”

Liz understands that it’s human nature to crave success, but thinks now is the time we start to redefine what success actually looks like. “Adults in and around sport sometimes find it difficult to see where the maximum capacity of any one athlete lies. They need to tell themselves that they don’t need to push the child but they do need to protect them. The child will learn what they need to learn from sport and form their own vital, transferable skills.”

In discussing welfare with Liz, countless cases of severe abuse invariably surface. Grooming, sexual assaults, court cases, intimidation as well as details of how legal loopholes may have allowed such cases to oxygenise.

Such cases are headline-grabbers and I ask Liz which one most stands out to her. She doesn’t name one per se, and slightly alters the axis of my question. “The most heartbreaking moments are the cases that come in years afterwards where a fifty year-old is still deeply traumatised by damage from their treatment as a young athlete. Confidence issues, depression, eating disorders or OCD - these are devastating impacts that can last and blight a lifetime.”

I feel that I can put names to some of these cases. So probably can we all. These aren’t theoretical Athletes A, B, C to Z. These are sport’s young humans who deserve good experiences. All it takes is for us to ask ourselves how they see the world around them, and if it’s failing them ask ourselves what can we do so that - in Liz’s

words - they can ‘be safe, have fun and feel welcome’ in the sport they love.

Re-read that phrase; it forms a cornerstone of BF’s thinking. CEO Georgina Usher explains. “‘Safe’ is not just about making sure we’re wearing the right equipment, it’s about safeguarding the welfare of all our participants, embedding good safeguarding principles and practice into every aspect of our sporting offer. ‘Welcome’ means being inclusive, helping people overcome the perceptions they might have of our sport, so that everyone in fencing feels they can truly ‘belong’, irrespective of ability, age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion. And ‘fun’ - that might be a small word but really matters. It’s obvious why.”

To help the whole sports community navigate such priorities, UK Sport has launched Sport Integrity, a new independent disclosure and complaints service pilot, to support athletes, coaches and all support personnel within the Olympic and Paralympic high-performance space across the UK.

Sport Integrity provides a confidential reporting line and an independent investigation process to deal with relevant allegations of bullying, harassment, discrimination, or abuse, and to allow sports to take the appropriate disciplinary action.

Sport Integrity incorporates a ‘safe-space’ for athletes and members of the high-performance community to raise concerns; a confidential and independent ‘preliminary assessment’ to ascertain details of complaints; a confidential and independent ‘full investigation’ to establish the facts relating to a complaint, as well as access to trained mediators in resolving disputes.

With safeguarding come considerations of equality. Sport Integrity also forms part

of the high-performance community’s response to the ‘TRARIIS Review’ into racism and racial inequality in sport, following its recommendation that an independent, impartial investigatory body be established.

Georgina welcomes the timely initiative. “This is an important next step ... underpinning the responsibility of all in performance sport to deliver training and competition environments which uphold and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity for all participants.”

Liz describes how lucky she is to work with a sports CEO like Georgina “who has the rare quality to be as passionate and as dispassionate about fencing so that she can make the best judgements in the individual’s best interests.” She also talks about how, now sport has begun to interrogate its past, it’s “making great strides” talking glowingly of athlete-centred philosophies “because through the love of sport, we can all become better people - that’s what it should be about.”

Like most things that work well, welfare and safeguarding are areas that come down to all of us. I’ll loosely re-quote philosopher John Stuart Mill, and the wording that found its way into the statement made by the Football Association in response to the publication of Clive Sheldon’s report into abuse in the sport in March 2021.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.”

Reporting a concern to British Fencing can be done via <https://www.britishfencing.com/welfare-zone/report-a-concern/>

Forthcoming Welfare Officer Training Dates:

11th July 6pm-9pm
13th August 9am-12noon
19th October 6pm-9pm
13th November 9am-12noon

Forthcoming En Garde Ready Training Dates:

8th September 6pm-8.30pm
10th December 9am-1130am

HELPING UKRAINE

“Every day Mykolai asks me what time we are leaving to go fencing. It’s clear fencing is his focus. Fencing is what he loves.”

Sian speaks to one of the British fencing families who have reached out to share their home with their Ukrainian counterparts.



Sian Beautyman

Sian Beautyman lives in deepest Wiltshire with her epeeist son, Cador. Three times a week at least, Sian undertakes a three-and-a-half hour drive to and from Knightsbridge Fencing Club where Cador fences. She further supplements this itinerary with trips to Pentathlon GB training in Bath and Abingdon School Fencing Club. So if we were ever looking for somebody to be at the helm of helping Ukrainian fencers displaced by the conflict in their homeland to come over and still keep practising their sport, we need go no further than asking this already busy person.

When Sian speaks to me, she is sat in her car outside Bath University where Cador and their Ukrainian fencing guest, 16 year-old Mykolai are attending a camp with the modern pentathletes. The last-year Ukrainian Cadet epeeist has been staying chez Family Beautyman for two-and-a-half weeks along with his mother, Alla.

“They don’t want to be here,” cuts across Sian gently. “They want to live as a family in

Ukraine. Mykolai’s elder sister is still there and has just had a baby. But they had to split up as Mykolai is not allowed in Britain if he’s unaccompanied.”

Still, Alla and Mykolai are more than grateful for the hospitality and Sian says her greatest concern is to give the Ukrainian mother and son a really good experience. She clearly makes everything work well under such pressure. Mykolai is used to fencing five times per week in his native country in addition to competing every weekend. Fortunately, Tamás Kovacs and Julianna Révész at Knightsbridge, with the support of the whole fencing club, as well as Alan Knowles at Abingdon School have, Sian confirms, been “very accepting”, welcoming this fencing guest with open arms into their salles.

“There’s been lots of support in the wider communities too. The council offered to give them computers to keep in touch with Mykolai’s school in Kyiv and with their family and friends, many of whom are now scattered across Europe. When our neighbours found they were coming, they printed out A4 sheets welcoming them in Ukrainian and put them up in all their windows. When we drove them up our lane, it brought the biggest smile to their faces.”

Sian talks glowingly of her admiration for Alla who spends a lot of time every day polishing her English and walking around the village trying to integrate into the language, country and culture as much as she can. Near where Sian and Cador live, they get together with other families who have welcomed Ukrainians into their home. But I wonder about life for teenage Mykolai, and ask Sian what he will do over a long three-month summer break from his online schooling?

“I’ve signed up him and Cador to a national pool lifeguarding qualification so they can work as pool lifeguards. Also we’d planned for Cador to do a summer epee camp in Vittel in France. The club there has raised money so that Mykolai, and another Ukrainian fencer, can join in.”



Ukrainian Fencers at Knightsbridge

Behind these fairy-tale outcomes is Sian – working flat-out to raise the profile of what Ukrainian refugees need and to get the funding and support to make it all happen. “We have been successful in finding five families to host Ukrainian fencers so far and we are still working to place three fencing families in Britain. There is a [Smartsheet](#) on the BF website that people who want to express their interest in hosting can fill out. Then I can get in touch with them and see what will be best.”

Alla has told Sian that currently in Ukraine there is a shortage of glass. So many windows have been broken and shattered that supplies, which would normally have been sourced from Russia, have run out. The Ukrainian people have howling wounds in both their material and emotional worlds. When Mykolai’s elder sister was in labour, there were missiles whizzing overhead. Sian then tells me of a fencer from Kharkiv who cried inconsolably when she heard that her fencing club had been bombed. The place that she loved to go and train had been razed to the ground.

We chew over the British Fencing maxim that fencers should ‘be safe, have fun and feel welcome’ in their sport. Sian immediately responds, “Certainly safe takes on a completely different context. Fun through fencing is a lifeline to them. As for feeling welcome – I see that vibe, I feel it. With Alla and Mykolai, we could have tried to do this on our own but it is so much easier, so much more manageable and so much nicer to do it with everyone’s help.”

BRITISH SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS 2022

Honesty. Respect. Excellence - Call it Attitude

Photos: @denpollitt

The Platinum Jubilee Weekend was auspicious in hosting the first ever integrated British Senior Championships, where B Competitions ran alongside the main tableau, with The GB Cup and Para Fencing Championship Tournaments bringing competitive energy and focus to the room.

Here are some highlights and links to the Championship report and results.



Read the results report [here](#).

Click [here](#) for full results.

GEORGINA USHER, MBE

*"In the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2022, it has been announced that British Fencing's CEO Georgina Usher has been awarded an MBE for services to fencing."
British Fencing News 1 June 2022.*

Firstly, a huge congratulation to our Chief Executive Officer, Georgina, Usher, on her so well-deserved honour from the Queen in this very special Jubilee Year.

Taking over from Peter King in April 2014, having been on the Board since 2012, Georgina was to reinvigorate British Fencing post the London Olympics. The savage cuts in National Lottery and UK Sport funding after the Games and the ever increasing pressure to "popularise" what was still seen as a sport that was out of reach for the many, led to difficult decisions by the Board and its non-fencing Chair. The need for an experienced CEO that came from a highly-successful fencing background became vital at this stage. From the very start, the challenges came fast and furious - the need to find sponsor partners, the legacy dictats of the 2012 games, the balancing of all six fencing disciplines in the face of much opposition, the need to modernise our outdated training regimes and to place our sport firmly in the middle of a changing cultural and social environment. Add to this mix, governance, financial audits, constantly changing health and safety regulations, safeguarding, a pandemic of global proportions, two more Olympic cycles and a full international calendar, it is a wonder that our CEO has had time to follow her own fencing career, engage socially with friends and colleagues and most importantly to raise a family!

Maybe, at this stage, we should look at what exactly the MBE is all about and why this honour has been bestowed on Georgina. The initials stand for 'Member of the Order of the British Empire'. [There



are some who would like to see the words Empire taken away from the title, but for now it stands as a tribute to all those who over the centuries have contributed to making Great Britain what it is today.] The rank of "Member" recognises outstanding achievements or service to their community which have had a long term, significant impact. Honours are decided upon and announced by the Government Cabinet Office twice a year; at New Year and on the Queen's Official Birthday in June. They are then presented to the recipient by members of the Royal Family throughout the year at ceremonies known as 'Investitures'.



So who starts the ball rolling for this Honour? Well, normally it is a group of friends and/or colleagues who have watched the person concerned and been closely associated with them over a period of time. Family members don't count! They gather letters of support from a few others who know her and who feel that that person is deserving of public recognition. They cannot dictate what type of honour - that is up to the Cabinet Office.

Then a submission is prepared and the waiting starts. Sometimes this can take up to two years, but if the case is worth the honour then it will happen. The recipient is normally informed about a month before the announcement but is bound to secrecy until it is made public - perhaps the hardest part of the whole business! The authors of

the submission are always confidential and so Georgina may never know who it was that put her name forward. In my opinion, that makes it all the more special.



But what really makes her honour special for me is knowing that in Georgina we have someone who is quite unique. She has a passion for all things fencing and a love for its entire community. In her own words, she sees fencing as having been a positive force in her own life and has committed herself to "giving back to the sport in the way all coaches, referees and volunteers gave to me. I inherited a sense of legacy from a previous generation. I was shaped into a fencer and fencers like to do things the right way with a respect for rules and values".

Her credentials, which include being in the top 16 Senior World Ranking for Epée, ten times winner of the Senior Individual Epée National Championships and current President of the FIE Women and Fencing Council, say it all.

As our President, Hilary Philbin MBE, said on hearing of her award:

"It is wonderful to see Georgina, British Fencing and the sport of fencing recognised in this way. Georgina has had a lifelong involvement with so many aspects of our sport and continues to serve the sport and the fencing community (both in the UK and internationally) with dedication and passion."

I heartily concur!

*Lawrence Burr OBE
Vice President, The Epée Club*



THE SEASON SO FAR

Karim Reviews the Season and Looks Ahead to the World Championships

Photos: Augusto Bizzi #BizziTeam

What a strange season it's been so far. It's a post-Olympic season which means some of the top fencers are either taking a rest or not in full training. That said, the short Olympic cycle to Paris 2024 means that those breaks are perhaps a little shorter than they might normally be. Covid is still playing its part and means again that the season will be incomplete and travel restrictions are preventing some countries from competing at some events.

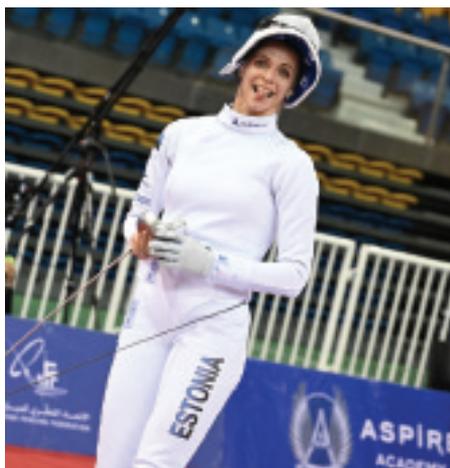
Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prevented athletes from both countries plus those from Belarus from taking part fully in international events. Furthermore, the events planned to be taking place in Russia have had to be moved. There is no doubt that Russia was a key player on the international scene and the ramifications over their overnight removal from all sport have been significant.

I reiterate what I wrote in the last issue. The athletes from all three countries (and, in the main, the administrators) are innocent parties in all of this and are having to sacrifice a lot. If giving up on being able to compete isn't bad enough, I was extremely saddened to hear about the loss of life of some Ukrainian fencers in defence of their country. I hope that some day they will be recognised.

With the truncated World Cup and Grand Prix schedule complete, here's my review of the season and who to look out for at the finale.

Women's Epee

The season started well for France and Estonia. At the first World Cup in Tallinn Jacques Andre Coquin (FRA) claimed the second World Cup gold of her career, 9 years after her first. A third World Cup medal from Candassamy (FRA) indicates she's back in the form she showed in 2014 and Louise Marie made it a 1-2-3 for France after breaking through last season. Isola (ITA) completed the podium with her second senior medal after winning her first before the global lockdown.



Lehis (EST) - First GP Gold

Estonia's 1-2-3 came at the next event, the Doha Grand Prix. Olympic bronze medalist, Lehis claimed her first GP win beating teammate Differt and podium debutant in the final. Kirpu completed the Estonia trio with her fourth GP medal, three of which she has won in Doha. Candassamy showed consistency with her second consecutive podium.



Candassamy (FRA) - In Form

These fencers then moved on to Barcelona where Song (KOR) claimed her first World Cup win beating Candassamy in the final. Mallo claimed bronze making her the fourth different French fencer to make the podium, returning to the piste after having had her first child last year. Murtaeva (RUS) completed the podium winning her first senior circuit medal after finishing fourth at the Olympics. She is one to watch

but is currently banned along with her Russian teammates.

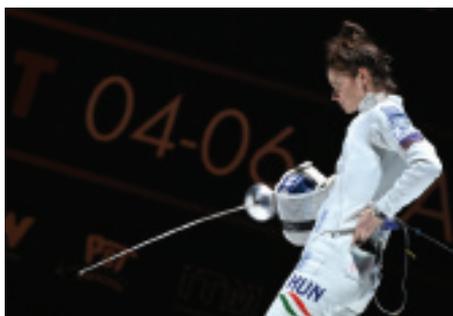
Santuccio (ITA) secured her first senior circuit win at the next event, the Budapest Grand Prix. She beat another podium debutant Kun (HUN) in the final as Choi (KOR) and Lehis (EST) claimed the bronze medals. This event is a particular favourite of Choi's who has won three of her five GP medals there.



Team Korea - Tough Unit

Choi bettered her Budapest bronze by winning the Cairo Grand Prix. It was her second GP win and nine years since her last. Mallo (FRA) showed consistency by winning her second GP medal - a silver. Song made it a good event for Korea by claiming back-to-back GP medals in third place. The biggest surprise though was the other bronze medalist. And not because she's not talented enough. The surprise is that Holmes bronze medal finish represents her first ever senior circuit medal outside the Pan-American Championships.

In mid-May the women's epeeists moved on to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates for what proved to be the strangest of events. On the Friday after the preliminary rounds were completed, the President of the UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan died and the country immediately began a period of three days of mourning. Work was suspended in the public and private sectors forcing the fencing event to be cancelled as a mark of respect.



Kun (HUN) - Rising Star

The final event on the circuit before the major Championships was a World Cup that took place in Katowice. Choi (KOR) made it back-to-back wins from Santuccio (ITA) and Kun (HUN) who both picked up their second medals of the season. Candassamy (FRA) continued her run of consistency, collecting the other bronze medal, her fourth podium appearance of the season.

Five different winners from six completed events suggests that the field in Women's Epee is quite open. However, the Koreans have improved in recent times, especially Choi who was the only fencer to win two circuit events. France also impressed with five different fencers making the podium - most notably Candassamy who has climbed to fourth in the World with her run of results. Anna Kun (HUN) has also jumped into the top 10 and now regularly threatens the podium along with Alberta Santuccio (ITA). China's Sun hasn't competed this season but one can't rule out a return to the piste for the reigning Olympic Champion. Someone we know has retired is Romania's Ana Maria Popescu. The three-time World medalist's senior medals span over a decade, nearly two, during which she claimed eight Grand Prix and ten World Cup wins along with Olympic silver medals in Beijing 2008 and Tokyo 2020. What a career!

Only three team World Cups were completed each with a different winner -



Team France - Take your pick

Russia, France and Korea. Italy were the only team to claim two podium spots but competition within the French team will make them a threat at the European and World Championships.

Men's Epee



Limardo Gascon (VEN) - London to Paris

The men's epee season began in Berne where London 2012 Olympic Champion Limardo Gascon (VEN) claimed his fourth World Cup win and his first since 2014. He beat 2019 Heidenheim winner Bardenet (FRA) in the final with reigning Olympic Champion Cannone (FRA) collecting bronze alongside Santarelli (ITA) claiming his second World Cup podium.

Borel (FRA) picked up his fourth Grand Prix crown at the next event in Doha. The losing finalist was Gally (FRA) who claimed his first ever senior circuit medal. The bronze medal went to two Italians, Di Veroli and Vismara, who both made their GP podium debut.

The last international fencing event to take place in Russia before the ban was held in Sochi. It was a first senior medal and win for Cuomo (ITA). He beat Cannone in



Borel (FRA) - 2018 World Champion

the final as the Frenchman picked up his second medal of the season. The bronze medals went to reigning Olympic silver and bronze medalist, Siklosi (HUN) and Reizlin (UKR) respectively, their fourth and fifth World Cup medals.

Limardo Gascon was at it again in Budapest claiming his first ever GP win and his second crown of the season. He beat 22 year old Nagy (HUN) who was making his senior podium debut. Cimini (ITA) in bronze picked up his first GP medal alongside another first-time GP medalist Vouroninen (FIN). The Finn last stood on the podium when he took bronze at the 2017 Vancouver World Cup.



Siklosi (HUN) - Defending Champion

The Challenge Monal or Paris World Cup is a big one in the season for epeeists and the 2022 edition produced a debut winner in Lopez Pourtier (FRA) to the delight of the home crowd. It was also his senior circuit podium debut as he became the fifth different French fencer to make the medal matches. Defeated finalist Kurbanov (KAZ) picked up his second World Cup medal. Bardenet (FRA), in bronze, picked up his second medal of the season sharing the position with Koch (HUN) who made his third appearance on a senior World Cup podium.

The third and final epee Grand Prix took place in Cairo where Borel (FRA) struck again for his fifth GP crown. It was a second



Stankevych (UKR) - Debut Winner

consecutive final for Lopez Pourtier (FRA) and a second podium for Siklosi (HUN) who collected bronze. Fava (FRA), also bronze, became his country's sixth podium finisher of the season.

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Champion Cannone (FRA) added the Heidenheim World Cup winners trophy to his cabinet at the next event - another "big one" for the men's epeeist. Two time African Champion Elkord (EGY) collected his first ever World Cup medal with silver as Cimini (ITA) and Koch (HUN) made their second podium visit of the season with bronze.



Team France - Cannone, Borel and...

Stankevych (UKR) collected the final individual gold of the regular season by winning the World Cup in Tbilisi. He knocked out four of the Japanese team on route to his first win and only got taken into double figures once. It was consecutive podiums for silver medalist Koch (HUN). Ito became Japan's first and only circuit medalist in bronze which he shared with Reizlin (UKR).

You'd have to fancy Borel and Cannone to form part of the French team but the other two spots are far from certain. Hungary also looks to be in good health with Koch, Siklosi and Nagy all getting medals during the season. A fired-up Limardo Gascon is also looking strong as he prepares to qualify for Paris 2024, while Italy are reshaping at a blistering rate too.

Team events at the Majors will be interesting. With Korea not firing on all cylinders yet, there's an opportunity for Hungary, Italy, Germany and perhaps Switzerland (who won in Tbilisi) to make a bid for the podium. France, though, have to be team favourites.

Women's Foil

The women's foilists began at the World Cup in St Maur and Volpi (ITA) bounced back from a disappointing fourth place at the Olympics to beat the Tokyo Champion Kiefer (USA) in the final. It was a first senior circuit medal for Dubrovich (USA) and a third for Palumbo (ITA) who shared the bronze medal spot.



Volpi (ITA) - Hatrick

Volpi (ITA) made it back-to-back wins at the next World Cup in Poznan, this time beating Harvey (CAN) who was claiming just her second senior medal after bronze at the 2018 Shanghai GP. It was a third circuit medal from Chen (CHN) in bronze. She shared the position with 20 year old Faveretto (ITA) as the 2020 Junior European Champion made her senior podium debut becoming one to watch.

Next up the Guadalajara World Cup where Volpi (ITA) claimed a hatrick of consecutive wins beating Kiefer (USA) for a second time in a final this season. It was a debut podium for 30 year old Calissi (ITA) who claimed bronze along with Harvey (CAN) who was making her second podium of the season.



Sauer def Ebert - All-German Final in Belgrade



Kiefer (USA) - World #1

The Belgrade World Cup followed and Sauer (GER) claimed her first ever senior circuit win, beating teammate Ebert (GER) for the best women's foil result Germany have had for some time. Batini (ITA) picked up her ninth World Cup medal with bronze, sharing the place with serial podium visitor of the season, Kiefer (USA).

The Tauberbischofsheim World Cup followed and Olympic Champion Kiefer (USA) was back on top of the podium showing her pre-pandemic consistency has gone nowhere. The result also elevated the American to World number one. In the final, she beat Blaze (FRA) who claimed her first senior medal in six years. In bronze, Cipressa (ITA) became the sixth Italian to make the podium this season and former highly-ranked junior Miyawaki (JPN) joined her there with her first senior medal.

Seoul replaced Shanghai as the destination for the next Grand Prix, and Kiefer (USA) made it back-to-back wins, beating Harvey (CAN) who was making her third visit to the podium this season. The bronze medalists were also returning to the podium with Sauer (GER) making her second appearance and Volpi (ITA) her fourth.

Leading into the zonal championships and the Worlds, Volpi (ITA) and Kiefer (USA) are in fantastic form. They head into the business-end of the year as favourites for medals at the majors and look likely to continue their rivalry for some time to come.

The result in Belgrade would have done German women's foil a great service. Back at the 1988 Seoul Olympics they had a



Harvey (CAN) - Rising the Ranks

clean sweep in the individual tournament and defended the team gold they'd won four years earlier. Italian national coach Giovanni Bortolaso seems to be having a positive effect but they need a stronger third fencer if they are to make a run at Paris 2024 qualification.

It's also been a good season for Harvey (CAN) perhaps spurred on by teenage teammate Guo, who is already a presence on the senior circuit and Ryan, who are (at the time of writing) all in the World's top ten. Italy also continues to impress with no less than six different medalists this season as new Head Coach Stefano Cerioni completes his first season in the job.

There are some missing names from this season's podium results. Errigo and Thibus haven't appeared yet but I suspect they're deliberately taking it easy in training after Tokyo 2020. They'll be back up there I'm sure. Politics aside, Gracheva (nee Deriglazova) is noticeable by her absence.

Men's Foil

The season consisted of four World Cups and one Grand Prix for the men's foilists and began with the Paris World Cup. Reigning Olympic Champion, Cheung (HKG) made a winning return by claiming the first title of the season beating Luperi (ITA) to silver, his third World Cup medal. Teenager Emmer (USA) impressed with a debut podium performance in bronze alongside Foconi (ITA) who was collecting his thirteenth World Cup medal.

Cairo held World Cup number two of the season and it was a debut senior podiums for the winner A. Borodachev (RUS), silver

medalist Mylnikov (RUS) and bronze medalist Filippie (ITA). Not to miss out, Shikine (JPN) also took bronze - his first ever World Cup medal.

If you want an example of an athlete whose development thrived during lockdown, then look no further than Marini (ITA). He took his maiden World Cup title in Belgrade beating experienced teammate and 2011 European Champion Avola (ITA) into silver medal place. Former Junior World quarterfinalist Giacon (NED) collected bronze along with Iimura (JPN) as both made their debut podium appearance.



Cheung (HKG) - Olympic Champion

The athletes and entourage moved on to the Plovdiv World Cup as Foconi (ITA) claimed his fourth World Cup win beating 2016 Olympic Champion and Tokyo 2020 runner up, Garozzo (ITA) in the final. Marini (ITA) made it a 1-2-3 for Italy, collecting his second consecutive podium in bronze with Szemes (HUN) making his podium debut. No one would have predicted that this Hungarian Junior would have gone that far.



Marini (ITA) - New Sensation



Centre Stage Foconi (ITA) - Predictably Strong

The regular season finished at Seoul where Marini claimed his first ever Grand Prix crown, his second win of the season and third consecutive podium. 2019 Shanghai GP bronze medalist Choi (HKG) collected his second GP medal with silver. Foconi (ITA) made his third podium of the season with bronze alongside podium debutante Chastenet (FRA).



Emmer (USA) right - Joins USA Team

Six Italians made the podium through the season and you have to say not only has Foconi continued his fine form but Marini has put himself on the team for now at least. That Borodachev and Mylnikov made the podium for Russia before the ban shows they have the class to make it at the top. In fact, men's foil is in rude health at the moment with teenagers Emmer (USA), Iimura (JPN) and Szemes (HUN) breaking through to podiums this season.

Where are the other USA fencers - Meinhardt, Massialas, Imboden and Itkin? It's been a while since one of them has been on the podium. Will we be seeing something new from coach Massialas in the team event at the PanAms and the Worlds? It looks that way!

Women's Sabre



Georgiadou def Gkountoura - All-Greek Orleans GP Final

The season began with a Grand Prix in Orleans, France for the women's sabre circuit. Greece started the season with a one-two as Georgiadou (GRE) grabbed her first senior medal with gold, beating Gkountoura (GRE) getting her first GP medal, in the final. There were GP podium debuts from Sheveleva (RUS) and 2020 Olympic team bronze medalist Yoon (KOR).

The next event in Tbilisi saw Queroli (FRA) pick up her first senior circuit win beating Gkountoura (GRE) who had made back-to-back finals. 2016 Olympic Champion Egorian (RUS) took bronze confirming her aspirations for Paris 2024. She shared the position Gregorio (ITA) who collected her eighth World Cup medal.

On to the Plovdiv World Cup where former Russian fencer, Bashta (AZE) claimed her first senior medal with the win. She beat the reigning Olympic bronze medalist in the final as Apithy-Brunet received World Cup medal number twelve. Gregorio (ITA) sealed a second successive bronze - her first two



Bashta (AZE) - Best Career Form



Apithy-Brunet (FRA) - Podium Regular

medals in five years - along with podium debutant Vongsavady (FRA).

Bashta (AZE) followed up her excellent Plovdiv performance by winning again at the next event, the Athens World Cup. She beat Martin-Portugues (ESP) in the final as the Spaniard picked up her first senior circuit medal. Balzer (FRA) collected her second World Cup medal with bronze and her first since 2017. Former highly-ranked cadet Matuszak (POL) completed the podium, with her first visit.



Team Japan - Olympic Legacy

The circuit moved to Istanbul, Turkey for another World Cup. It was a sixth World Cup crown for Apithy-Brunet (FRA) who beat teammate Poupinet (FRA) in the final. It was the first senior medal for Poupinet and means she joins a group of strong French fencers bidding for a team place for their home Games. The bronze medals went to 33 year old Kozaczuk (POL), who was claiming her second senior circuit medal and first for 15 years, and Martin-Portugues (ESP), who didn't have to wait longer for her second podium appearance.

Hammamet, Tunisia was the venue for the next event where Emura (JPN) claimed her first World Cup win and third medal. Georgiadou (GRE) claimed silver and her second medal of the season (and her career) whilst Apithy-Brunet (FRA) climbed

to the top of the World ranking with bronze. Somewhat out of the blue, Kobayashi (JPN) was the other bronze medalist as she made her podium debut at this level.

The final circuit event was the Padua Grand Prix where Bashta (AZE) continued her excellent season with her third win. Japan earned their third and fourth individual medals through runner up Takashima and Emura who shared bronze with Queroli (FRA) claiming her second podium of the season.

Looking ahead to the Worlds, the big question is who France will field. If they go straight down the World rankings, the team will be Apithy-Brunet, Queroli, Balzer and Noutcha. Lembach's experience could see her feature but she only returned to the piste in Padua and didn't make the 64.

The form of Bashta (AZE) has been incredible. She's made the semi-finals three times this season and on each occasion went on to win. Now ranked second in the world, she is certainly one to watch. The progress of Japan continues too. With three of their fencers claiming medals this season individually they are serious contenders for medals in Cairo.

Kharlan (UKR) only returned to competition in May, making two 16s. That means that she has dropped out of the top 16 in the World rankings and will be one to avoid in the poules at the World Championships.

Men's Sabre

The season began with the Orleans Grand Prix where two-time Olympic bronze medalist Kim (KOR) got off to a winning start and showed no sign of a third retirement. He beat Curatoli (ITA) in the



Kim (KOR) - What retirement



Bazadze (GER) - Debut Win at Home

final who claimed his sixth GP medal. Oh (KOR) recovered from what he'll consider a disappointing Olympic Games to collect bronze adding to his four GP gold medals. Yoshida (JPN) completed the podium receiving his first senior circuit medal at 29 years old.

Bazadze (GEO) continued his form of the past couple of seasons to claim his first senior circuit win at the next World Cup in Tbilisi. He beat Ibragimov (RUS) in the final who claimed his seventh World Cup medal after a 3 year break from the podium. Kim (KOR) showed consistency with his second podium of the season and thirteenth World Cup medal. He shared the position with Apithy (FRA) who is by far the leading French fencer and may need to rely on individual qualification for Paris 2024 - or a host nation place.

Three-time Olympic Champion Szilagy (HUN) made his return to the piste after Tokyo 2020 with a winning performance at his home World Cup in Budapest. Curatoli

(ITA) was the losing finalist but showed consistency like no other Italian fencer to collect his eighth World Cup medal. Kim (KOR) and Oh (KOR) shared the bronze medal placing and also demonstrated that they are amongst the form fencers this season.

Madrid was the next stop on the tour where Oh (KOR) claimed his fourth World Cup win beating Curatoli (ITA) in the final as the Italian claimed his third silver medal of the season. Bazadze (GEO) made his second podium appearance of the season with bronze along with serial season medalist Kim (KOR).

The final event for the men was the Padua Grand Prix where three-time Olympic Champion Szilagy (HUN) took his second gold of the season. He beat Gu (KOR) in the final whilst Apithy (FRA) and Bibi (FRA) shared bronze.

Korean fencers have picked up eight of the twenty individual medals available this season. This remarkable performance



Szilagy (gold), Curatoli (silver), Kim and Oh (bronze) - Stellar Budapest GP Podium



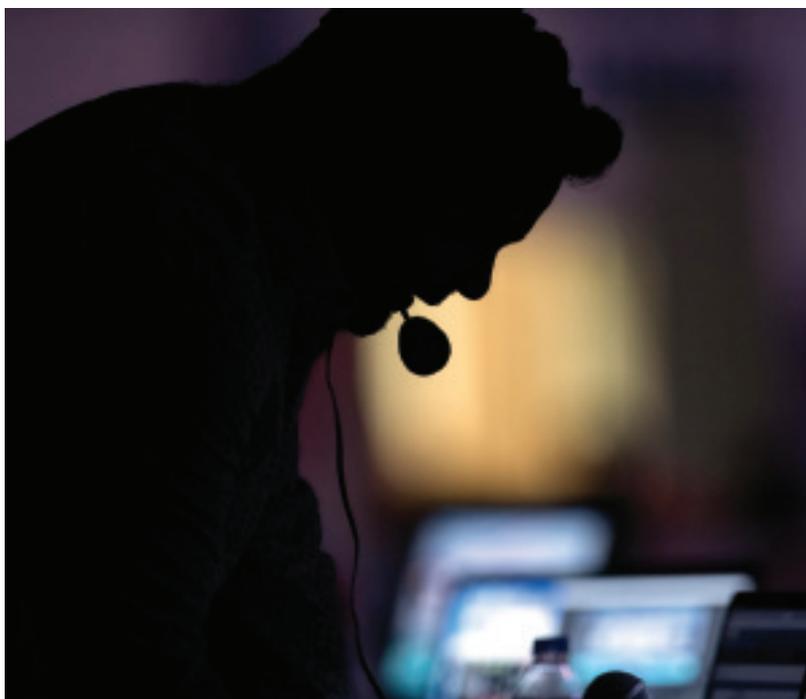
Team Egypt - Medal Hopes

across three fencers, Gu, Kim and Oh makes them a real podium threat in the team and individual events at the Worlds.

Curatoli (ITA) has also been in cracking form this season but is the only Italian to have made an individual podium. The other individual to look out for is Bazadze (GEO) who broke his duck by winning in Tbilisi and has been consistent all season.

Notable absentees from the podium this season are the two American's Dershwitz and Homer plus Pakdaman of Iran. It's quite possible that they are all taking a post-Olympic break in training but they have been competing on the circuit.

Other than men's foil, this discipline is where we could see host nation medallists. Whilst Amer, Elsisy and Samer haven't made the podium this season, I expect them to be contenders in Cairo.



Fencing World Championships, Cairo - 15-23 July 2022.

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FENCING WITH THE PARAS

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Since April 1st, 2022, the responsibility for para fencing in the UK has been transferred to British Fencing. Being able to welcome many more people into fencing and support them on their journey in our sport fulfils a long-term objective for BF. This expansion in participation and inclusion also represents new opportunities for activities and involvement from fencing clubs and coaches.

Para is the Greek for 'with' and, from local club participation to GBR Athlete Development, the work to put para and able-bodied fencing side-by-side has already begun.

Creating a welcoming and inclusive space is key to the development of new para fencers. GBR para fencing athlete and Olympic medalist, Dimitri Coutya discovered fencing at a young age. He credits the provision of equipment and early encouragement as the spark that ignited his glittering international, Paralympic Games medal-winning athlete journey – a life's work that, he says, started with taster sessions. 'Fencing really appealed to me. When I was younger, I loved movies like Star Wars and Pirates of the Caribbean and then when I moved to secondary school in 2009, fencing was a games option there. The school was incredibly supportive. They bought a frame and people would fence against me. I started once a week initially, then did the Chichester Open in 2010 and went to the UK School Games in 2011. I was



Para Equipment

spotted and invited to monthly training for a year or so and seeing the squad training was really inspiring. I started fencing internationally in 2012, competed in Rio at the 2016 Olympics and moved to Bath to become a full-time athlete. Tokyo last year was a highlight of my career."



Competing With The Paras

Dimitri and his team-mates train full time on the UK Sport funded English Institute of Sport's (EIS) World Class Programme (WCP) at the University of Bath. As the EIS is funded to deliver the WCP, it falls outside the scope of the responsibilities of BF, but Dimitri's early positive experiences of fencing give some guidance as to how our clubs, coaches and community can establish purposeful yet fun training environments for para fencers.

For anyone wishing to get deeper into wheelchair fencing, the International Wheelchair and Amputees Sports Federation (IWAS) has made an 'Introduction to Coaching Wheelchair Fencing' video series, which aims to provide insights and information for coaches and athletes who are just starting the sport. The videos show how coaches from able-bodied and wheelchair fencing can use or adapt their skills to coach wheelchair fencers. For new athletes it also shows how to improve their fencing. The videos cover the history of wheelchair fencing, an overview of classification, rules, equipment. You can watch the series of videos [here](#).

There's more information too on British Fencing's Para Fencing Zone. The Zone features articles and information from specialists like Viv Mills – a wheelchair fencer, former international athlete and coach. Viv has advice to offer anyone

who is apprehensive about their ability to include para fencers. "When you encounter people with disabilities you may feel anxious, worried you might say or do the wrong thing, perhaps offend the person, by using incorrect language. It's okay, your reaction is normal. I was exactly the same before I became disabled, but I am going to give you some pointers to help."

Point Number One for Viv is that 'wheelchair fencing' refers to the method by which the sport is played, not the manner by which the fencer gets about. Some disabled fencers will not want to fence from a wheelchair so don't feel that you have to force them to. Some, for example amputees, may be able to fence quite adequately in the traditional manner.

Equally important is not to make assumptions about what a disabled fencer will or won't be able to do. Bebe Vio (Italy) is a quadruple amputee, but she is also a multiple European, World and Paralympic champion at foil.

Then talk to your fencer, and find out what they can do. Show them without a weapon (by arm and hand movement) some of the basic movements they will need to make, and see if they can replicate the movement, or how close to the movement they can get. Work with what they have got. They may be able to develop the basic movement over time.

Remember that all disabilities are different, so even though you may have two individuals with the same or similar injury, the way they are affected by the condition may be very different.

Also take into account that disabled people may attend a fencing club in their wheelchair and not be accompanied. Such people will be able to look after themselves but may ask for help with certain things. Wait for them to ask. If you see them struggling, ask them if you can help and wait for their response.

Disabled people who are accompanied by a carer/parent may need help with some things. Always speak to the disabled person and ask them how you can help.



Para Fencing Comes to The Senior British Champs

Don't talk over their heads to the carer/parent, even if it is the carer/parent who gives the response.

The final pointer is one of the trickiest and that is to stand back and watch while a disabled person struggles with something. It is essential for the disabled person to learn how to adapt to what needs to be done, and even though it is painful not to step in, sometimes it is necessary. For example, someone with only one functional hand will initially struggle to plug in, and put on their mask, but only through trial and error will they learn how to do it on their own.

Even so shortly into this new era, some British Fencing affiliated clubs and centres like Touche Fencing Club in Milton Keynes, Leon Paul London, Bristol Blades, and the University of Durham already have wheelchair frames and host para fencers.

BF will be working with clubs and regions to host 'come and try' opportunities for people with disabilities to experience wheelchair fencing. These experiences will not be limited to those disability categories that fall under Paralympic fencing. To help people find sessions, BF will be working to create a network of clubs to signpost to participants. Clubs can also welcome para fencers to GB League fixtures - which is the fun, recreational league for all levels.

It can still be daunting for some clubs new to para fencing, and they may wonder whether they have the resources to welcome para fencers - especially in regards to all the equipment and whether para fencers require a frame. Viv says, "You won't need a frame in the initial stages. When a wheelchair fencer first attends, they can learn the basic hand movements and basic blade work from their own

wheelchair, and a coach can occupy an ordinary chair and fence them at a suitable distance. Other fencers can join in gentle sparring with them, also using a chair. They won't need a frame until they start to lunge."

If clubs do want to purchase a frame, they start at around £3,000. There may be funding available for clubs who would like to introduce para fencing. Please contact Hannah Gavin at British Fencing here (hannah.gavin@britishfencing.com) for more information.

BF's Athlete Development Programme (ADP) supports athletes in achieving Olympic and Paralympic success and inspiring others. Founded on athlete-centred, development-driven and competition-supported principles, the ADP encompasses athletes from ages 15 to 35 (and beyond for those performing at Olympic and Paralympic level) who are moving through a defined development pathway to success at the highest level of fencing.

ADP Camps, held regularly throughout the year, bring the country's top fencers together with top coaches, and provide strong sparring opportunities aimed at developing both an individual's skills and a wider GB squad culture.

At the July 2022 camp, the first cohort of para fencers will be invited to experience

the ADP in operation. Para fencing will now be included in ADP camps throughout the year, providing development opportunities including sparring and coaching, competition planning, nutrition education, and resilience through mindfulness. Para-fencing training opportunities at the ADP Camps will be open to all para-fencers on a performance pathway (WCP or non WCP) but will not be linked to specific international events.

Steve Kemp, Director of Pathways at BF, said, "The addition of para fencing into the ADP will only enhance and add value to the current programme. There are clearly lots of opportunities for us all to learn from the para fencers and their coaches, and we look forward to seeing and working with them at the upcoming ADP training camps this summer."

The welcoming of para fencing into British Fencing gives athletes, clubs and coaches more sparring and training possibilities than ever before. If you would like to contribute to the BF Para Fencing Zone resources, or would like to suggest activities and initiatives, please contact BF. If you are interested in introducing wheelchair fencing into your club, or helping to run 'come and try' experiences please contact us by completing [this form](#).



Para Fencing in The Salle

A PERFORMANCE REVUE

Siân looks at how clowning around can redirect high-performance

Why would we need Aristotle to suspend our disbelief when we have Dusty Miller, Head of People and Culture at British Fencing?

I'll tell you.

Dusty has arranged for coaches to opt-in to seek out their own inner star performer with a theatrical workshop at The Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham. The workshops there are to be attended by coaches from the sports of boxing, tennis, modern pentathlon, futsal, climbing, UK Coaching, UK Sport, Wales Rugby Union and sports professionals from Birmingham and Hartpury Universities.

The day is preceded by a British Fencing-only pow-wow on how to bring to life the core ADP concept of the: 'Fencer-Centred, Development-Driven, Competition-Supported' (FC-DD-CS) approach, held at Hartpury House within the university campus.

"My aim is to see how coaches can start to socialise this pivotal idea", says Dusty. "How we build our high-performance environment and plan for performance is fundamental. We constantly need to shape and refine its creation and maintenance."

It is a Sunday, and the first apt word to really land upon the agenda is 'communion'. The notion is introduced by Hartpury's, Dean Clark. All I'll say is, if you ever have the fortune to meet Dean, please don't fall for his line where he describes himself as a 'professional idiot' or linger on his verbalised CV as a 'failed PE teacher'. Focus rather on his current job title as 'Senior Lecturer in Coaching Science' - he's an expert in it.



Coaching Pow-Wow at Hartpury House

The reason why Dean has joined in with the session, and run with the idea of communion is this feeling of fellowship, rapport and connection can be where the best and most effective coach-athlete relationships lie.

We most probably know that. Perhaps, though, what we don't necessarily appreciate is that communion is arrived at through unease. "It is not so much what you make yourself think as a coach but what you make yourself feel," asserts Dean to the gathered BF ensemble. "The goal is to feel discomfort as a coach because that is what your athlete feels as a fencer. For a coach to put themselves through discomfort is a route to communion with their athlete."



Dusty Miller Leading Performance

At this point, Dusty starts to allude to the following day where the BF coaches and personnel will be going on stage - dressed as clowns. Dean helpfully points out that everyone is going to 'look and feel foolish'. I can sense the silent yet nervous combined intake of breath. But Dean reaches out again, and asks everyone to appreciate their positives and remind themselves of times when their coaching was stand-out. "Think about your most recent moment where you've done something impactful, not related to winning or losing. That should be a 'signature me' moment - it could be a glance or a phrase but it will remind you of being outstanding."

Dean's personal recollection of one of his own coaching moments was in the process of training a rugby player. A lot of painstaking work and preparation with the

athlete had been distilled into the word 'dog', as it was the animal that represented the particular qualities needed by this player on the pitch. When they passed each other in the tunnel one time on the way out to a game, Dean just said, 'dog'. "It was like an encyclopaedia of understanding passed between us," he recounts. "It was a powerful moment."

Such pivotal instances are firm examples of belief and faith, and in exploring the FC-DD-CS methodology, Dusty asks how the BF community can trust one another? Sabre coach, James Williams agrees that how coaches work on gaining trust - particularly from parents - is 'mission critical'. Epee Lead, Ian Lichfield points out that in his experience, "By athletes trusting the process, there tends to be less noise from parents who may feel anxious and lacking in information."

Clearly the need to centre the fencer is never in question. That the fencer needs to have their development in a driven and purposeful space is also a fait accompli. DiSE's Neil Brown tackles the third of the three-pronged FC-DD-CS approach, saying, "Results can't not be a measure in a competitive sport. But everything is development. Competitions are where fencers improve, grow and flourish."

With the dynamic moving between Dusty and Dean to stimulate discussion, the coaches have also been working in groups to achieve their own insights. Whenever their time on task is up, Dusty - as Master of Ceremonies - calls out "5-4-3-2-1 ... back in the room!" - with this rhythm giving everyone a chance to spend multi-perspectival energy on the mental job of



Dean Clark Talks Coaching



James Williams Discusses Coaching Principles

continuing to make the ADP a well-planned yet organically evolving entity.

Before the meeting started, Dusty who, like us all, can find the worth in a good viral video shows me 'Crazy Dancing Guy' which claims to demonstrate an accessible way of understanding the principles of leadership.

The wee film is a massive treat. It shows how a movement can be formed from its inception by one leader or - as the film's narrator tells us - a 'lone nut'. A sole shirtless chap pulls off some wildly wacky dance moves in a hillside field, probably at a music festival. He is joined by another individual, then a third. In under three minutes, a whole movement of 'first followers' is formed. The important element that encourages this momentum is that the initial leader embraces the first followers as equals. They are not told where to stand or how to move or they're a little bit over the top. They are allowed to be themselves, to decide on what their best moves are and bring them to the party. As such, the first followers bring about transformation. A patch of grass where one crazy guy starts dancing now plays host to a crowd - all moving in their own way, to the same tune, putting on a great performance themselves and encouraging great performances out of each other.

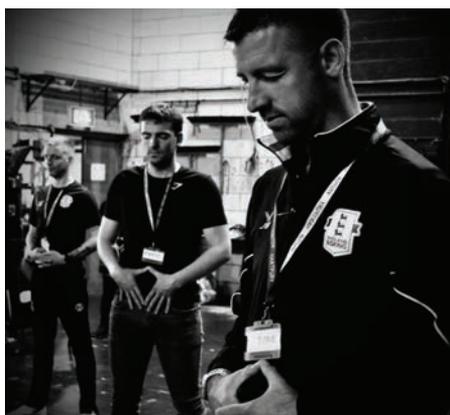
The question is - will these British Fencing First Followers who have opted for a



The Stage Door Beckons

sit-down chat at Hartpury House now make their way to the theatre and put themselves under the spotlight?

I don't think it would lessen the acuteness of their nerves, but the participants for the day's experiment in theatrical performance should know that getting one performance group into another performance environment is not a wholly untried whim. It is a well-researched area that British Fencing, amongst other sporting bodies, have already incorporated into their thinking.



Coaches Breathing It All In

An example of a high-performance space is the Juilliard School - a performing arts academy - in New York City with the reputation for being one of the best in the world. To maintain its elite status and ability to deliver winning performances at a specific time, Juilliard focuses on four key areas. They are:- not to leave emotions at the door, having good eyes, not teaching from fear and recalibrating students and resetting goals.

There are obvious lessons to derive for fencing. The first is that Juilliard believes students should actually be encouraged to bring emotions into the room - figuring out how to recognise them, deal with them and use them. It serves the performer better to channel their emotions into their development and recognise how the emotions can help future performance.

In the past, sport has discouraged emotions - with the laser focus hiding feelings and fixating on outcome. Danny Kerry, GB Hockey Coach highlighted his inability to appreciate the winning of the gold medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics. After the match, he didn't know what to do so sat in his room looking at what made the performance work, with an eye on Tokyo 2020.



Core Strengths

Equally the eye for the finer detail is what separates the good from the great coaches which is key at Juilliard. Constant feedback should be given, yet only the problem or barrier should be identified - not the solution. This encourages self-reflection and requires the performer to analyse their own performance, taking responsibility for their learning rather than being overloaded with information by the coach.

Another core teaching philosophy at the Juilliard is 'not teaching from fear'. If you're teaching people from fear, they're ultimately doing it for you. Fear takes away responsibility. The dancer cannot turn to their teacher during a show and ask how to land from a difficult jump. Allowing them to take responsibility is paramount to their performance skillset.

This begs the question of the presence of the coach piste-side. What are the unintended consequences? The fear of letting the coach down is one. The potential impact of that fear is the fencer playing safe, deciding not to attempt those slightly higher-risk actions to win a point, or a match.

Juilliard is unique in the respect that the performer's goal is to be accepted into the school. That is the achievement. Once there, the school resets goals and creates new ones. Similarly in fencing one goal is being selected for a major championship. Going into that major championship being well-prepared for a higher-level performance is then an entirely different aim in itself.

Now to the Stage Door at The Everyman.

After a short 'getting to know one another' session, the sporting coach collective is ushered in to meet Rosie. Rosie is a theatre

practitioner, specialising in clowning. First, and reassuringly familiar to the group who run through these rituals on a very regular basis, she gets the coaches to warm-up.

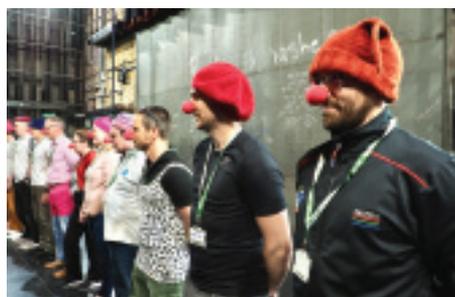
“This is a way of you arriving into your body,” she calls out. “You are leaving everything behind so you can be present for your own performance.”



Facing Up To Performance

A nice way of putting it and Rosie sets to - working on physical movement, expanding vocals, as well as developing breathing techniques. Sports psychologist Professor Johnathan Katz is concentrating like a Buddhist monk; it is surprisingly demanding - even to watch. As the participants start to flag, Rosie cries out “You’ve done this show twelve times this week and you’ve got nothing left but you have to do it again!” Not only do the group have to perform physically but they have to engage vocally, enunciating ‘Two Toads Terribly Tired Trying To Trot To Tewkesbury’ like it was the best story they ever told.

They are now very much present in the room. To reinforce their sense of location, the group is asked to face a black wall, emblazoned with some low-level graffiti. They stand in unison and the ‘wall’ lifts - it is, in fact, the stage blind that opens out onto the auditorium, with plush red velvet seating, sumptuous lighting and ornate decor. In a sense, it could be Plovdiv or Paris; Novi Sad or Cairo - it is evocative of a competition venue where everyone needs



Send In The Clowns



Dusty & Rosie - A Pair of Clowns

to focus on giving their best performance, and working with others to achieve the same.

Like fencers after an initial warm-up, it is time to do drills. One is for each participant to choose one person they wish to stick close to and identify another they wish to stay as far apart from as they can.

Sabre Lead, Rob Cawdron starts to sprint away from his foil colleague, Johnny Davis as though his life depends upon it. No matter if it is due to a difference in weapon mentality or pure instinct, Rob’s stampede as though he’s in *The Hunger Games* and Johnny’s persistent and unfailing pursuit brings forth whoops and howls of laughter from the rehearsal studio. It is a perfect performance born from sheer improvisation.

Then the clown noses come out. Rosie thanks the group for being “generous enough to say yes to wearing a mask that magnifies vulnerability moment upon moment.” She gees them on further with “You’ll all be great.”

Rosie is not wrong. There are quite a few people in our coaching and ADP ranks who have missed their true calling. I could stand for days on end and watch Steve Kemp make a quirky ‘hee-haw’ sound as he reaches out and pinches his performance partner’s red nose. He doesn’t notice me crying with laughter because he is having such a good time himself. The sight of epee coaches Ian Lichfield and Chris Hay sporting red berets to top off their clown appearance makes me think that it might create a distinguished addition to the team trackie. Oana Puiu (epee) and Chris Galesloot (foil) do an almost ‘Waiting for Godot’ genius of a sketch that plays to a different and more subtle emotional register. In the happiest of coincidences, BF’s Lorraine Rose sports a superhero cape for her clown outfit, and as for the sight of Neil Brown donning a floppy hat and frilly pink lace bloomers over his jeans? That

picture will be forever imprinted in my mind.

Following Oscar-meriting performances from Sabre coach Phil Shepherd-Foster and Johnny Davis, where shouting out just a number made everyone applaud, it was time to move on to reflective practice.

Led by Louise - herself a former actor turned theatre practitioner, the session was aimed at reflection so as to bring about improvement or produce change in how we get things done. One exercise is for the group to form a circle and throw around an imaginary ball. Steve Kemp nearly falls into a wall in a scene-stealing turn - with him once again merrily hoovering up the limelight like Scooby Doo devouring snacks.

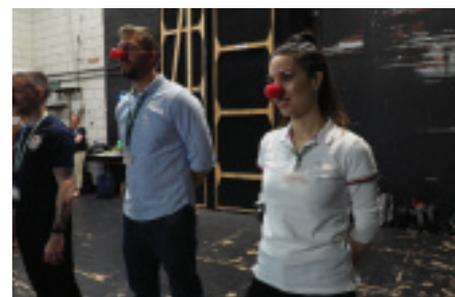
This game develops into ‘Get Rid Of The Teddy Bear’ where the group throws a cuddly toy to one another. Nobody who holds the bear wants the bear then everyone who wants the bear tries to catch it before the person who caught it wants to pass it on.

When they reflect, the coaches can see how the first activity got them to communicate non-verbally together and how the second was akin to team sport where they had to tackle their fear of dropping the ball and just get on with the mechanics of throwing and catching it.

They begin to reflect on the previous clown workshop. Referencing fencing, Steve Kemp describes how the red nose gave him ‘a mask to hide behind’, removing his real persona and offering another layer of protection.

Sabre coach Nat Lewis’ simple verdict is that the day so far has created ‘fellowship’.

With no time for further pause, it is time for ‘luvvie exercises’ with Kirstie, a theatre director. Kirstie explains that actors are



Oana In The Spotlight



Neil Brown Looking a Little DiSE-y

called 'luvvies' as they are immediately over-familiar with one another. This is because they have to be the best of mates to create a safe, supportive and responsive environment that all can perform in.

Again, the drills provide eye-openers to what kind of internal tool-kit the actors must draw upon to give their performance. I hear Kirstie congratulate Sabre's Fran Whalley on her ability to act out confrontation. "Thank you" fires back Fran succinctly, before moving on to play out the next, very different command which, if memory serves me correctly, is 'flirty'.

Kirstie ends the session asking everyone to go into groups and to pitch an idea to the rest of the room. Five groups opt to pitch movie proposals, one chooses an invention. In his few minutes of fame, Mike Cleary (foil) is a Prop Master extraordinaire - grabbing a wooden frame to place in front of his face as though through a 'portal'. Two presentations make bids for the 'Lifetime Achievement' category. Rob, ably supported by Lorraine and Dusty, captures our imagination to buy into a 'Remake of the Remake of the Remake of Top Gun'. In true



Clowning Around

Tom Cruise fashion, he has the audience from hello. Dusty pledges the film will be full of 'really nice planes and really nice ships'. It's a sure-fire blockbuster-to-be and is unanimously well-received.

But Nat, also emboldened by a day centre-stage, brings his creative team including Steve and Ian to the floor. "We are also producing a remake of Top Gun", he announces carefully. "But our version is starring squirrels and it'll be the nuts." When the coach from England Boxing assures us that animal welfare will be a number one priority and we'll be promised 'squirrels in fast jets', we invest with our hearts, our minds and our souls. The Luvvie Workshop is a wrap.



Happy Days

The final session is devoted to identifying the similarities in any sphere of performance with Adrian Evans, WRU Regional Development Manager and Lecturer in Sports Coaching. The key characteristics are the same across the board. In drama, a successful actor should be open to direction; in sport the high-performing athlete must be coachable. The respective communities are both filled with adaptive, competitive, resilient, stress-tolerant and committed individuals.

I catch up with Steve Kemp and marvel at his natural adaptiveness to the theatrical performance environment. He asks me if I think he is an extrovert or an introvert. "An extrovert. 100%", I reply confidently. Wrong. In prior psychometric testing, Steve has scored convincingly as an introvert. He has been pretending while embedding himself deeply into a 'discomfort' zone. On further investigation, it transpires that so have the majority of the others. A performance approach that has seemingly enhanced their stagecraft - not detracted from it.



Cleary-ing The Pitch

Everyone assembles smilingly for a cast ensemble photo on stage. Dusty rounds off by thanking everyone for coming to the experience voluntarily and stretching themselves to explore how to attain better performances from themselves so that they can achieve them for and with their athletes.

Dusty has been the one to instigate the day. He has been the leader - the off-centre dancer dude in a space attracting a like-minded crowd. With some apparently offbeat 'moves' and a firm dedication to treating everyone with equal value, Dusty is starting a movement - a movement that is gathering momentum where we want to be world class - the best we can be so that fencing in Britain can show the world its capacity to further emerge, develop and grow. We can showcase our appetite to finesse ourselves with confidence, balancing our frailties and vulnerabilities with our strengths and toughness. It is a mix that can create the most special moments and internal and external successes both on and off pistes and podiums.

Only one thing for it then. Time to join the Crazy Dancing Fencing Guy.

If you're interested in getting involved as a coach, here's a link to [BF's July Coaching Courses](#).



What A Performance!

JOINING THE DOTS

Siân talks the bigger fencing development picture with Obi-lan

Photos: ©denpollitt



Ian Talking Us Through The Fencing Galaxy

If anyone were to ask me who, in my professional sphere, least behaves like a Sith Lord then I would probably have to plump for British Fencing's Project and Programmes Manager for Education, Ian Lichfield.

In fact, I think that Ian must, upon rising out of bed every day and before navigating his cereal options, consult the Jedi code or check in with Wookieepedia where it states that "A Jedi does not act for personal power or wealth but seeks knowledge and enlightenment. A Jedi never acts from hatred, anger, fear, or aggression ... Jedi use their powers to defend and to protect, never to attack others."

Because that is our Ian. Wherever you look in fencing, he is involved with ADP camps, acting as a Coach at Cadet, Junior and Senior international competitions, representing GB fencing as Chef de Mission at the Junior and Cadet European Championships as well as working in the university space, liaising with selectors, trying to keep the curve of BF data-gathering on the up and then coaching at Crawley Swords. By the time I catch up with him, he is still trying to get his voice back after overusing it at successive tournaments for sixteen hours a day, every day. This factor worryingly puts a tick in the box in the Sith Lord column, but I remain confident that a few hoarsely-uttered sentences doesn't make a Darth Vader.

Now that I have started talking to Ian about all the points that demonstrate the green shoots of growth and success, it is clear

there are so many aspects and facets that an interconnected and interdependent picture is emerging - more suggestive of a night sky twinkling with many, varied constellations.

We really are in a fencing galaxy near, near to home.

The first group of stars - literally - that Ian mentions are the Junior Women's Epee team who followed a directive from the British Fencing Board, and ultimately from the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, not to compete against Russia in Novi Sad that coincided with the eve of their team event.

"The decision they took not to fence Russia at the Euros was intricate. In many ways, it accelerated and improved the interpersonal dynamic," says Ian picking up the story. "It is very hard to exit a competition when you haven't lost. But the women epeeists decided to go ahead and contest their 32 match against Austria and earn the right to be in the tableau of 16 where they would face the Russian competitors. They also knew that was where the tournament would be over for them but that wouldn't in itself stop them from still operating as a team."

Ian details how the GB epeeists convincingly dispatched Austria with 'phenomenal leadership' from Imogen Bulman. The fencers, with support from coach John Rees, had discussed the ensuing scenario so that they would - as a united group - not break the values of British Fencing - namely that of honesty - by feigning injury or illness so as to be able to withdraw on medical grounds incurring no penalty. Equally they had to talk through and consider the reality of the alternative where a no-show could incur a black card that would remain in place for three months and thereby eliminate them from the Worlds.

Ian, as the 'Captain' and therefore the designate to go to DT and assign the fight

order and team, shouldered the burden of the decision. He was the one not to show, resulting in the British JWE being scratched but not banned.

All in all, it was a diplomatically-negotiated effort that kept the fencers at the centre of considerations, explains Ian - adding, "I was determined that the epeeists should not be used as political martyrs and that we should be helping them to be advocating in their own athlete voice."

From their experiences in Novi Sad, the epeeists already had a grasp on their own voice. A slightly different JWE assembled for Junior Worlds where I was keen to keep a continuity in approach.

"They all individually had not performed or got the results as they would have liked at the Worlds so, in the team event, I asked them to be accountable for each other's emotions and negative self-talk that could end up in them spiralling down more. They began supporting one another - and resetting one another - positively."

By a further subtle shift and means of empowerment, Ian had made it so that the fencers could free themselves from external noises and pressures.



Phenomenal Leader Imogen Bulman



Jedi Chat

Noise can be present on multiple levels in a fencing room. The beeping of the boxes, calls from the referees, urging from the coaches and messages cascading to mobile phones as fencers make it through the tableau. Identifying noise as a distracting and disruptive issue is a vital first base in trying to manage an individual's or a team's progression.

"We made a plan to separate ourselves from the noise as much as possible. We had got the JWE team to a clear level of trust, supporting each other. If someone had a difficult leg or bad moment, the rest of the team came in with positivity. It helps to manage expectations. You can't hide from expectations. But I kept humour in the box, and made myself ultimately accountable for any key decisions so that the fencers could take the risk - the outcome didn't matter as much as the execution. The only mandatory was that if we lost, we wouldn't lose to ourselves through not being prepared and keeping our standards."

At the World's, the British women epeeists, in number 24 spot, beat Ukraine - the number 9 seeds, and achieved a final placing of 6th. Given their trajectory to the Championships, this was the best performance of any women's team at a World Championships in a lifetime.

Ian is certainly proud of such a stellar result but equally proud of catalysing the right behaviours to drive such performances. Another essential element to success, in

his eyes, is honesty - again a core value for British Fencing. An element that seems to slow everyone down and make fencers lose faith is projection - either from others, like coaches or parents, who feel that the fencer should be doing better and getting selected for more competitions, or indeed from the fencer themselves.

A lack of honesty, according to Ian, is a total blocker - a self-sabotage mechanism. Reverse it, and you can get an athlete quickly recognising weaknesses and areas for improvement. "That way they are able to start connecting the dots sooner than others do. We need, as the ADP, to be playing the fencer's data back to them so they can identify where the gaps are and pull it back." By this relationship getting started between fencer and ADP, Ian believes that the whole 'denial curve' can be flattened; acceptance can take place and constructive reflective practice with improved performances naturally follow.



Ian's Fencer-Centred Approach

Sometimes the most profound and far-reaching of thoughts, intentions and actions are the simplest. And that is what is at the heart of joining the dots - just the ability to recognise what puts the fencer firmly at the heart of the process so that they can flourish.

At the Junior and Cadet Worlds and the heat of the Dubai Championships, Ian recounts how Pathways Director, Steve Kemp was up until 3am most mornings, welcoming in GB fencers from their flights. Having previously experienced 5-hour queues at weapons control, he got the epeeists to give him their top bags complete with weapons and items, then he was surfacing by 6am - along with Lorraine Rose - to line up with 10 or 11 sets of kit to get checked. This was so he could help the fencers get more rest, adapt better to their surroundings and get a performance.

I think to myself that, if he were told that it would centre the fencers and aid them in any way, Kempy would sweep out the whole of Tatooine with a dustpan and brush.

Back to Ian and the idea of joining the dots takes on a new meaning when I ask him to measure his own performance in terms of time and effort that he has voluntarily put in this season going the extra mile. It is impossible to compute in mathematical terms. It can be summed up better by just using one word - 'care'. Ian has to care if he is going to have all these infinitesimal dots form to make a bigger, better picture. "Yes I do", he agrees. "Though, I do think that it should be the focus for everyone - especially the athletes. When they tell me they don't know how rankings work vis-a-vis selections, I wonder how they manage to do their sport when they don't seem to want to get to grips with the rules of the game that they're playing."

We started with Star Wars. I guess we better return there too, where the force is described not so much as a power but as "the energy between all things, a tension, a balance, that binds the universe together."

And so it is with fencing.

DIFFERENT STROKES

Steve Kemp gives Siân the deep dive on freestyle fencing thinking and how to encode your own success

I'm suddenly regretting the Star Wars thematic, having somehow forgotten that ambushes are a key plot feature of the spacetastic storylines. I have walked straight into one as Pathways Director for British Fencing, Steve Kemp lays not just a single, but several diagrams before me. I feel a bit queasy.

I ask Auntie Internet if there is a label for my unease at distilling information into wee little boxes with lines shooting all over the place. Auntie delivers - give or take - 7,470,000 results in 0.55 seconds, telling me that 'xenographobia' is the fear of an unfamiliar graph. This phobic response is especially present when faced with 'more novel - or downright strange - graphs and crossbreeds of charts'. Thanks Auntie. It's not just me then.

The diagrams in question here are referred to as swim lane diagrams - a type of flowchart thingamajig that shows who fits in where in any given process. Using the idea of lanes in a swimming pool, a British Fencing swim lane diagram introduces process steps within the horizontal or vertical "swim lanes" of fencing athletes. It shows connections, communication and handoffs between these lanes, and it can serve to show where improvements can be made and efficiency enhanced.

Words like efficiency and process seem a bit clinical for an athlete journey but Steve assures me that athletes considering how to progress through the competition routes



Swimming in Fencing - ©denpollitt

in any one given season could find a handy visualisation in this thinking.

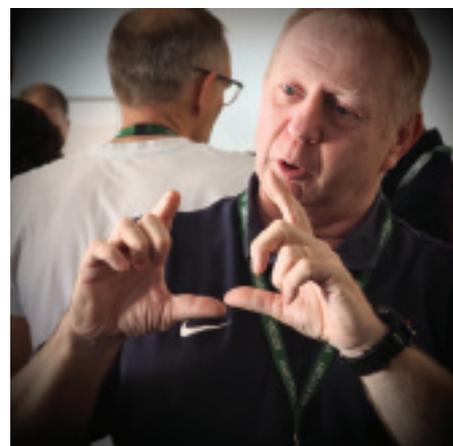
"No-one follows the same journey in fencing. They can follow the same or similar patterns but each journey is different. And if you look at athletes like a graphic equaliser then one athlete will always need more or less of something than their fellow fencer."

Steve also recommends thinking in terms of swim lanes to help fencers visualise their season, feel autonomous and as in control of their sporting journey as possible. It helps here perhaps to start at the other end of the thought process. Let's just imagine that all fencers feel the same as the next. They see only one big pool that they are all heaped into and so a rigid pattern emerges - almost to the extent of fatalistic determinism - where, thinking that they should be outputting the same results as other fencers of their age, it means that if they don't win the race or swim as one of the fastest in the lane, it's all over.

"Exactly that," says Steve. "Whilst there are always the outliers, it also helps to think that any given fencer is only going to likely be reaching their peak performance window when they are about 28 years-old. So why should a much younger Cadet or Junior fencer be punishing themselves with the thought of winning or losing, getting selected or not being selected? Rather than defining themselves by age, they should really be defining themselves by stage, and asking themselves where they are right now and what they are ready to do next to improve performance."

Swim lanes are not new, having been employed in different forms since the 1940s. That must seem like over a thousand years ago to some young Padawans. However they do represent a fresh perspective in fencing. Specifically in sport, this kind of diagramming can help identify where an athlete is stopping and starting, blocking or racing ahead and needing to

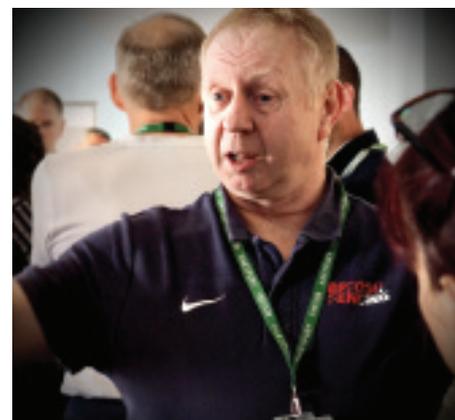
be promoted to the next level. Should an athlete be slowing down in the lane they are in, they can be supported by notching down a pace so that they can work on consolidating their performance.



Diagrammatic

By establishing their goals, a fencer can decide which swim lane they are going to position themselves in to cover the necessary ground at the appropriate pace. At this point, data can be a serviceable tool - but only if used with the right degree of emphasis. "There's a big gap between being data-driven and data-informed," explains Steve. "Being data-driven means sticking closely to a specific level of information. For example, data might tell you that somebody is number one in the rankings but doesn't necessarily indicate whether they are a good or bad team player. That kind of detail can only come from being data-informed, where along with a set of metrics can come a set of questions or reflections that can realistically be interpreted and may provide a level of insight so that the fencer can up their game."

Steve mentions athletes who are beginning to operate along these lines. He mentions a Junior athlete who entered an U23 Satellite competition full of strongly competitive fencers from Switzerland and Italy. The idea was to temporarily graduate up the swim lane so the fencer could see what pace was



Steve Thinking It Differently

Standing Up For Development - @denpollitt

needed to power through the water with their slightly older and more experienced counterparts. It reminds me of reading about Yuki Ota who, while still a teenager, had qualified for the Beijing Olympics. He describes his crushing disappointment as he realised that all the other fencers had more power in their tank than he did. But it was a defining moment. By having flunked the swim lane then, he had the chance to regroup and re-identify how he was to navigate himself back to the top. Which history shows that he did.

Splashing about between data and metrics and diagrams, and I surprise myself that I have remained so engaged and interested in this topic. Steve is similarly enthused and starts tripping the light fantastic, giving me thirty boxes with thirty different phrases within that populate the athlete journey map. There are boxes with the phrases, 'Major Championships', 'Athletic Skills' and the like. However some unlikelier suspects have snuck their way in. Within one box is displayed 'Wants & Needs', another 'Self Care' and another in which Kempsey - God love him - has put 'Making Memories'.

"Wants and Needs address how the fencer may want to do more sparring but really needs to get a lot fitter, because if the athlete is fitter then they will spar better," clarifies Steve with perfect verbal symmetry. He goes on to detail how 'Self Care' relates to fencers having a good sense of self-determination, or as he more succinctly quips, "Knowing how to look after themselves."

'Making Memories' segues into how fencers have to love fencing to keep on with it. Ninety percent is training and ten percent is performing, and we love to perform, to be there and to have those moments. The gathering of priceless experiences can give an athlete something to look back upon, as well as thoughts to apply to future scenarios. Making memories might not sound completely indispensable but the experiences exercise in itself plots an essential feature of the fencer journey map.

I quiz Steve on a final couple of boxes that have caught my eye. 'Social Media You' is one where Steve just urges athletes to "Be mindful of the world around you and think about how what you do now may embarrass you in twenty years time." Then 'Integrity Winning Well' brings forth another clear answer. "It refers to the mantra every fencer should adopt which is: 'I win well', where you know you've beaten your opponent fairly and squarely."

The boxes have brought forth generalities that are easy to turn into specifics once applied to any one individual at any one time. They help to determine objectives, and allow a greater depth of understanding, enabling the fencer to hone in on what will make them become more effective.

Steve underscores this theme eloquently, saying, "If we can identify fencers hitting the milestones they need to at the right time, then our resources can be better dedicated and utilised. But on an entirely

more human level, when a fencer can visualise their journey, they too can be better informed about how to plan and what to do. That way, they have better and more relevant experiences. Swim lanes create a curiosity to explore and to ask what excellence looks like. This all culminates in building confidence in the athlete. Keeping the Confidence Bucket full is key."

At this point in time, sport is defining new narratives for itself. In fencing there is a clear philosophy from the ADP that any thinking that helps the athlete to decipher and decode so that they can design and encode their own self-actualisation, progress and success is of value.

And by now, it's pretty clear that swim lane diagrams are a useful reference benchmark rather than a dogmatic methodology. What's more, the thinking aligns with the 'fencer-centred' approach of British Fencing and how recognising that the pace of athlete development sometimes slows, slides, races and flounders, resulting in bottlenecks and frustration, can only help and inform each fencer and the support structures around them.

If Steve feels sorry for me that I am crawling in the slow lane, only just getting to grips with how this stuff makes sense, he doesn't show it. Instead he speaks with encouraging solidarity. "Yes, you can almost take swim lanes and replace them with a Tube map. There are any number of multiples of different journeys, long or short, faster or slower than an athlete can choose. It doesn't matter how we think about it; what's important is that we get there in the end."

A FEAST OF FENCING AT EID IN THE SQUARE

Muslim Girls Fence shared the skills of fencing at the Mayor of London's 17th Eid in The Square Festival in early May. The special event marked the return of all major festivals to the city of London at Trafalgar Square as well as the end of Ramadan where Muslims all over the world had been fasting for the holy month.

Eid in The Square is organised in partnership with arts, cultural and grassroot Muslim organisations in London, bringing communities, friends, and family together to celebrate Muslim art, culture, literature, poetry, history, and fashion alongside a host of food stalls from around the world.

Muslim Girls Fence is a project collaboration between Maslaha and British Fencing which aims to facilitate spaces for Muslim girls and women to challenge assumptions and narratives relating to their gender, racial, religious and other identities through both physical and creative methods. Eid in The Square therefore provided a perfect location for MGF to bring fencing to a receptive audience.

The event attracted thousands of visitors, with people from all backgrounds, faiths and no-faith in attendance. Muslim Girls Fence took centre-square to provide interactive fencing sessions and turned out to be one of the most sought-out activities with long queues of people wanting to have a go.

MGF's coaches Helen Solly and Yvonne Chart came mentally equipped for hail, rain or shine and were happy to see the



The Battle of Trafalgar

welcoming reception from the public as well as being inspired by the curiosity everyone showed in the skills of the sport. Parents surrounded the MGF space, taking pictures and using the fencing attire as photo shoots for their family memories of the event. MGF also received many queries about fencing as well as questions on how to get involved, from parents, professionals and teachers who are keen to get fencing into their community and their schools.

Helen and Yvonne worked to engage the huge crowds who created a day-long demand for the fencing activities. The two coaches refused to stop even for lunch due to the lines of children watching and waiting to pick up a sword - meaning that over four hundred people got to see what swordplay is all about from behind the mask.

Yvonne said, "We had an incredible amount of interest. Everyone got a chance to do a competitive fencing bout and the best ones were between siblings, as they always got extra competitive. There were so many enthusiastic participants that I forgot to take breaks; every time I turned around there was another group smiling at me and it motivated me to want to keep going!"

Helen added, "Eid in the square produced an incredible opportunity to show what fencing has to offer. We gained a prime spot in the centre of the square, and in front of the main stage! The demand was so high, that we did not have time to undertake demonstrations. With a constant flow of people keen to gain hands-on experience of the sport, we delivered our activity continuously for five and a half hours, as we wanted to get as many people as possible involved."

The work of MGF at the festival emphasised how fencing has the capacity to be an all-inclusive participation sport, catering for everyone - especially children with additional needs. MGF's Project Manager Reha Ullah ensured that no one was left out, wearing her coaching hat to help give everyone in the crowds a chance



The Mayor Gets A Photo with MGF

to fence by assisting with the interactive sessions for those less able to wait.

MGF's Partner Charity, Maslaha also supported the team in terms of crowd management for smooth running of the activity. Head of Programme at Maslaha, Sahrah Mohamed managed the lines with help from her team which included Suleman Amad, Project Coordinator and the Director of Maslaha, Raheel Mohammed who ensured everyone was well-nourished and hydrated.

The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan said how pleased he was to welcome back diverse communities from across the city after a two-year break due to Covid. Addressing the crowds in Trafalgar Square, he added, "I want to begin by thanking every single Londoner of Muslim faith ... for the things that you did during Covid, saving lives and saving our community and showing the very best of the religion of Islam."

Eid in The Square was certainly an event that celebrated joy in diversity. Muslim Girls Fence were keen to express their thanks to the London Mayor and his team, as well as of course Raheel and Maslaha, for this opportunity to showcase fencing in the very heart of London.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Karim's Recalibrated Season

Over the past few issues we've heard a lot from the ADP team about how British Fencing is focusing their development plan on an athlete-centred approach. Or to be more precise "Fencer-centred, Development-driven, Competition-supported".

Apart from a few years, fencing has been a central part of my life. I started training at the age of seven and have, since then, competed internationally through the age groups, been an FIE Candidate Referee, started and run a club and coached youth foil. Right now, my involvement is in the commentary box, watching fight after fight unfold live before my eyes on the piste. It is a job that gives me a unique lens on fencing and about what it takes to get to the top.

When I was fencing, it was all about getting the points to beat everyone else to qualify for the next event (World Cup, GP, Euros, Worlds). It was a constant battle from one event to the next, travelling around the country to every event you were eligible for and I look back on it fondly, as a thrilling roller coaster ride. Many dropped by the wayside unable to sustain the relentless strain of train-compete-repeat and I may have been close to the brink myself a number of times. A few achieved success to varying degrees including me. However, the highs were separated by extremely long dry periods. Of course we had the thrill and camaraderie that is only derived in this type of environment and much lower expectations, perhaps, on our performance. Not a regret in sight for me on that front but things have changed.

The glass ceiling has been removed and replaced with enhanced performance expectations. Public funding (whether you like it or not) comes with demands for achievement on and now off the field of play. Performance fencing is a different game to when I was active on the piste nearly fifteen years ago.

Of course, I'm lucky enough to travel, when allowed, across the globe to watch and commentate on all six disciplines and in just over a decade, I've come to a simple conclusion - every fencer develops at a different pace and "bursts" of improvement

happen at different times of the season and/or in different seasons for each and every one of them. Take Italy's Andrea Cassara for example. Individually, he is one of the most decorated fencers in modern history. He has individual medals from thirty-seven World Cups, twenty-three Grand Prix events, three European Championships, two World Championships and one Olympic Games. Arguably the most consistent men's foilist over a career that spanned over two decades. However, it doesn't take too much analysis to see follow periods during that time - most notably the eight year gap between individual World Championship medals. There are, of course, the odd exceptions. A stand-out for me is Bartosz Piasecki. His silver medal at London 2012 was a surprise for everyone and remains Norway's only Olympic fencing medal. It's also the only medal he won on the senior circuit.



The Results Crowd

Let's leave those outliers to one side and before I go on, I want to acknowledge that some fencing countries are totally dependent on results-driven selection. In every single case though, these countries either have hundreds or thousands of fencers at their base, or sport is seen as the way to a better life or cultural norms dictate a work ethic from an age that we find too young. In every case, British Fencing cannot compare, compete and should not aspire to these models, in my opinion. Their environments cannot be easily replicated - fencing is not the national sport in the UK as it is elsewhere; we have been brought up in a developed democratic society; our geography and population limit fencing capacity; educational scholarships are limited for sports people in the UK - you get my drift.



Latest Fencing Adventure

So exceptions and unrealistic environments aside, what does the most successful competition schedule look like? I think back to November last year when I was lucky enough to interview Mariel Zagunis for this magazine. I'm sure you'll agree, she's a fairly good role model when it comes to this topic. She talked extensively about prioritising your own journey, looking for the ultimate goal and working back from there. She talked about rules, injury and family changes that impacted her training schedule. She talked very specifically about working on some new footwork patterns that had a detrimental effect on her performance between winning her two individual Olympic titles.

Reflecting on my competitive career I wonder if I would simply move from one goal - making the cadet squad - to the next - making the cadet team etc if I was fencing now. The answer is I wouldn't of course. I'd listen to Mariel and the great thing is there are many more opportunities now.

Let's start at the beginning. Quite rightly, coaches and parents take charge of a young fencer's calendar but the "meaning" of competition can be instilled early. Put simply, performance assessment based on results is not at all appropriate. At this stage the focus should be on the learning opportunities available and what experiences can be gleaned from each event. If you've never had to be ready to get in the car at 6am for a competition 150 miles away, it's unlikely that you will be able to predict your result. Actively learning (parent as well as child perhaps with guidance from the coach) the impact of that early start will provide a far more solid foundation for better performances in the future. This is just one example of an almost infinite number of learning opportunities for the fledgling competitor. Acknowledging this alone should help parents and fencers to select a calendar



Mariel Zagunis - #BizziTeam

that only includes events that will help provide relevant experience. Again, put simply, trekking from one event to another, weekend after weekend, is more likely to turn the young fencer off than provide a stable platform for the future.

Target your season-ending event and build your event calendar based on achieving the right experiences to enjoy and perform YOUR best at that event.

As you rise through the ages to become a cadet, there are plenty of opportunities at U13 and U15 to compete just over the channel. If possible, pick one or two to add to your calendar or maybe choose one of the domestic or foreign summer camps, conveniently held during school breaks, advertised on social media and open to all.

Once a cadet, don't simply focus your attention on the domestic ranking events and European Fencing Confederation circuit. Europe offers a wide range of opportunities to fence lots of athletes. Perhaps you struggle against the German style? You could go to a German youth event open to fencers from abroad providing you with a chance to test your options against your bogey opponents. The removal of the chance to win (or lose) ranking points could be a liberating experience that enriches your fencing significantly. By this point you should at least be on the ADP radar - a programme that will inform not just your personal competition scheduling.

Perhaps the biggest transition is moving from the junior to senior category, particularly for those that have made that transition in the past couple of years. The competition opportunities grow further in this transition period. Perhaps you are now thinking about making the senior team at some point in the future. Your planning timeline will almost certainly extend beyond one season. So it's time to listen to Mariel again. An Olympic cycle is as good as any benchmark but pick your own relevant timeline. Where do YOU want

YOUR FENCING to be in one, two, four or more year's time? It's important not to base these expectations heavily on your age. What's right for one twenty-one year old will likely be wrong for another. These goals are very personal and should be based solely on your current development, circumstances and opportunities. Add the U23 EFC circuit to your list of potentially relevant competitions, along with even more foreign open events. The under-23 EFC circuit has now grown and if you look at the results, is definitely the kind of breeding ground for developing fencers from nations like Great Britain. Planning further ahead will make events like these obvious stop-off points in your own development and ultimately success. By planning your goals for each season within your long-term strategy, you are more likely to reach the performance targets you set both at the end of and along your journey.

I think you have probably got the gist. It's time to recalibrate and let's be blunt about it. Being British number one or in the top four, on its own is meaningless in the grand scheme of major international medal contention. There, I've said it! We have to measure ourselves against our actual goals.

Fencing development continues through to the end of the best fencer's careers. They all stepped up to the next level at the appropriate time. Mariel developed her footwork after she'd won the Olympic gold medal. There was no rite of passage for her simply because she had done it at the very top level. The result of this approach will remain a thing of record for eternity. Making the GBR squad or team is fantastic and congratulations to all who achieve that. To make it matter though your hunger to develop further matters. Here is what Richard Kruse, Great Britain's first ever fencing World number one has to say on that point.

"In fencing you can generally spot talent at an early age. Talented fencers will make headway in cadets, then juniors and then seniors. Eventually going on to become Olympic and world champions. These case studies are not hard to find - Joppich, Kleibrink, Le Pechoux, Cassara, Ota - the list goes on. There is, however, another type of fencer that does eventually make it to the upper echelons Senior fencing that didn't shine from an early age. Two spring to mind in Men's Foil. Radoslaw Glonek never made the Polish team as a Cadet or Junior but



Richard Kruse - #BizziTeam

then went on an A-grade winning spree as a senior. An even better example is of the former world champion Alessio Foconi. Foconi remained at L64/L32 level for many years as a senior fencer. However, by his late twenties he has turned that around to being (in my opinion) the most consistent Men's Foilist during the Tokyo Olympic cycle. We even had a joke in the British team that a bad day in the office for Foconi would still result in a bronze medal."

"In my experience progress in fencing is rarely linear. If you are motivated and train hard (and smart) then your overall progress should head in the right direction but there will be setbacks and plateaus along the way due to injuries, mini burn outs etc. It is important to stay motivated but to also to continually review and refine your training. Remember practise doesn't make perfect. Perfect practise makes perfect."

Just because someone born in the same year as you has already been to two major championships doesn't mean you won't win an Olympic medal. The two journeys, in the main, are mutually exclusive.

By the way, Bartosz Piasecki won a bronze medal at the U23 European Championships in 2009. His Olympic medal came just three years later.

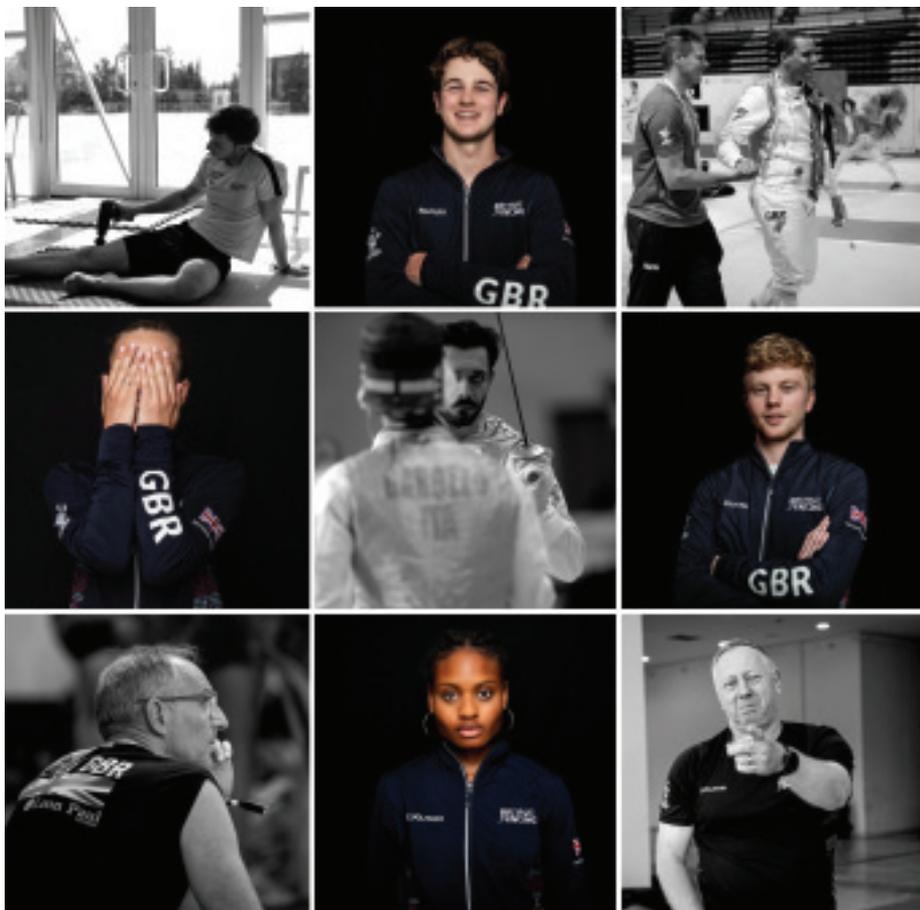
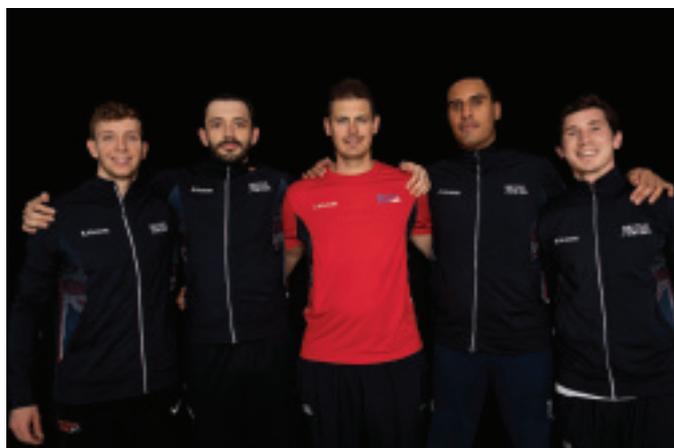


CALL IT ATTITUDE - THE FENCING COMMITMENT

Photos: © denpollitt

Maybe it's because of the rule book. Maybe it's because of the three different weapons and their contrasting yet complementary styles and characters. Maybe it's because we clothe ourselves in modern-day armour. Maybe it's because we fight one-on-one so that we can fight as one. Fencing calls for its own kind of commitment, its own clearly expressed oath and declaration. We can see ourselves mirrored, and our purpose reflected, in the statement. Resolute? Whole-hearted? Steadfast? Committed? Yes. We are.

British Fencing set about determining how everyone in the fencing community can feel aligned and know their core *raison d'être*. Led by a working group of active senior fencers, the words in **Our Commitment** further evolved out of consultation and activities with ADP fencers, subsequently supported by UK Sport and English Institute of Sport staff. The phrasing was mirrored back to the athletes and insights were garnered from ADP coaches as well as from a so-called 'history group' - former fencers who had competed at previous Olympic Games who could remind us all of our past connecting to our future.



All of them highlighted and defined their thinking and priorities to articulate their commitment to fencing. These conversations facilitated a final creative versioning by The Sword's own Siân and Karim into **Our Commitment**, which is brought to life in this issue with the visuals from the latter stages of the 2022 Senior European Championships in Antalya, Turkey.

To communicate the unifying and dedicated approach to the sport that infuses our community and binds it together, and with the intention that everyone can see themselves in the Commitment somewhere, British Fencing has adopted the wording, recently introducing **Our Commitment** to the new generation of athletes on The Athlete Development Programme.

At just over one hundred and fifty words, this statement is one showing a wealth of intent, representing the whole fencing community.

Our Commitment

To have an understanding of fencing's power.

To have the spirit to accept challenges.

To have the insight to be a role model.

To have the strength to be humble.

To have the focus to listen.

To have the confidence to be accountable.

To have the values to be professional.

To have the ability to act fairly and squarely.

To have the desire to be part of a team.

To have the urge to be an individual who can win and lose but always learn and grow.

To have the courage to face the demands of sport and to embrace them.

To have the qualities of an excellent opponent yet be the greatest friend.

To have respect for standards.

To have compassion for others.

To have the ambition to strive for better.

To have the honesty to reset.

To have the dedication to commit.

What I have is what I am.

Call It Attitude



COMMON WEALTH

The Magic of a Special Championships - Coming Soon to London!



The Bashir Brothers

Nostalgia is personal, but memories are shared. Before you call for the men in white coats, let me explain. I sat on a video call with Alex Savin (Technical Director) and Lorraine Rose (Secretary of Athlete Services) - the Barnum and Carlyle, if you like, of the 2022 Commonwealth Championships which are coming to London this summer.

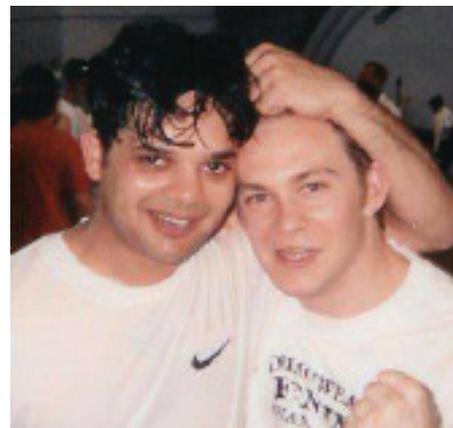
The sense of purpose, attention to detail and pure vigour this pair exude bodes well for a spirited event that promises to put the athletes front and centre. The meeting stirred memories of an event that means so much to me and that punctuates my time on the piste with everything that sport can offer to an athlete - hard work, team, patriotism, victory, defeat, passion, responsibility and, most of all, belonging.

Feeling that I should have been selected four years earlier, my first encounter with the Commonwealth Fencing Championships was in 1994. The venue, one of the most bizarre I've competed in, was the 'Rendez-Vous Cafe', two thirds of the way up Blackcomb Mountain, part of the Whistler Ski Resort near Vancouver, Canada. Aside from wearing beachwear at the foot of the mountain and needing skiwear to get to the venue at altitude after catching two ski lifts (with fencing bags hanging off the back), forming a human chain as part of an unexpected rapid rescue mission (full story not fit for print!) and fencing in a venue with a roof too low for the sport,

three other memories prevail. My Welsh grandad insisted on coming to watch my brother, Gareth (sabre) and I fence. Some years before, this was the man who had congratulated me for making the England Schoolboys Team by telling me that "if you ever fence for England again..." Sorry, I can't print the end of that either!! In short, he provided a deep and immovable foundation for my Celtic Heritage. Whilst my results were nothing special, Gareth provided a highlight ending up with a silver in his team event. This was also the event that took me on to the next level - a recognition of what I could achieve if I worked at it, driven on by failing to make the podium myself.

The 1998 Games in Kuala Lumpur followed a move in jobs. To my amazement and eternal gratitude, my new employer, Computacenter, gave me a lot of paid leave before I'd even started working for them. This set up the opportunity for me to train full-time with one of my clubmates, Paddy, who had been selected to fence for Northern Ireland in a team including Johnny Davis. Six hard but enjoyable weeks of two sessions a day plus sparring and lessons at the club in the evening followed - ensuring that I was in the best shape I'd ever been. Team Manager, Chris 'Stampy' Stamp, had booked us into a fantastic hotel outside K-L, the experience was not new to me and the sense of team was intense within and visible to everyone else. That team spirit carried us through the first day where I embraced the role of cheerleader for our women's foil team - all four made the top 16 and Patsy Hunt made the quarterfinals. Buoyed on by this I went on to make the top 16 of the men's individual foil, cheered on our women's foil team to a marvellous bronze and then took my place on the second step of the men's foil team podium with Simon Duckett, David Taylor and David Whiting. I was subbed out in the gold medal match against England who went on to win, but not before I'd faced my clubmate and housemate, Graham.

The Commonwealths was held in Australia in 2002 about two hours north of Sydney. The town of Newcastle, New South Wales, was the furthest I would travel in my



Dave and Me at KL 98

competitive career. It was not an event of note for me other than agonisingly missing out on a team medal and taking the decision to retire from competing. My other main takeaway was the number of romantic relationships that began there (not for me!). Some continue to this day.

It turned out that the retirement decision was premature. After a year of travelling around the world - a delayed gap year if you like - the lure of fencing and specifically going after one more Commonwealth medal was too much. Training began in late 2004 and it was tough to start with but I made the grade and selection. In my last ever domestic event, the Bristol Open, I went on a confidence-boosting run through to the semi-finals, where I faced Laurence Halsted. My final competitive lesson taught me that I needed to find a way to conserve more energy than I had done earlier in my career. Laurence wiped the floor with me. He was sharper, faster and better. Despite the humbling I headed to my final Commonwealth Championships in Belfast full of anticipation. The individual event was another tough ask and whilst I didn't get near the medals, I did get to fence another one of my clubmates and friends. Marc, a leftie, was gifted with a natural sense of distance and timing. I rarely beat him in training, let alone competition. I had to take a risk to give myself a chance and it paid off. I went out in the following round but having the chance to fence one of my best mates in what was my swan-song



The 1998 MF Team Podium

event was special. I won't dwell on finishing fourth again in the team event because I did that for too long at the time!!

Hopefully it is now clear the special place the Commonwealth Championships has in my heart. The bond I lived through fencing for Wales and the Welsh team is part of me. I believe that took each of us to a place where we achieved more than the sum of our parts alone. I rarely fenced better than when I was wearing Welsh colours. The team and these seemingly small Championships gave me my proudest moments in the sport. I went on to represent Wales as a referee and chaperone at the 2010 Junior Commonwealths in Chennai, India.

I returned to the same event eight years later when England hosted the Junior event in Newcastle - this time in my capacity as a commentator. I can't explain the joy it was to call an event that means so much to me. Catching up with old teammates who had moved geographically and into new roles supporting the next generation. The fizz of the event was still there and stirred up the feelings I'd had years before.

I also got to experience something special from the other side of my heritage. The Indian team turned up with a vibrant spirit that no one could ignore. Their energy

was electric and welcoming. Their fencing was new, perhaps a little raw but most of all exciting and effective. They came away with one gold and one bronze medal and friends for life from every corner of the Commonwealth. I had the pleasure of meeting a lot of the team and I think every coach and official. Another proud moment for me was to follow as I listened to their stories and how they felt that they knew me. At the time fencing was very much in development in India and with limited opportunities to train or spar, almost everyone in the travelling team had watched fencing clips on YouTube as part of their training. Both very humbling and very rewarding.

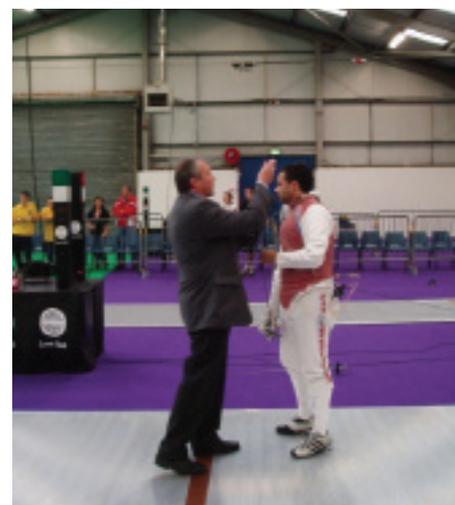
Alex, Lorraine and Team have the pleasure of guiding everyone through the next Championships, and their fencer-centred approach from event delivery to planned recreational excursions sounds very promising. Their eyes widen as they talk through their schedule brimming with a passion that only this event can muster. There isn't long to wait and I urge everyone reading this to try to make it to the event in person. Not only will you get to cheer on our Home Nation fencers, and see fencers from all over the Commonwealth, you'll also get the chance to breathe the atmosphere of this unique spot in the calendar.

I will be cheering in equal measure for Wales and India!

Before I leave you to survey the schedule I have one last thing to share. This event forges friendships that last a lifetime. Gareth, Paddy, Graham and Marc - my particular cast of travelling performers - were the Best Men at my wedding.

Over to you Barnum and Carlyle!

Visit the [Official Event Website](#) for more information.



Just Before My Last Competitive Poule Match

RODNEY CRAIG (1945-2021)

Richard Cohen

Rodney Craig, who died on 1 October last year aged 76, was a stalwart and popular member of the British sabre team from 1968 to 1972, and had the unusual distinction of being runner-up for the British sabre title four years in succession, beginning in 1968—the last three occasions to his good friend and fellow international David Acfied. He was inter-services champion four times, in 1967-68-69 and 1973, and fenced in the Olympic Games of 1968 and 1972, in the latter competition, in a close match against the Soviet Union, beating both the 1967 world champion and the reigning Olympic gold medalist. At the 1970 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh he won an individual silver and a gold in the team event. Other notable results included



Rodney 1968 Mexico Olympian

coming third in a top B Grade event in Hamburg in 1969 and fourth in Duren that same year, as well as being a regular finalist at the Corble Cup, taking the bronze medal in 1967.

Rodney was born in April 1945 and learned to fence under Akos Moldovanyi, the Hungarian coach at St. Paul's who also taught at Merchant Taylor's School, a strong fencing academy whose pupils included future internationals Sandy Leckie, Peter Jacobs, Steve Higginson and John Rayden. Rodney was the star junior sabreur of his generation, winning the public schools title in 1963 and the Under-20 championships in 1965.

After school, he entered Sandhurst and from there joined the Army, ending up a

captain before leaving to join IBM, where he stayed for over twenty years and rose to become managing director in Europe. As one of his sons, Will, commented, "To this day it baffles me how he could have managed to spend so long in that company, and yet not have the foggiest idea how to work a computer!"

As a fencer, he was always very fit, and as one report noticed, "used his broken-time beat attacks to great effect." In a time when cheating on the international circuit was rampant, he was a pillar of integrity and also of caring good humour, attributes which he carried into his personal life.

Away from fencing and work, he took up many hobbies, including gardening, dog walking, birdwatching, yoga, and pilates. Golf was a particular love, possibly because it can be one of the most humbling of sports, which is why it intrigued him because he was such a modest character, despite all his achievements. In 1968, just 23, he had married Celia, who bore him three sons, Harvey, Nick, and William, and in all his life decisions he put his wife and family first. Celia predeceased him, dying in 2017.



Celia and Rodney



On the family holiday in Majorca

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Email the editor: karim.bashir@catchsport.com

RESULTS



The 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

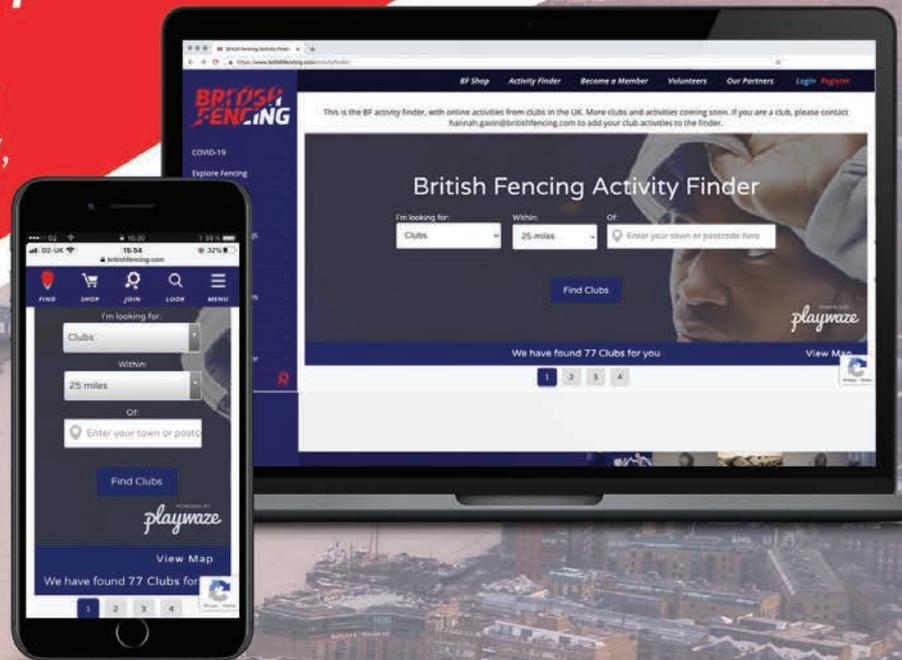
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