

# THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2023



TALLINN MEDALS PP5-7  
FORECAST FOR 2024 PP12-17  
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# WELCOME TO THE SWORD



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PARIS 2024 PREDICTIONS  
**PP12-17**



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World Cup Champion.

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Karim Bashir



The recent decision by the FIE to allow Russian and Belarussian athletes back to international competition in time for the start of Paris 2024 qualification will not have gone unnoticed by many of you. An Extraordinary Congress, held online in early March, voted 89-46 in favour of athletes from those countries to return to individual competition and 85-51 in favour of their return to team competition "subject to possible future IOC recommendations/decisions, and in compliance with conditions of neutrality and individual eligibility".

British Fencing's Board responded on 16 March with the following, "On the 14th March the Board of BF, along with Athlete Representatives discussed the result of the recent FIE congress decision to allow athletes, coaches and officials from Russia and Belarus to return to international fencing competition in time for the beginning of the Olympic qualification period. This was not a proposal that we supported and we want to take this opportunity to reiterate our support to our fencing friends of Ukraine. We acknowledge that there is much to be confirmed around the detail, with neither the IOC or FIE defining neutrality and the EFC yet to announce any decisions on participation in EFC competitions. We note that the current participation ban still applies to the Cadet and Junior World

Championships and the 2023 European Games. We acknowledge that some of our athletes/teams may decide they do not wish to fence against an athlete or team from Russia or Belarus. We understand that this will be a difficult decision for any athlete to make especially for those with Olympic qualification at stake. We will work with our athletes, coaches and parents to ensure that they are supported whether they compete or not. We will continue to seek the input of Athlete representatives and other stakeholders as details become available."

USA Fencing issued a similar statement along with representatives from a number of other nations, mainly in Europe. Women's Foil Olympic Champion, Lee Kiefer headlined an online video with a multitude of athletes from around the world simply saying "No. I don't agree." Ukraine's 2008 Olympic Champion, Olga Kharlan published a statement noting that she "felt empty inside" on the day the decision was announced.

For balance, representatives from Russia have backed the decision and urged countries and athletes not to boycott events. However, the repercussions are already being felt across the fencing community. Polish Fencing require Russian and Belarussian athletes to declare they oppose the war in order to compete at the Poznan World Cup in April, and German Fencing have already cancelled the Tauber World Cup in May. The French have also cancelled the St Maur World Cup. Furthermore, the Polish government has announced that athletes from Russia and Belarus will not be allowed to take part in the European Games, an event due to include the European Fencing Championships which is a bumper points qualifier. To say the situation is difficult is somewhat of an understatement.

For now though, all I can tell you is that we've got some exciting content in this issue of The Sword. First off, a massive congratulations to Jaimie Cook on his win in Sabadell back in February, the first time that Great Britain have topped the podium at a Men's Foil Junior World Cup since Jamie Fitzgerald in 2009. We couldn't resist splashing Jaimie across the front cover and we'll have an in depth interview with him in the July issue, where we'll ask him to reflect on a remarkable season.

We also celebrate the medals won by our Juniors and Cadets at the European Championships in Tallinn, Estonia. Some of them will be competing at the World Championships whilst you're reading this magazine. Siân goes behind the scenes at one of BF's longest running supporters, Cutlers, unlocking the secrets to their backing. Heidi tells us all about why the university fencing scene is a place not to be missed, and Liz tackles my questions about winning the right way in today's sporting world.

I also had a lot of fun writing an article about what to look forward to on the Road to Paris. There's a lot to unpack for fencing fans of any weapon and I promise you, whatever your weapon, there's lots to look forward to across the disciplines.

Virginia tells us about the new collaboration between Muslims Girls Fence and This Girl Can and we meet BF's new Inclusion Officer, Rick Rodgers. Sophie invites you all to contribute to BF's media content, including paid options to write for this magazine, and we cap the issue off with news about a campaign to get a Blue Plaque for Bob Anderson.

Enjoy!

# BEAUTYMAN, LUMINEAU, SUNDER-RAJAN & ZHU CLAIM EUROPEAN BRONZE

## Great Britain's Cadet Men's Epee Team Collect European Championship Bronze

Photos: #BizziTeam

On the first day at the Championships in Tallinn, Estonia, Cador Beautyman secured a top 64 finish in the Cadet Men's Epee event, Sameer Sunder-Rajan and Cheney Zhu made the 32 and Tristan Lumineau made the top 16. This set them up as fourth seeds for the team event and earned them a bye through the incomplete round of 32.



GBR Cadet Men's Epee Team

Norway, ranked thirteenth, made their way through Belgium 45-37 to set up a meeting with GBR. Beautyman, Lumineau and Sunder-Rajan started the match as the Norwegians edged the first three legs 15-14. Slowing the fight down, the British trio edged 29-26 ahead before bringing on Zhu, who opened the lead to 34-29. Beautyman and Sunder-Rajan closed out the match 45-39 to book their place in the quarterfinals.



Sunder-Rajan Ducking Hit

Fifth seeds Ukraine were a tough prospect and the team included European number three, Denys Lavrentiev, who had been staying with the Beautyman family to continue his training. Denys and Cador had been featured on BBC Breakfast in the days leading up to the Championships. Beautyman, Sunder-Rajan and Zhu began the match, but the Ukrainians took a 14-13 lead into the fourth leg. Lumineau came on for Zhu, but Ukraine opened their lead up to 30-27 with three legs remaining. Lumineau closed the gap to one hit before Beautyman took Britain into the lead 40-38 against Lavrentiev. Anchoring again, Sunder-Rajan closed out the match 45-39 to give the British team a place in the semi-finals and two shots at a medal.

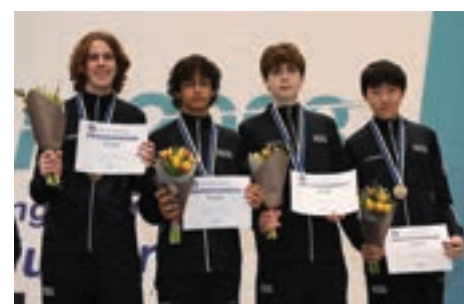


Beautyman Relishing the Opportunity  
Against Ukraine

Beautyman, Sunder-Rajan and Lumineau got the top four match against top seeds Italy under way in promising fashion, leading 14-11 after a patient start. The Italian comeback came immediately as Cortini scored nine hits in the fourth leg to establish the lead for the first time. With three bouts remaining, Italy had opened the lead to 29-25, forcing GBR to chase. Despite a 7-4 leg for Beautyman in the penultimate fight, Italy went on to make the final 45-40.

Hungary defeated third seeds Poland 45-34 in the other semi-final to set up a bronze medal match with Great Britain. Sunder-Rajan, Beautyman and Lumineau started again and all three fenced with composure, creativity and confidence, leading 15-11 going into the fourth leg. A 15-10 run through the middle of the match saw Great Britain leading 30-21: a strong position from which to claim the team's first medal at the Championships. Zhu came on for Lumineau in the eighth leg and did his job (5-1) to hand over a 40-26 lead to anchor Sunder-Rajan. A solid 5-2 win took the British team to the podium with a 45-28 victory, with all four members of the team playing their part.

Speaking about the match against Ukraine, Cador Beautyman said, "Going into our match with Ukraine I felt like, although they had the number one, two and three European ranked fencers (at the time) in their team, we still had a reasonable chance to win considering our team's respective experience fencing them in the individuals throughout the season and obviously within training. Personally, I was very excited to fence Denys in such a high stakes match for us, as he had knocked me out twice during the European season. So to win that leg 6-3 and to give our team a two point lead going into the final leg felt unreal."



First GBR Medal of the Championships

# EUROPEAN SILVER FOR ARCHER, CHAUDHARI, PENMAN & SOSNOV

Photos: #BizziTeam

Day two of the European Championships saw David Sosnov make the quarterfinals of the Cadet Men's Individual Foil, Mihkel Archer finish in the top 16, Callum Penman into the 32 and Aarav Chaudhari to the 64. Ranked third going into the team event, there was hope that a medal was more than possible.

A bye through the round of 32 was followed by their first match of the day, against fourteenth seeds Turkey who had just beaten Portugal 45-30. Sosnov, Archer and Penman began the match strongly, leading 15-10 after three legs. They were only outscored twice from there to the 45-34 victory.

Sixth seeds Poland were next and again Sosnov, Archer and Penman made a flying start to lead 15-7. That lead built to 25-15 before Duraj scored 10-3 against Penman, but the British team went into the final third of the match leading 28-25. Poland brought on their substitute Fogt, but GBR held the three point lead, going into the final leg 37-34 up. Sosnov anchored the team to victory, winning the match 45-38.

Second seeds Hungary were the team's semi-final opponents and it was a tricky start. Sosnov led the team out with a winning display before Archer lost 8-3 to Rubin. Penman steadied the ship, taking GBR to 15-11 after three legs. Archer came back on for the fourth and showed his



Archer in Final

quality to extend the lead to seven points. Rubin then came on for the sixth leg with Hungary trailing 15-23, and closed the gap to two points against Penman. This time it was Archer who turned things around, handing the fight back to Penman with Great Britain leading 32-26. He extended the lead further to 40-30, with Sosnov coming on in the anchor leg against Rubin. Sosnov put in a professional performance, taking GBR into the gold medal match with a 45-31 victory.

Top seeds Italy beat Israel 45-39 in the other semi-final and faced the British line-up of Sosnov, Archer and Penman for the title. Sosnov got the team off to a great start, winning the first leg 5-1 against De Cristofaro. Scalora and Pasin immediately changed the complexion of the match, beating Archer and Penman, taking Italy to 15-8 up after three legs. The Italian team powered through the middle of the match and led 30-18 with three bouts remaining. Archer's seventh leg showed that the team were still in the fight as he closed the gap to seven points. It proved to be not quite enough as Italy claimed gold with a 45-36 victory.

Talking about recovering from his early loss in the semi-finals, Mihkel Archer said, "I used what we had been taught and what you learn through experience: to take each fight as it comes. Once the referee calls 'halt', you have to forget about it and move forward. You want to maintain a positive attitude because emotions are infectious."

On the overall team performance, Callum Penman added, "We worked well together as a team and that's a real strength that we can draw on moving forward - good communication, very supportive and really encouraging towards one another. The main thing I think we need to concentrate on is maintaining our high intensity and energy, both in the box and on the piste, throughout the whole day. Big thanks to Keith (Cook) and Ben (Peggs) for their hard work, motivation and drive."



## Final Line Up

Looking ahead towards the season finale, David Sosnov said, "This sets me up excellently for the World Championships. I was slightly disappointed in my individual results, so I'm excited to get back out there and try to get a medal this time. As for the team, I'm really looking forward to one last competition with my team since we've worked so hard this season and half of them are becoming Seniors this year."

BF's Olympic Team Manager, Johnny Davis, concluded, "The achievement of the Cadet Men's Foil Team in winning the silver medal is testament to the dedicated focus and work of the fencers, their personal coaches and the British Foil Team Management at the event. The event was strong in its depth (twenty teams) and our team showed great resilience in finishing ahead of a number of those nations who have traditionally been regarded as the powerhouses of European fencing. The team members were clear in their objectives as identified and agreed with the Lead Men's Foil Coach, Keith Cook, and leant into each other throughout the day, showing consistent and unconditional support for each other without ego or selfish agendas impacting on the process. The role of the personal coaches - Ziemek Wojciechowski, Pierre Harper, Chris Galesloot and Keith Cook - should be acknowledged for its significance in the winning of this medal. Following this medal-winning performance, the GBR Cadet Men's Foil Team are now ranked number one in Europe. With the correct level of appropriate support and guidance, there is no reason to believe that this group of talented young men can't continue to win medals at European and World level."



GBR Cadet Men's Foil Team  
Podium with Coaches

# STUTCHBURY TAKES JUNIOR EUROPEAN BRONZE

Photos: #BizziTeam



Stutchbury at Full Stretch

Defending Champion Carolina Stutchbury began day one of the Junior European Championships in Tallinn, Estonia, in great form. She won all six of her first round matches, dropping just six points to take third seed into the elimination stage of the competition.

A bye through the round of 64 was followed up by a dominant performance against Poppel (SWE), going through 15-8. Next up was fourteenth seed Kagan Tyagunov (ISR) and it proved to be a much tougher battle. With her attack not working, Stutchbury fell 3-1 down with just over 20 seconds of the first period left. Finally she found a way through to the shoulder of her opponent and after a flurry of hits, went into the break 4-3 ahead. Working on her defence at the start of the second period was a useful change of tactics. Stutchbury pulled 9-3 ahead before the next break, with Tyagunov backing off in the final minute. Stutchbury stuck to the same defensive gameplan in the final period and with the Israeli fencer reluctant to press her attack, the British fencer won 14-5 on time.

The quarterfinal match was full of jeopardy as Stutchbury faced Lior Druck, again from Israel. Druck had claimed bronze at the World Cup in Udine, silver in Zagreb and gold in Mödling during the season and was seeded second for the event. She'd dropped a fight in the poule, thus the early meeting with Stutchbury. The Brit missed a couple of her attacks at the beginning with Druck, landing on both occasions on the counter, but Stutchbury found her distance and timing to lead 5-3 at the first break. Druck quickly levelled at the start of the second period, luring Stutchbury out into early attacks on preparation. Stutchbury

adjusted quickly and reestablished the lead, 13-10, at the second break. At the start of the final period Stutchbury showed her intent, landing a nice attack and ground out the final hit to progress 15-11.

Her semi-final match was against Ukraine's twenty-fourth seed for the event, Kristina Petrova, who had stormed through the poules to claim second seed for the knockout stages. She had also just knocked out Stutchbury's teammate, Amelie Tsang, in the previous round. Petrova started well, going up 5-0 in the first half of the first period before Stutchbury went down clutching her front knee. During the medical time-out, she was strapped up and ready to continue, only to fall 8-0 behind. She closed out the period strongly though, fighting back with four unanswered hits of her own. At the start of the second period, the neat and tidy Petrova scored twice in quick succession, the second a beautifully timed stop-hit. Then a second medical time-out, this time for Petrova, who had taken a whip across the top of her sword arm. When the fight resumed, Petrova used patient long attacks to close out the fight 15-4.

Petrova went on to claim the silver medal, losing to Giulia Amore (ITA) in the final as Stutchbury shared the bronze medal position with Ariadna Tucker (ESP).

Speaking on her return to the USA, Stutchbury said, "I fenced Druck at the last European Championships in the semi-final and beat her 15-8, so I had some sort of a sense of her fencing. Druck has been having a strong season so far, so I was nervous to fence her having seen her improvements. My fencing has also



changed a lot in the last year, so I went into the bout deciding to fence without a predetermined plan and to adjust my tactics based on her reactions. Against Petrova I used actions that worked, but the definition of 'attack in prep' has been changing recently and you can see that I used my two video reviews early on in the bout. I will have to work on adapting to the referee's style in the future. Going into the World Championships, I feel prepared to try to build off my bronze from last year and excited to put into effect what I have learned this year."

Olympic Team Manager, Johnny Davis, reflected on the medal-winning performance, "Carolina once again confirmed her status as one of the world's brightest young talents in Women's Foil. As defending Champion, there is always additional pressure and expectation and we need to recognise her achievement in once again medalling at this event. Throughout the day she showed her class in remaining undefeated until her semi-final match. Given her young age, it is important to acknowledge her consistently world class performances and to ensure that there is a clear and concise plan to support her for her remaining time in the Junior space and her transition into the Senior space, where she has already shown she is able to deliver quality performances and results. Having witnessed her working relationship at first hand in Atlanta with her coach Dmitri Romankov, it is clear that their shared world class aspirations and their work ethic underpin the success that Carolina has achieved to date and which, with the appropriate support, will continue in the future."



Carolina & Coach Romankov

# WE FEW, WE WORSHIPFUL FEW, WE BAND OF ... CUTLERS



Photos: Den Pollitt

*Talking to the past masters of weapon-ware, Siân Hughes Pollitt discovers a truly modern tale of social engagement and impact that is surprisingly cutting edge.*

*It cannot just be me who has noted society's recent sport of weeding out the old and the anachronistic and, on first glance, I wonder why the Worshipful Company of Cutlers - one of the oldest of the Corporation of London's livery companies - might have been spared.*

*However, a second glance affords me a wholeheartedly more meaningful, and relevant, take-out.*

*There are over one hundred livery companies comprising London's ancient and modern trade associations and guilds. And these are not just the people who have voted in a Lord Mayor or two; they are the people who are big on giving. The idea of charity - in the sense of caritas - originated as the companies that would look after their own in sickness and old age. These days, they support their members as well as dedicating themselves to wider*

*benevolent aims and activities, with a motto declaring: 'pour parvenir a bonne foy' or 'to succeed with good faith'. The Cutlers, in other words, are a group who look to nail something by putting their best foot forward. It comes as no surprise then that they also support British Fencing.*

*Yet, in the Hall of Fame of Well-Known Awards, the prizes given by The Worshipful Company of Cutlers are relatively little known. Do they dish out silver ladles? Gilded soup spoons? Fancy fish knives, maybe?*

*Joshing aside, I can see that they have certainly been deserving of a long-overdue write-up, given that this society of metal-shapers and weapon-crafters has been busy flexing its collective empathy muscles since the thirteenth century. The Cutlers were recognised with a royal charter in 1416, by way of thank you from King Henry V for all the armoured hardware they had gifted to him for the Battle of Agincourt.*

*To help me along in my quest for understanding, an interview is first arranged not with The Master, but with Richard Randolph - aka a Past Master. To navigate this unfamiliar territory, I am in*

*need of a Big Question. But apart from "How else did The Cutlers cut it during The Hundred Years War?", I am struggling to know how to pin the direction of the discussion. I have decided to ask Richard, "What are you Cutlers folks passionate about?", and see where it goes from there.*

*"Knife crime", comes Richard's calm but pithy response.*

*Richard explains that in 2016, after The Cutlers had raised funds to commemorate their official six-hundred-year anniversary, they decided to invest a significant amount of money into funding case-worker intervention at the bedsides of victims of knife crime at The Royal London Hospital, where the UK's first hospital ward-based violence reduction service had been established. The programme seeks to assist young patients injured through knife crime while they're still being treated in hospital, to break the cycle of violence at the point of crisis. They work with victims to unravel the complex social reasons behind knife crime and offer ongoing holistic support to help prevent further harm. The programme has had incredible success in reducing retaliation and violent reoffending in this group of vulnerable young people.*

*Talking to Richard and suddenly charitable affiliation after affiliation came a-bubbling to the forefront of our conversation. It is humbling to see the numerous and wide-ranging list of who The Cutlers engage with. They support the 'Spitalfields Crypt Trust' who work with people affected by addiction and homelessness. They lend a generous hand to 'The Extended Medical Degree Programme' at King's College London helping students to study medicine who might otherwise be prevented from doing so, as well as helping 'Into University' - a charity that provides local learning centres in disadvantaged communities supporting young people from the least privileged families to gain a university place or achieve another chosen aspiration.*



Piers Gilliver





As passionate as Richard is for identifying social need and achieving social impact, so he is about sport. He, like the rest of the Worshipful Company, can see sport's magic - its invisible yet manifest influence in reshaping and reimagining people's lives. Whatever impact sport has, it is for the better.

Hence the relationship with British Fencing that started in the early Noughties when Richard had a chance meeting with a publisher who also happened to be a fencer. Soon his sensibilities were locked into what fencing as a sport could teach and he looked to broker some kind of support for our federation.

The Cutlers Prizes have been honouring British fencers for their notable achievements for some years now. The 2015 annual award went to the GBR Men's Foil Team of Richard Kruse, Marcus Mepstead, Ben Peggs and Alex Tofalides for their gold medal victory at the European Games. Richard also took the Cutlers Annual Award Bronze Medal in 2018 for winning the first World Championship medal since the 1960s.

In the recent Paralympic and Olympic years of 2016 and 2021, it is British Paralympic fencer Piers Gilliver MBE who has added Cutlers medals to his own gongs. In 2016, Piers took the Annual Award for his Silver in Rio, as well as awards for his individual and team performances in Tokyo 2020 that had been postponed to 2021.

Henry V declared victory at Agincourt on 25 October 1415. A few days shy of seven-hundred-and-seventy years later on 21 October 2022 was when The Cutlers also accepted Piers into their company as a freeman - a title that renders him a full member of the guild. Cutlers Clerk (or Chief Executive Officer) Rupert Meacher cannot contain his enthusiasm. "We are absolutely delighted that Piers has been welcomed into the Company. He is the most incredible fencer we have seen and demonstrates

a strong sense of discipline in the sport to achieve his results. He represents a wonderful addition to The Cutlers. Our strength does lie in our number; everything stems from fellowship. To maintain our sense of relevance and social responsibility in the world around us, we come together and unite to make a difference."

Piers is no less thrilled with being described as a 'freeman' of The Cutlers. "It really means a huge amount to have such a rare accolade and be part of this organisation which has centuries of history. It seems to chime well that fencing is an ancient sport and The Cutlers have a rich tradition but both are so relevant to our lives and our world today."

As Piers goes on to describe the evening when he was sworn in, with its warm welcome and social dinner, he tells of how important such awards and accolades are to a competitive athlete.

"It's paramount to have some kind of external recognition. I am so focused on the sport. I never stop thinking about and working on the next competition, the next result, the next medal and on every single improvement - so much so that I can end up in a place where I forget the bigger picture of what I have achieved. The Cutlers awards have helped me get back to seeing and appreciating what that is."

Piers' pride-of-place Cutlers medals reside in a display cabinet at home. It is clear however that they occupy a different and even more special place in his inner world - a double-meaning that is also appreciated by British Fencing CEO, Georgina Usher MBE.

"British Fencing's affiliation with The Worshipful Company of Cutlers is

significant on so many levels. Their commitment to civic engagement and social impact reflects and echoes British Fencing's priorities and values and we are proud of the connection we have. Equally, in the climate of funding, The Cutlers have always been generous and imaginative in determining solid ways to support fencing. Given what we have shared and achieved over the past and present years of affiliation, we can only go from strength-to-strength together in the future."

Most of the fencing community is on a perennial mission to relay the positive aspects of the sport. There is no need to bang that drum with The Cutlers. They get it. The Cutlers already know the value of fencing and that, in terms of funding, fencing can be under-valued. They are certainly keen to see what can be done in the future, and how they can make even more of an impact.

On completing my mini-quest, I have managed to forge and finish a much greater knowledge of The Worshipful Company of Cutlers. Talking of their strength in unity to do battle, Shakespeare had their early royal patron, Henry V say "we few, we merry few, we band of brothers". So too The Cutlers infuse their emblematic fellowship with a uniquely concrete worth that far outstrips any precious metal.

Indeed, I feel that I've become more than a little 'worshipful' myself. The word means 'filled with reverence and admiration'. I can honestly say yes, that I am - full to the brim, and overflowing.



Piers Gilliver vs Ollie Lam Watson

# WINNING THE RIGHT WAY

## Liz Behnke Helps Karim Navigate the Grey

I've long-held the belief that to win in international sport requires not only the right physique, skill and shed-loads of hard work, but also a level of sacrifice that would be considered unpalatable in the real world. I know that I'm not alone in this.

"Leaving no stone unturned" was the mantra adopted by UK Sport until relatively recently and let's face it, it worked. Medal success for Team GB has never been so good. However, the so-called participation legacy, specifically post-London 2012, simply hasn't materialised. That means that the benefits of those podium successes were limited to those achieving them and perhaps a few others around them.

Worse still, the stories coming out of governing bodies, both home and abroad, about the physical, sexual, mental and psychological abuse dished out by team coaches, trainers and even doctors on athletes and 'ignored' by those in positions of power, has been abhorrent. My fear at this point is that what we've heard so far may just be the tip of the iceberg.

There are plenty of these stories that will have all of us on the same page in terms of condemnation - the US Gymnastics team doctor, the Korean short-track speed skating coach, the 'trial by scales' story closer to home, are just a few examples. Venture away from the obvious breaches in what is legal and what is not, what is humane and what is not, what is decent and what is not, one quickly finds oneself in a grey and perhaps undefined area.

"The Acceptable vs The Unacceptable" perhaps?

A couple of personal examples may help paint the picture better or, if nothing else, illustrate my personal benchmark.

When I trained at what can only be described as a 'performance-facing' club, my teammates and I would regularly train to the point of exhaustion. This would include sessions ending with vomiting! It was nothing to us or our coaches and treated very much as the "no pain - no gain" part of the journey to better performance. For the sake of clarity, to



Karim with Club Mate and Countryman  
Dave Whiting - Malaysia 1998

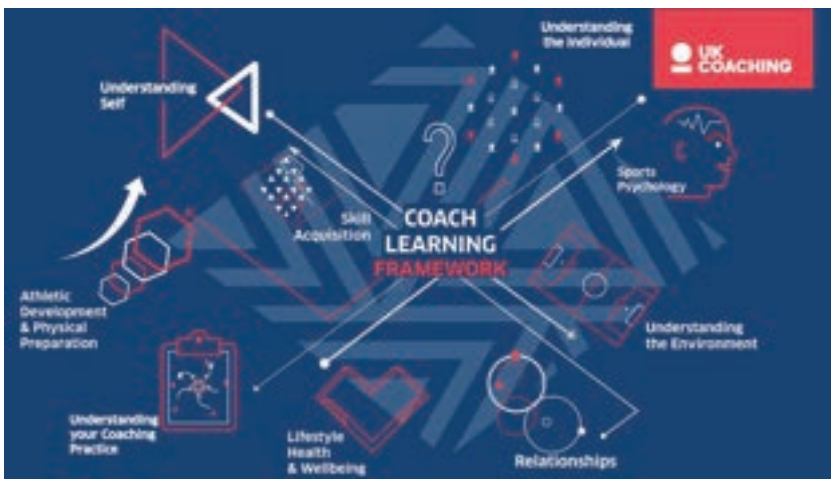
this day, both myself and those I'm still in touch with, don't look back on this with any regret or malice towards those training us. It was "acceptable" in those days and I acknowledge that, but old habits die hard. Recently, I discovered a training regime called "Insanity" which I went through to regain some of my youthful physique! Adopting the same "no pain - no gain" approach, three times I injured myself in the first few days of the programme. I decided to compromise with myself and take it a little easier. Eventually it worked and I built up the stamina and strength to go at it hard. On seeing me throw up or panting heavily for 20 minutes after completing the day's exercise, my wife told me that she was deeply concerned that in my fourth decade I was putting myself through too much. A grey area! For me, it was an acceptable sacrifice for losing weight and getting in shape. For her, it was unacceptable because I was "going to have a heart attack".

Our youngest took up swimming recently as an extracurricular activity, something that I was very pleased about - even more so, when it turned out she had genetic similarities to the dolphin family! Fastest in class, she was quickly promoted to a group where all her peers were at least a year older. There's me, dreaming of heading to the Olympics in LA with a medal contender - working out how we'd do the early morning taxi shuttles to Plymouth and where all the domestic trials were. Time wasted it turned out because our "Flipper" didn't have a competitive bone

in her body. She was (and still is) fast but feels no need to prove it to the world. So here we are, paying national governing body membership, annual and weekly club fees for a swimmer with almost everything to go pretty far but only her clubmates, coaches, mum and I know about it! Despite my huge frustration - especially when she decides she doesn't want to go to a club session every now and again - as long as she wants to continue swimming we'll do what we can to make that happen. It is more than acceptable for her to just want to take part, even though the lack of desire to compete is alien to me. What she gets from the weekly experience is different to her school, home and social lives. It clearly has all of the health benefits associated with regular exercise and "Flipper" loves her coaches, who not only provide her with swimming guidance and expertise but are influential adults whose opinions mum and I trust. On top of that "Flipper" has just turned 16 and has applied for a job as a lifeguard at our local leisure centre.

Basing my approach on such things on 'gut feeling' no longer seemed appropriate. Fortunately, on hand to help me navigate a healthy and fulfilling path was Liz Behnke, British Fencing's Lead Safeguarding Officer. Whilst most people only come into contact with Liz when something has gone wrong - or at least they suspect it has - I decided it was time to get ahead of the game. Here's her perspective on those not-so-grey areas.

"So why do we think that tough toxic environments are the best way of developing athletes? Let's wind this back a bit. If you feel threatened or out of your depth, are you consistently going to produce your best? If hard training is equated to vomiting, what does that tell you? If being shouted at all the time, belittled or undermined is what you are on the receiving end of, what does that tell you? Conversely, telling "Flipper" that she can make the Olympics, when she doesn't have an interest in doing so, what message will she take away? I understand that sport at the top level can be brutal and full of knocks but do we have to expose athletes to this world or teach them how to cope with it?"



“The simple answer is that everyone is different. Some will need the metaphorical arm round the shoulder. Others will need the proverbial boot up the backside at times. The key thing is that no one will consistently produce their real best unless they feel safe. That is physically safe and emotionally safe. Safe to be able to speak about how they feel. Safe to let us know what they like and don’t like and why. Above all, safe to make mistakes. There has to be respect. Mutual respect can only exist where there is no abuse of power.”

“Karim, you have spoken about clear cut examples of abuse of power, such as Larry Nasser, the US Gymnastics Team doctor, but horrific as these are, they are rare in sport. Most examples are much more subtle. Some people would not even recognise them as such because the way they see things are heavily influenced by their own personal experiences. We need to be clear that just because we experienced it does not mean it is right. As a coach, when I step into my coaching role I have power. Just think about it, at the beginning of a session the starting point might be - ‘OK everyone get warmed up’. That is reasonable and totally appropriate. We need to be able to lead our groups. So at one extreme we have a reasonable request, at the other end (Larry Nasser) we have abuse. Where does abuse of power start? This is where it gets more difficult again, as we are talking shades of grey. So is it OK to ostracise a fencer because of something they have done differently or are different to others? Is it OK to stand in a fencer’s space and yell at them after a competition where they haven’t done as well as you expected? Are we actually looking at what they need?”

“I recall vividly a conversation with two lovely parents who had submitted a complaint about the way their son had been treated in another sport. They were

genuine, caring, balanced parents. They described how they had withdrawn their child from the sport where he had been subjected to emotional abuse and had moved to a different sport. The boy had come in from first training session in his new sport with a smile on his face. “Mum, Dad, I had such fun, we were able to laugh and enjoy ourselves.” It dawned on the parents that they had allowed him to be subjected to emotional abuse and abuse of power from the coaches. They had a realisation that in any other walk of life they would have not allowed their son to experience this behaviour. “We thought that this was how you developed good athletes. How did we allow this to happen?” They were devastated that they too had been duped by the coaches who had abused their position of power under the disguise of producing athletes.”

“Within fencing we are now talking more about the following:

- Be safe
- Have fun
- Feel welcome”

“I suspect that if I spoke to “Flipper” she would say that she feels all of these in her swimming club, and above all, she is allowed to be herself. She is treated as an individual within her squad. Everyone is different. Even you, Karim!”

“So maybe we need to think about the culture that we are setting. How are we actually treating our fencers? Are we treating them the way we want to treat them, or the way they want to be treated? Are we actually thinking about what they want and need, or are we actually training them to just accept what we give them?”

“Sadly there is no black and white here. We are all told that shouting at athletes is not

acceptable. Think about it. Is this actually correct? If an athlete is putting themselves or others in danger, then it is. OK, that’s pretty obvious. What if an athlete has gone off the boil in a match? Well, that depends. Are they the one who needs a bit of a wake up call or are they the one that needs to work it out for themselves? Now we are getting into really knowing your athlete.”

“Whilst one could feel that this summary provides little clarity I would argue the opposite. For me, it’s no different to teaching two pupils a particular action. Rarely will they get to exactly the same place at exactly the same time. However they will get to their version of that action at some point. Good coaches embrace that individuality and try to capitalise on it.”

“I see no difference here. Good coaches, volunteers, referees, organisers, parents, friends all treat each other as individuals and show empathy. Of course, there are times when a raised voice, a telling off, a display of disappointment are all appropriate and acceptable, but only in a circumstance that has trust at its core.”

“Let’s try again. Be Safe. Feel Welcome. Have Fun.”

*In saying, “There is no black and white here,” Liz has confirmed that seeking clarity about one situation or another needs an examination of the people involved, the situation that they are in and how everyone felt they were being treated at the time.*

*We train in first aid, coach development, armoury and getting better at fencing. There’s no reason that we shouldn’t train for welfare too.*



Liz

# THE FORECAST FOR PARIS 2024

**Karim Bashir**

Photos: #BizziTeam

We are almost exactly a year away from knowing which teams and athletes will qualify by ranking for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, and there's no doubt that the landscape will change over those twelve months. However, just for fun, I thought I'd have a look at who would qualify (by ranking) for Paris if the qualification period was over today.

Now, before I get into that, it's prudent to put this article into context. Firstly, Olympic qualification has only just begun and what you are about to read is intended to reflect the situation at the time of writing: mid-March 2023. Details are based on the FIE ranking list at this point in time and form is temporary. Secondly, whilst I expect 'the usual suspects' in each weapon to be there or thereabouts in a year's time, there are bound to be changes in some team line-ups, injuries that affect individual performance and other factors that will have a bearing on who actually qualifies. That said, I thought it would be interesting to look at who would qualify today... and perhaps more interestingly, who wouldn't.

Finally, I've made the assumption that you understand how qualification by ranking works. If you need a refresher, take a look at pages 15 and 16 of [the last issue of this magazine](#).

## Women's Epee

Let's start with the facts. Starting with the team rankings, the top ranked four, Korea, Italy, France and Poland, would qualify directly to the Games. The zonal placings go to China, Egypt, Ukraine and the USA. The individual athletes who would qualify by the Adjusted Olympic Ranking (AOR) list are two from Asia - Kong (HKG) and Sato (JPN) - two from Europe - Kun (HUN) and Differt (EST) - and one from each of Africa and PanAm - Ndolo (KEN) and Moellhausen (BRA).

The first thing that strikes me is that currently the reigning Team Olympic Champions, Estonia, would not qualify a team. Furthermore, none of the Tokyo



Lehis - Estonia MIA

2020 Estonian team would make it to Paris, including Estonia's first ever fencing medallist, Katrina Lehis. It's highly competitive at the top of the Women's Epee World rankings, and their current ranking means they will face tough opponents from the round of 16 at the start of the real qualifying period. They have to hit the ground running to put themselves in contention. The European race for team qualification will be an interesting one to watch.

As will the Asian contest. Korea are streets ahead in terms of form and the expectation is that they are likely to hold on to their



Canada

place in the top four teams. There is no doubt though that both China and Hong Kong could challenge for the automatic qualification spots. It is not too much of a leap to predict that all three could qualify directly, opening up the Asian zonal spot for Japan.



Moellhausen Win Doha GP 2023

Geographical strength in depth will be a running theme across most of the weapons. In Women's Epee, despite the transition period they are going through, the USA leads the way in PanAm and are favourites to pick up their zonal place at the very least. Canada, as during the Tokyo qualifying period, will hope their closest southerly neighbours can make it into the top four. As for African qualification, Egypt are clear favourites but must hold their place in the top 16 in the World to qualify for Paris.



Ndolo Switches to Kenya

The makeup of the top four teams in a year's time is far from clear, so any conjecture about which Asian or European athletes would be in contention is futile. That is not the case for the African and Pan American zones, however. Brazil's thirty-seven year old Moellhausen is in devastating form at the moment but she'll be keeping a close eye on Argentinian Di Tella, as we all should. Former German fencer Ndolo has switched allegiances and now fences for Kenya: a move clearly made for the purpose of making the starting list for Paris 2024... and one that is likely to pay off.

As things stand, putting Estonia aside (not that we should), the individual field in Paris would currently contain most of the World's top 25. The lowest ranked AOR qualifier, Sato (JPN), has a World ranking of 33. So, the Women's Epee Olympic event promises to be strong from top to bottom.

### Men's Epee

The top four teams in the World, France, Italy, Korea and Japan, would qualify directly to the Games. The zonal placings go to China, Egypt, Switzerland and Venezuela. The individual athletes who would qualify by the AOR list are Kurbanov (KAZ), Fong (HKG), Siklosi (HUN), Loyola (BEL), Elkord (MAR) and Rodriguez (COL).

The battle for the top four team places is fierce and I expect Switzerland, Hungary and China to mix it with Italy, Korea and Japan for three of those places. France are the stand-out team at the moment, with coaching "Dream Team" Obry and Grumier at the helm, having won the first three World Cups of the season. The problem France faces is a spoil of riches. It's a nice



Obry The Mastermind



Can Egypt's Men Stay in Contention?

problem to have, but currently I can see seven contenders for the three individual places and one team reserve spot.

Italy has some breathing space in the top four and I'm not convinced that Switzerland are the finished article yet. Hungary, Ukraine and perhaps Germany will also be in the running for the European zonal places.

Whilst China currently holds the Asian zonal team place, their preparations have been hampered by former coach Obry's return to his home country. I think it's likely that China's progression to Paris may rest on whether Korea and Japan can stay in the top four.

Along with Venezuela, who currently occupy the PanAm place, the USA and Colombia reside in the World's top 16. The Limardo brothers and Lugo make Venezuela strong favourites within that trio of nations, and I back them to see it through to the Olympics. Morocco sits nearly 100 points behind Egypt in the African race, making them unlikely contenders for the zonal place. Again, however, the question is whether the Egyptians can stay in the World's top 16.

Looking at the AOR places, my gut tells me that Hungary will do enough to pick up at least the European zonal place. That would mean that World number two and the 2019 World Champion, Siklosi, would vacate one of the two European allocations. Belgium's Loyola has been a bit of a surprise package this season, claiming silver at the Doha Grand Prix. He'll need to keep up that form as he's being chased by Stankevych (UKR) and two Swiss fencers, Bayard and Heinzer. Cohen (ISR) and Tulen (NED) are also worth keeping an eye on when it comes to that particular challenge.



Is Loyola Belgium's Quiet Contender?

I expect Korea and Japan to qualify through the team route, but I'm not convinced both will stay in the top four. If that is the case, China would be relegated from the Asian zonal spots, pushing their fencers into the race for the two Asian AOR places - and what a race that promises to be. Kurbanov (KAZ) and (assuming China don't qualify by team) Lan (CHN) lead the race, but they don't have a huge points advantage over Alimzhanov (KAZ). There's plenty to look out for in the Men's Epee Asian battle.

Tokyo 2020 Olympian Elkord (MAR) leads the African AOR race and there's just one individual place available for that continent. If Egypt qualify as a team then Elkord will go to Paris, but if they don't, the Moroccan will be in a battle with Elsayed for the African place. Rodriguez (COL) leads the PanAm race and is 25 points clear of his nearest rival McDowald (USA). Earning silver in the Berne World Cup this season,



Rodriguez - the neutral's man

the Colombian is currently in fine form but he does blow hot and cold. It's worth checking in on that two horse race.

Anything can happen in Epee, especially in the Men's field. These predictions have the best chance of all the weapons to come back and bite me!

### Women's Foil

The top four teams in the World, Italy, USA, France and Japan, would qualify directly to the Games. The zonal placings go to China, Germany and Canada. With no African team currently in the World's top 16, Poland would pick up the extra team place. The individual athletes who would qualify by the AOR list are Berthier (SGP), Cheng (HKG), Boldor (ROU), Polozhiuk (UKR), Mohamed (EGY) and Pistoia (BRA).

Italy are over 100 points clear at the top of the team World rankings and will qualify for Paris 2024. There are plenty of headaches for coach Cerioni though. First up is Errigo who recently (March) gave birth to twins. She is still ranked sixth in the individual list and determined to make her comeback at the World Championships in Milan in July. Who would bet against her? Volpi is the highest ranked Italian in the Women's Foil field and a banker for the team. But who else will be in the team? Along with Volpi, this season Italy have had podium finishes from Palumbo (2), Cipressa, Mancini, Favaretto, Batini and Sinigaglia. Eight does not go into four easily! The good news is that we're going to get some indication of Cerioni's thinking soon at the first World Cup qualifier, and an even clearer picture when we see the team line-up in Milan.



Cairo World Cup, but will this be the ITA team for Paris?



Boidin's Japanese Dream

The USA have collected all three silver medals in the team events this season and I expect them to stay in the top four. This is good news for the Canadian team who will, in return, collect the PanAm zonal place. It's looking good for France and Japan to stay in the top four too, but I wouldn't be surprised if they swap places given Japan's recent form under Frenchman Boidin.



Berthier on course for Olympic qualification

The European team zonal spot is a nervy one. There's very little between Germany, Poland and Spain. My guess is that Germany and Poland are likely to last the battle, but picking between them at this stage is not something I'm prepared to do. However, we may not have to. Despite their three leading fencers all being in the World's top 50, the Egyptian team have not made it to the top 16 of a team World Cup this season and currently lie outside of the qualification places. Whilst they are quite capable of turning that around, the signs aren't looking great for them right now.

That leaves Asia and with Korea in transition at the moment, China is looking good for their continental zone place.

Whatever happens with team qualification, there will be a real scrap for the two AOR places allocated to Europe. Boldor (ROU), Polozhiuk (UKR), Kondricz (HUN), Karamete



Pistoia PanAm Pole Position

(TUR), Marino (ESP), Lyczbinska (POL), Pasztor (HUN), Stutchbury (GBR) and Diaz (ESP) are all in the race.

Given Korea's position, Berthier (SGP) - who had a promising Junior career - is poised to claim one of the two Asian AOR places, with Cheng (HKG) not too far behind. It remains to be seen whether Koreans Chae and Hong can join that race.

The three Egyptians, Mohamed, Elsharkawy and Hany, will battle it out for the single African spot. Pistoia (BRA) will battle it out with teammates Bulcao and Gomes, plus Mormandi (ARG) for the PanAm place, all ranked 80 or below.

There's a bit of a gap between the top and everyone else in Women's Foil, which opens up the debate about how fair the qualification system is when applied to this discipline. The Olympic Games is a global spectacle and demands, quite rightly, participation from all continents. However, you've got to feel for the four (perhaps more) Italians who will be sitting at home potentially watching fencers outside the World's top 100 becoming Olympians.

### Men's Foil

The top four teams in the World, Italy, USA, Japan and France would qualify directly to the Games. The zonal placings go to Hong Kong, Egypt, Poland and Canada. The individual athletes who would qualify by the AOR list are Mo (CHN), Im (KOR), Choupenitch (CZE), Mepstead (GBR), Madi (ALG) and Servello (ARG).

Italy, USA, Japan and France have shared all of the team titles this season, with



**Who does Cerioni pick for ITA?**

the USA taking two gold medals and Italy and Japan winning one each. Whilst not mathematically impossible, it would take a concerted and long-lasting change of form for that to change.

If I am right, then we only need to consider the zonal allocations for this weapon. Let's take Africa first because it's the easiest. Currently ranked fifth, Egypt's Abouelkassem and Co are extremely unlikely to drop outside the World's top 16 and with their closest rivals, Algeria, a long way back, we can expect to see Egypt at the Games. It's a two-horse race for the Asian allocation between Hong Kong and Korea, who are separated by just twelve points. I slightly favour Hong Kong at the moment as they boast reigning individual Olympic Champion Cheung, who has recently hit form again. That, of course, could change.

Thirty-nine points is the lead Canada holds over Brazil in the World rankings, but their finishing positions over the course of the season so far suggests that there is going to be a tight race for the PanAm place. It's one to keep a close eye on.

Whether you are a British fan or not, the race for the European place is massive. Poland currently leads the World rankings by thirty-seven points over Great Britain, followed by Hungary, Ukraine, Germany



**Le Pechoux Destined for Paris via Tokyo**

and Belgium. However, if you look just at the four events so far this season, whilst Poland still leads the race, Great Britain would be tied with Hungary in second. Germany and Ukraine are tied in fourth followed by Belgium - and there's very little in it. Over the course of the next twelve months, the team that comes out on top will have had to show consistent form, put in some performances perhaps above what is expected and have a little bit of luck with the draw.



**The Paris 2024 USA Team?**

So to the AOR. If Korea overhaul Hong Kong in the race for the team place then Cheung would easily pick up the first of the two Asian places and the second would go to the top Chinese fencer: a battle between Mo, Xu and Wu. If Hong Kong hold on to the zonal team place, Im, Lee and Ha would be in a battle to be top Korean, with the second place going to the top Chinese athlete.



**Choupenitch - A medal contender**

Choupenitch leads the European contest and given his form (and the fact that the Czech Republic are very unlikely to qualify as a team), he should be on the plane to Paris along with Spain's Llavador. Should Great Britain fail to qualify as a team in that tight battle, the good news is that Mepstead is just behind the Spaniard and their current form is very similar, with both having made the podium once this season.

If Canada qualify through the team route, Servello (ARG) is in pole position for the PanAm place with Toldo (BRA) chasing him. If Brazil makes it, then Van Haaster (CAN) and Servello are likely to have to beat each other for the place. The race for the African AOR spot looks like it will be a fight between Madi (ALG) and Metoui (TUN).

The field is certainly more bunched up in Men's Foil compared to the women. However, the depth in competition in Africa is shallow, making the route for an African fencer outside of Egypt considerably easier compared to those in Asia and Europe.

**Women's Sabre**

The top four teams in the World, France, Korea, Hungary and Italy, would qualify directly to the Games. The zonal placings go to Japan, Spain and the USA. With no African team currently in the World's top 16, Azerbaijan would pick up the vacant team place. The individual athletes who would qualify by the AOR list are Shao (CHN), Chu (HKG), Georgiadou (GRE), Kharlan (UKR), Boudaif (ALG) and Page (CAN).

Korea are the form team in this discipline, making the podium at every World Cup so far this season. Brunet (FRA) is making her way back after injury and her team have won two of the four World Cups so far. Italy haven't quite settled yet, but have still taken silver and bronze. Hungary haven't been on the podium yet and didn't make it out of the 16 at the Athens World Cup. On current form, I fancy Spain to have a crack at the top four and for Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany and Greece to be in the running for the European zonal place. You also can't rule out Ukraine with Kharlan leading the team. They won bronze at the last World Cup and there is no doubt that they will be highly motivated. The team race in Europe



**Korea Looking Good**



**Bulgaria could spring a surprise**

will be an intriguing battle, especially if there is no African qualifier.

The Asian zonal allocation is looking good for Japan at the moment, but it's worth keeping an eye on the Chinese performances over the coming year. I'm not certain it's nailed on for Japan, but their destiny is in their own hands. Neither is it for Canada in the PanAm zone. Whilst they don't have a realistic zonal rival at the moment, the question there is whether they can stay inside the top 16. Algeria is the main contender for the continental place available to the African continent. However, they sit outside the top 16 and don't attend every event. Could budget be a factor in their chances of making Paris 2024?

There is little point in predicting who will pick up the two European AOR places other than to say that if neither Azerbaijan nor Ukraine qualify through the team route, Bashta (AZE) and Kharlan (UKR) have to be the favourites. It's also worth keeping an eye on Eifler (GER) during the qualification period.



**Ukrainian Hopes Rest on Kharlan**

Assuming China doesn't pull the rabbit out of the hat in the team event, Shao is likely to battle it out with teammate Fu for one of the Asia AOR places. Bhavani Devi (IND) and Chu (HKG) are the current contenders for the other one.

Two Canadians, Page and Thurgood, will be in a battle with Toledo (MEX) and Perez Maurice (ARG) for the PanAm place. Algerians Boudiaf and Kehli look likely to go head-to-head for the single African place.

There's plenty to keep an eye on in the battle for the team places, but for those coming through the AOR - outside of Europe and Shao - it's unlikely that those qualifiers will contend for the medals in Paris.



**History Maker Bhavani Devi**

### Men's Sabre

The top four teams in the World, Korea, Hungary, Italy and France, would qualify directly to the Games. The zonal placings go to Iran, Egypt, Germany and the USA. The individual athletes who would qualify by the AOR list are Sarkissyan (KAZ), Streets (JPN), Bazadze (GEO), Teodosiu (ROU), Ferjani (TUN) and Arfa (CAN).

Korea and Hungary are currently split by twenty-four points at the top of the World



**Hungary with Triple Individual Olympic Champion Szilagy**



**K-Sabre**

ranking. There is a gulf of over one hundred points from them down to Italy and France, who would qualify automatically if Paris qualification was over today. Germany and the USA are not far behind, with Iran, Egypt and Japan in the chasing pack. Suffice to say, two places in the top four are up for grabs.

Looking around the zones, China is not that far away from Japan and both could qualify should one of them make the top four in a year's time. With both France and Germany in contention for places in the top four, you have to consider Spain, Romania and Ukraine as contenders for a run at the European zonal spot.



**Georgia's Bazadze**

Who knows if Dershwitz can lead the USA team to the top four, but if not, Canada will have to do it on the piste and overtake them to make Paris. Egypt, solidly a top 16 team, have clear air between themselves and Tunisia, so you'd fancy them to qualify in the African zonal place.





### Kazakhstan Hopes for Sarkissyan

It's so open that it's hardly worth looking at the zonal AOR places for Europe and Asia. That said, Georgia's World number one (at the time of writing) Bazadze has to pick up the top European one, given his form and the likelihood that they simply aren't strong enough to qualify through the team route. The same could be said for Teodosiu, should Romania not qualify by team. If things remain as they are today, Kazakhstan would see Sarkissyan qualify in the top Asian place, with Streets (JPN) picking up the other place. Ferjani (TUN) and Arfa (CAN) are clear favourites for the single African and Pan American places, respectively.

There's not really that much more to say when it comes to Men's Sabre: it's so open and of all six weapons, the most closely contested - I can't wait to see how it pans out!

### Rule Britannia or Rule out Britannia?

Come on! This is British Fencing's magazine. We'll be cheering for them as loudly as you. Hopes are high in the foil space - the Men's Foil Team have been building a depth in the squad and are positioned well within the ranking to push for team qualification. Should they not, Marcus Mepstead is positioned nicely for the AOR route, if needed. Carolina

Stutchbury's age and stage trajectory would suggest Los Angeles 2028 is the goal. Her current performance trajectory would not rule out qualification for the Paris 2024 AOR route.

Realistically, an analysis of the challenge would suggest without dramatic changes in form, the best hopes for our epee and sabre fencers is through the special zonal qualifier, due to be held in May 2024. You can take that negatively if you want to, but I'd rather look at it in a positive light. Each weapon will be looking to build their teams and will be working to build their ranking in preparation for the Los Angeles cycle, whilst the individuals will be looking to gain as much experience - both on the piste and watching from the side - of those they might have to fence in that one-off qualifier.



### Mepstead Going for Paris

It's time to cheer on our fencers in the knowledge that there are multiple routes to Paris 2024. Should one door close, let's smash through the next!

### Qualification - could it be improved?

The simple answer is yes, if you aren't from a strong nation with lots of fencers. However, look at what Estonia did in Tokyo. They have focussed on Epee and while it took them several cycles, they came away

from Tokyo with one Individual medal in Lehis and Team gold in Women's Epee.

There is plenty of discussion of how things could be improved. I'm a firm believer in ensuring that there is continental representation in every weapon - how else can we inspire people to take up the sport in every region if they don't have someone to look up to? The rules for team qualification plus the special zonal qualifiers satisfy that for me. So the one thing I would amend is the rule for AOR qualification. That change is simple: fencers must be in the top 40 in the World to qualify via that route. If they are not, the place is released to the next highest ranked fencer not already qualified, irrespective of country. That would follow the same precedent set by the rules for team qualification, so shouldn't be that controversial (cue the backlash!).

### How to stay up to date

For the past two cycles, the FIE has produced a special online portal to stay right up to date with Olympic qualification. Keep your eyes peeled for the same this time.

We shall wait and see if Dave Baker sets up his brilliant Facebook page which followed qualification (almost) in real time for Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. Rumour has it that will launch soon as well as his podcast. You heard it here first!

We will also be publishing qualification round ups in the next four issues of The Sword. So there's plenty of options for fencing fans to keep abreast of who will qualify for the next Olympics.

The countdown clock has started. The teams and the fencers all start on 0 points. It's time to begin the Race to Paris 2024!

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

karim.bashir@catchsport.com

# OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

The top four teams as of 1 April 2024 will qualify directly for the Games, irrespective of their zone. Should one or more of the zones not be represented in the 5-16 ranking bracket, the highest ranked team(s) not already qualified will fill the missing slot(s), irrespective of zone. Eight teams are now qualified in each weapon. Those countries are allocated three places per team and the fencers selected will take part in both the team and individual events in their discipline.

There are two additional ways for fencers who haven't qualified through the team process to make the individual event: the AOR, Adjusted Olympic Ranking (the individual World Ranking less every fencer from every qualified team); and by winning in the Zonal Qualifiers.



PARIS 2024



## April 2023

Poznan Women's Foil World Cup  
Seoul Men's & Women's Sabre Grand Prix

## May 2023

Cali Men's & Women's Epee Grand Prix  
Tauberbischofsheim Women's Foil World Cup  
Acapulco Men's Foil World Cup  
Batumi Women's Sabre World Cup  
Madrid Men's Sabre World Cup  
St Maur Men's Epee World Cup  
Shanghai Men's & Women's Foil Grand Prix  
Abu Dhabi Women's Epee World Cup

## June 2023

Zonal Championships (Poland)

## July 2023

World Championships (Milan, Italy)

## October 2022 - April 2024

2x Women's Foil World Cup - 3 left  
1x Men's Foil World Cup - 4 left  
1x Women's Epee World Cup - 4 left  
1x Men's Epee World Cup - 4 left  
1x Women's Sabre World Cup - 4 left  
1x Men's Sabre World Cup - 4 left

## May 2024

Zonal Olympic Qualifiers

## Early 2024 (yet to be scheduled)

2x Grand Prix and 4x World Cups in each of Men's Epee, Women's Epee and Men's Foil  
2x Grand Prix and 3x World Cups in Women's Foil



# PARALYMPIC QUALIFIERS

The Para Fencing qualification for Paris 2024 began in October 2022. Since then there have been three events where points collected count towards qualification for the Paralympic Games: a first World Cup in Eger, Hungary; the European Championships in Warsaw, Poland; and a second World Cup in Washington D.C., USA. With medals at all three events, there's plenty to cheer about for our GBR contingent.

Here are the remaining events taking place during the qualification period...



## March 2023

Pisa World Cup

## April 2023

Nimes World Cup

## May 2023

Orange (FRA) Satellite

## July 2023

Warsaw World Cup

## August 2023

Sao Paulo Satellite

## September 2023

Korea World Cup (TBC)

## October 2023

World Championships (Terni, ITA)

## December 2023

Nakhon Ratchasima (THA) World Cup

## 2024

World Cups in Cardiff (TBC), Sao Paulo (TBC) and the European Championships

# TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FENCING

By David Worsfold

British Fencing has established an Environmental Sustainability Action Group to help map out a pathway to sustainability for the sport. The reality of global warming and human-induced climate change is not a matter of debate: it is reality. A scientifically proven reality.

As sport faces increasing scrutiny in the battle to limit global warming, it is essential that fencing looks hard at itself and asks what must we do to embark on a road to sustainability?

This is no longer optional for British Fencing.

All Olympic International Federations are now expected to implement an environmental and sustainability policy and national federations will be a key part of this.

Greening sport and, specifically, reducing its carbon footprint has moved centre stage in the battle to save the planet for future generations.

For many - individuals, clubs, competition organisers - this may seem a daunting challenge. Many will be willing to acknowledge the scale and breadth of this challenge but not know how to start addressing it. This is where the Action Group aims to help.

## Net zero ... by when?

The United Nations Climate Change Action plan includes a commitment to "drive sport to net zero by 2040" and has produced a "collective plan for putting sports on a trajectory to delivering change at the pace the world needs".

This plan - the **United Nations' Sports for Climate Action** - emphasises the importance of not seeing sport and our participation in sport as divorced from the wider battle to limit the damage to the planet caused by global warming.

"Sports organisations can display climate leadership by engaging together in the

climate neutrality journey. They can achieve this by taking responsibility for their climate footprint, which in turn will incentivise climate action beyond the sports sector, and therefore help global ambition step up in the face of the threat posed by climate change."

Focusing on the net zero target is a good place to start. It simply means ensuring we do not add to overall carbon emissions by our activities. Some carbon is inevitably generated by human activity, so it will mean identifying opportunities to offset the carbon we generate as well as limiting emissions in the first place.

Some sports have already made bold pledges and set out ambitious plans, and we want to learn from them. Football in England recently held a **Green Football Weekend** which set out to involve clubs - from the top to grassroots - players, fans and schools.

Of course, the resources available to football far outstrip those we have in fencing, but the all-embracing approach, with its stress on education and taking small steps, is a model we can adapt.

## Creating a framework for delivery

This suggests a simple framework for delivering British Fencing's policy commitments.

**Educating and Motivating** - To use fencing to spread the message that we are all responsible for the environment and taking action to protect it; to create thousands of fencing activists of all ages.

**Actions** - To provide a range of actions that will help fencing on the journey to net zero carbon emissions.

**Learning** - To learn as we go along - to highlight good practice within the fencing family; learn from each other and experts; assess impact, do more.

## Actions that make an impact

There are actions - large and small - that will start to make a difference and which

the Action Group will be exploring and sharing.

It is crucial that sustainability is embedded in the decision-making of BF. We should always consider the environmental impact of strategies and actions with the aim of eliminating or reducing adverse effects, and certainly not embark on new activities that expand our carbon footprint.

One of the first actions has to be to find a reliable - and affordable - way of measuring and monitoring the sport's carbon footprint.

Looking at how we select venues and how we can encourage them to enhance their own sustainability is another priority.

There are so many things we can all do to adjust our lifestyles to reduce our own carbon footprint and we will look at how this can be made simple, achievable and relevant to fencing. Avoiding single use plastics, especially water bottles, is already a British Fencing policy so we need to look at how we encourage people to follow it.

## Travel: home and abroad

Travel is a major contributor to carbon emissions and looking at how we can reduce that will be an important area of work. International competitions, which are a major feature of the world of fencing, will be a difficult area and looking at options for cutting back on this and offsetting the carbon produced is another project high on our agenda.

It is very early days for the Environmental Sustainability Action Group and we do not pretend to have all the answers - or even know all the questions to ask. We will be reaching out to the fencing community to help us get fencing fit for the journey to net zero and long-term sustainability.

## Environmental Sustainability Action Group

Clare Halsted - Convenor  
Liz Anderson  
Tabatha Barton  
Luke Deamer  
Nicola Murphy  
Caryl Oliver  
John Rees  
David Worsfold  
Neil Brown

# ATTACKING CLIMATE CHANGE

**Around the same time discussions were being had about announcing BF's new Environmental Sustainability Action Group in this magazine, we stumbled across an article written about HS2 by self-styled "Green Activist", fencer, coach and member of the Green Party Women's Committee, Meg Shepherd-Foster. Who better to share her opinion on what we may be able to do to help the planet?**

When I was asked to write this article, I think I was expected to suggest washing clothes on lower temperatures and hanging them outside to air dry. Perhaps, it was hoped, that I would be able to catalogue advice about bringing your own bottles and travel mugs to competitions, or choosing responsible printers and fashion retailers for club branding and competitions. I'm not going to do that. Although UN Climate Experts said in October 2022, that "there's no credible pathway to 1.5C in place", it isn't on any one individual alone to stop Climate Change, and during a cost of living crisis it is a privilege reserved for those with disposable income and time to be able to make these different choices.

If we wanted to make a collective change, I would recommend instead trying to emulate a movement gaining traction in football called 'Pledgeball'. This is a research-driven organisation that rallies fans and supporters to make lifestyle changes via a website - the idea being that different clubs compete against each other in an environmental league table. In an example cited on that website, if all of their supporters turned down their thermostats to 19 degrees it could be equated to taking 32,000 cars off the road. Food for thought, and we could incorporate some of the simple but effective changes that some

clubs and events are already making. Things like setting up an urn for tea and coffee and bringing an assortment of mugs from the local charity shop. A brilliant idea, so long as it is done safely and mindfully. We're a somewhat competitive bunch, so something like this - tweaked and adjusted to suit our sport - might work well.

The reality though, is that every weekend, large swathes of eager competitors travel to training and events by car or plane. Our largest carbon footprints lie threaded through the air in plane trails, and in dark repetitive layers on roads and motorways. There's no blame there, or expectation for any one family to change their habits. It's very difficult for me to argue that we should travel by train and ferry when my husband's weekend flights cost less than my 15 minute taxi journey to the station; or when it is cheaper to fly out to Ireland and then back into Manchester than catching a peak time train. We need a huge modal shift in how we all travel, but what do we do in the meantime?

Car-sharing is the most obvious solution and the most achievable. Setting up car pools or hiring mini-buses reduces the number of cars on the road. Discounted rail tickets and events and club venues close to bus stops and train stations is another solution. There are few venues that come to mind that are close to a train station. We need to find more and make bus routes more obvious too. I'd also argue that a less rigid selection system that allowed fencers to choose local events, or combine longer trips, could make the biggest difference of all. How many fencers find themselves taking flights to domestic events so that they can be back in time for school on Monday? Changing this system in that way would also reduce the financial burden of competing and make the circuit more accessible. A win on many levels.

The increasingly worrying trend emerging recently of 'Sportswashing' is also becoming more and more common, and



Meg

British Fencing deserves recognition for choosing their partners wisely. Just as global delegates despaired at seeing CoP27 sponsored by CocaCola, cyclists were outraged by Shell's sponsorship of British Cycling. This is arguably where an individual could make a different choice that would have a large impact, and where collectively we can make a large organisation change their mind: by choosing not to engage with them while they are sponsored by some of the world's largest polluters.

I am, of course, speaking to you from a position from a particular ideology and point of view. Not everyone is going to agree that being sponsored by Shell or Coca Cola is a bad thing. There is an argument that these companies are trying to mitigate the harm they have done and change their ways. In a way, that takes us full circle back to the beginning of this article. Perhaps it is up to us to make the changes we need to make that will mean that our children and students can continue to enjoy this wonderful sport. They just aren't the changes that we were necessarily expecting.

You can read Meg's HS2 article [here](#).

# A SPOTLIGHT ON UNIVERSITY FENCING

Heidi Januszewski - BF Content Coordinator



*I first arrived at university, like many, as a timid fresher scared of my own shadow. Faced with the challenge of meeting new people, yet wanting to try something new, I sought out a variety of societies and clubs to join. One of those was fencing - and little did my 18-year-old self know how important this sport would become.*

*I showed up at the beginner session - late, since I'd gotten lost as per usual - my non-athletic body fumbling through the strange actions and uncomfortable feel of the foil pistol grip, the classic weapon for many beginners. Trying a new sport can be nerve-wracking, especially when those drawn to fencing sometimes aren't the sportiest people in the world. Yet I was determined to stick with it, fuelled by childhood fantasies of one day, maybe, perhaps, becoming a master swordswoman.*

*Looking back, however, the welcoming club environment is what really made me want to stay. Speaking with people who fence both at university and at home, I keep hearing the same thing: there's a real sense of togetherness and a thriving social scene within university clubs that can't be matched elsewhere. This is apparent both at a club level and within your own team. University fencing also offers students the chance to make friends beyond just their own club, whether it be through universities hosting their own opens and training camps, or the BUCS (British Universities & College Sport) Regional Series.*



Heidi (bottom centre) with her Uni Team

*Having just returned from this year's BUCS National Championships, a highlight in the university calendar, this sense of comradery rings particularly true. Wherever a fencer is on piste, there'll be a herd of quarter-zip clad supporters cheering them on not far behind. The atmosphere is electric, and there's really nothing quite like it.*

*Possibly one of the most unique aspects of university fencing is the opportunity for learning in a friendly environment. Most university clubs take part in BUCS league and cup matches, with fencers competing in teams across different weapons. This naturally raises the opportunity to try different weapons without fear of judgement. Sometimes, you may find your weapon by accident. It was mid-match when, as a reserve, I was told to wield the unfamiliar and strange object known to many as 'the sabre'. It's been my go-to ever since.*

*Once your love of fencing has consumed your entire social life, the only reasonable next step is to join the committee. Taking on a committee role is one of the most rewarding things that you can do as a university fencer, as it enables you to build personal and professional skills that will most definitely help you in your future life. And yes, it also looks great on your CV.*

*Lastly, there's real potential for university clubs to become spaces for performance and learning. Some clubs are home to high-level athletes, from both home and abroad, who have medalled at international events such as the European and World Championships. By making the most of this opportunity to learn from other fencers, we can in turn become stronger athletes. Moreover, a greater spotlight on competing at a high level while studying would allow for a better understanding of how to balance the two.*

*The university space is a diverse, exciting space often overlooked in the UK fencing scene; yet there are increasing efforts to allow it the attention that it deserves. One*

*of the people promoting university fencing, who prefers to remain anonymous, is the admin of @unifencingresults.*

*"I started @unifencingresults as I didn't feel that there was any easily accessible or central place to get information on university fencing. Another reason for starting the account was the lack of past results, and the high turnover of fencers at university clubs, once every three years or so, means they get forgotten, and the achievements of past fencers and teams shouldn't be forgotten."*

*"The more people who get to enjoy fencing the better and with university fencing being so comparatively cheap whilst also providing so many opportunities for training and competition, it's a perfect way to get people into the sport. I don't think the importance of university fencing can be overstated and university clubs are invaluable to the fencing community."*

*I speak for many when I say that fencing has been a huge part of my time at university. Once arriving as an awkward fresher, I'm now leaving as a more confident (sportier, dare I say it?) graduate - and I have fencing in large to thank for that. In fact, I can attribute my first job with British Fencing to my university club, having gained experience in marketing, graphic design, and teamwork whilst on the committee. Ultimately, I hope that by continuing to promote the university fencing space, more students may have the same experiences that, for myself and many others, have been an integral part of our lives.*



Inter-Club Support At BUCS Nationals 2023

# EXERCISE FOR GOOD

By BF Medical Committee

## Background

It is well established that exercise can lead to improved health outcomes.

The NHS Physical Activity Guidelines for adults recommends<sup>4 & 5</sup>:

- at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week, or
- several short sessions of very vigorous intensity activity, or
- a mix of moderate, vigorous and very vigorous intensity activity spread over the week
- Moderate exercise is described as working up a sweat and a rise in heart rate such that you can speak but not sing a song. Vigorous exercise raises the breathing and heart rates significantly affecting the ability to speak normally.

Importantly, all adults should also aim to do muscle strengthening exercises for all major muscle groups on at least 2 days per week.

.....  
A medical study recently published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine<sup>1</sup> examined the relationship between muscle strengthening exercise - specifically weightlifting - and/or aerobic exercise with mortality.

**Who** was in the group studied? 99,713 people in the USA aged 55-74; so, a huge study.

**When?** From 1993 to 2016.

**What sort of exercise was looked at?** They were asked about levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA), and frequency of weightlifting.

**Why?** Aerobic physical activity is consistently linked to lower mortality; however, few large studies have examined the association between muscle strengthening exercise, such as weight lifting, and mortality.

**What was found?**

16% reported weightlifting regularly between one to six times per week.

32% of the sample met the aerobic MVPA guidelines.

Weightlifting and aerobic MVPA were both independently associated with lower all-cause mortality.

Activity level	Decrease in mortality risk (compared to the inactive control group)
Recommended weekly levels of MVPA	32%
Weightlifting at least 1-2x/week	14%
MVPA + weight lifting 1-2x weekly	41%

**Note:** findings simplified. For full data see the paper.

To explain the implication of these results:

Consider identical twins aged over 55 yrs. One of them does no exercise and the other does both types of exercise at the levels above. In any given period of time, the inactive twin would be approximately 1.7 times more likely to die from any cause than their active twin.

This study provides strong support for weightlifting as a healthy behaviour associated with longevity for older adults at varying levels of aerobic MVPA.

In other words, doing either type of exercise will be of benefit but to optimise health and longevity as you get older, do both. Oh, and start well before you think you need to!

**Does it have to be lifting weights?** No, muscle strengthening exercise includes using own body weight in Pilates, plyometrics, squats, push-ups etc.<sup>3</sup> but this particular paper only looked at weightlifting.

**What about fencing?**

The Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (USA) categorises fencing as moderate exercise<sup>2</sup> but, in fact it is often a



mixture of moderate and vigorous exercise combined with elements of muscle strengthening, notably the thighs, lower legs and core.

So, it is reasonable to assume that regular participation in fencing will contribute to both the MVPA and muscle strengthening exercise parts of a beneficial fitness regime.

Please note that, as for any sport, fencing beginners or re-starters should always build up steadily towards more vigorous exercise levels. And all types of weight training must be done with correct technique and progression to avoid injury.

Beth Davidson is the North East Regional Development Officer and reigning Veteran World silver medalist with hands-on experience of both fencing and coaching. She said, 'Developing activities with the aim of encouraging older people to fence, has been interesting on many levels! As a former international senior fencer who



Beth Davidson © Gillian Aghajan

then later stepped into veteran's age groups, I not only saw my own journey of continuing to fence, with all the need to stay fit, mental preparation and prepare to compete again, but how this was replicated across the veteran's fencing movement! It was inspiring to see people who are in their 70s, 80s and over having the same aim as myself, competing in international competitions!"

"At a grass-roots level, where older people come and try fencing because it has been a lifelong ambition or have struggled to find a sport they like, they have always been surprised at how deceptively intense it is! They are so concentrated in the activity, they forget they are exercising!"

"These experiences have made me redesign many of my fencing classes to encourage better movement for older adults, looking at flexibility, balance, resistance exercises and injury prevention! The Silver Swords project is hopefully going to build in better

practice for older people through resources and the training of current older fencers to coach!"

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# LEVELLING ACCESS

## How BF Is Improving Disability Inclusion Across Our Grassroots

In mid-November 2022 British Fencing hired Rick Rodgers as the new Inclusion Officer (Disability). Rick, a wheelchair user himself, has a solid background in growing disability inclusive sports, having founded disability inclusive cheerleading sport, ParaCheer/Adaptive Abilities Cheerleading, back in 2014. He has since helped the International Cheer Union spread it to over seventeen countries, through his education and advocacy charity ParaCheer International CIO. Rick is also an athlete on the Irish Wheelchair Rugby League squad and was a torch bearer for the 2012 Paralympic Games. He moved to British Fencing from Wheels for Wellbeing where he spent the last year advising local and national government organisations on disability inclusive cycling solutions.

**Rick shares an update on how BF is improving disability inclusion across our grassroots:**

There are currently around 1.2 million wheelchair users in the UK, roughly 2% of the population and 14.6 million disabled people in the UK. Globally, disabled people make up around 15% of the world's population. In Sport England's Active Lives Adult survey the data shows that disabled people are almost twice as likely to be physically inactive (43%) compared with those who don't have a disability (23%). Information from the government released during the pandemic in the [Gear Change report](#), showed that inactivity was the cause of death for 1 in 6 people. That is why it is so vitally important that we work to include disabled people in sport, movement, and physical activity at the grassroots, and not just for those few who are on a pathway to Paralympic success.

Our drive to gain a better understanding of the current provision for disabled people in fencing is why we launched the



**Rick Rodgers**

Level Access survey, with support from the Activity Alliance who have collected and analysed the data on our behalf. One of the challenges when working to encourage more disabled participants, and wheelchair users specifically, to start fencing and grow participation in the sport from this community is the lack of detailed data about club facilities. This data also includes the interest and experience club coaches have in supporting and coaching disabled participants. It is vital that British Fencing has this information so we can direct disabled people to appropriate clubs who can facilitate their learning, and so we can focus resources to ensure we help coaches and clubs overcome the barriers they have in supporting this community. To help club administrators fill out the survey and understand any questions regarding disability categories or what accessibility means, we ran a community discussion event. After brief discussion about the survey questions widened into conversation about supporting disabled people more widely. The conclusion was that the best way is

through continuous and conscientious communication.

One of the other big barriers to participation for disabled people that I quickly identified, is the current high cost of the additional equipment needed for wheelchair users and those who need to participate in fencing sitting down. Competition-quality fencing frames, used to strap fencing wheelchairs in place so they don't move around so much during the bouts, and the wheelchairs themselves, currently only available as a bespoke order, are several thousand pounds. If you think of a non-disabled participant wanting to learn to fence, all they need to do is turn up and borrow the jacket, mask and weapon; but for a disabled person to do the same they need to have these extra pieces whose cost is prohibitive, especially if the participant doesn't yet know if fencing is right for them. British Fencing is solving this problem as best they can, having already purchased six frames (with more purchases planned once funding is available) which they will use at competitions. The frames will also be loaned to clubs to be used on a weekly basis. I'm also working directly with a wheelchair manufacturing company and engineers connected with Bath University to find cheaper solutions to these challenges, and to get a club standard off-the-shelf wheelchair available for purchase at a price that's more reasonable for clubs and new participants.

It's an exciting time to be working with British Fencing on these projects, and highly fulfilling to see them progress. We're really looking forward to seeing the results from the survey and being able to much more directly connect with inclusive and accessible clubs around the country, helping them advertise and support more disabled participants to try out fencing activities and join this incredible sport.

If you want to get in touch about this article or any other details about our disability inclusion work, you can email [rick.rodgers@britishfencing.com](mailto:rick.rodgers@britishfencing.com).

# THIS GIRL CAN

Sport England's flagship campaign to help women get active is turning its attention to tackling the exercise 'Enjoyment Gap' - as it reveals 2.4 million fewer women than men enjoy sport and physical activity.

Research released in February as part of a new campaign phase 'This Girl Can With You' highlights the barriers faced by women when getting active, with key concerns including safety, fear of judgement and the cost of living.

'This Girl Can With You' is a call-to-arms for sport and activity providers to dismantle the barriers that contribute to the Enjoyment Gap. Enjoyment is one of the biggest motivators for people to take part in sport and physical activity, and with less than 60% of women active compared to over 63% of men, closing the Enjoyment Gap is an important step towards tackling the stubborn gender activity gap.

This Girl Can has identified four action areas with the power to dismantle barriers, help women enjoy getting active, and close the Gap: Activities for women must be Social, Suitable, Self-Affirming and Safe.

## **SOCIAL - WHAT DOES 'SOCIAL' MEAN FOR WOMEN?**

Having a support network or feeling part of a bigger community is integral to making activity enjoyable, whether you're exercising alone or with others.

Even if it's a catch up with friends, with a workout on the side.

## **51% OF WOMEN SAY THEY ENJOY THE SOCIAL SIDE OF ACTIVITY**

What doing 'SOCIAL' well might look like:

- Offering dedicated times and spaces to socialise before or after an activity session
- Instructors trying to get to know their class participants and being able to greet them by name
- Hosting social events for regular members
- Offering discounts to bring friends and family along

## **SAFE - WHAT DOES 'SAFE' MEAN FOR WOMEN?**

Creating spaces where women feel emotionally and physically safe, free from harassment and intimidation. Because when they're free from worry, they're free to enjoy activity.

## **1 IN 5 WOMEN SAY THEY WORRY ABOUT THEIR SAFETY WHILST WORKING OUT.**

What doing 'SAFE' well might look like:

- Having clear safety policies and procedures in place
- Communicating to both your staff and customers that you take safety seriously
- Ensuring that your staff are fully trained on how to handle reports of sexual harassment or assault
- Offering a range of reporting methods for women

## **SELF-AFFIRMING - WHAT DOES 'SELF-AFFIRMING' MEAN FOR WOMEN?**

Creating an environment where members feel confident and comfortable in their own skin regardless of shape, size or ability. Boosting enjoyment by empowering them to show up unapologetically as themselves and find their tribe.

## **23% OF WOMEN DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE IN THEMSELVES EXERCISING.**

What doing 'SELF-AFFIRMING' well might look like:

- Seeing exercise as more than just losing weight and promoting this amongst your members. Encouraging your members to reflect on how exercise makes them feel
- Being welcoming to all women and ensuring they feel comfortable to be themselves
- Creating an inviting community

## **SUITABLE - WHAT DOES 'SUITABLE' MEAN FOR WOMEN?**

Designing your offering to cater to your communities' needs. Considering their cultural and practical requirements, as well as ensuring timings are considerate of their competing priorities. You can power up enjoyment by making it feel possible for them.

18% OF WOMEN SAY THE CHOICE OF FACILITIES, ACTIVITIES OR CLASSES THEY CAN ACCESS DOESN'T SUIT THEIR LIFESTYLE.

What doing 'SUITABLE' well might look like:

- Offering intro classes or inductions so women can try out a class before committing to a membership
- Promoting entry-level classes or activities with as much prominence as other options
- Considering the needs of audience groups when developing timings of activities offered
- Providing facilities that factor in religious and cultural considerations relevant to your audience

Muslim Girls Fence (MGF), a project run by British Fencing and Maslaha, is one of four case study films, focusing on the importance of the 'Social' action area.

Binni Begum, MGF coach in Birmingham at Ladywood Leisure Centre, said, "At Muslim Girls Fence we make sure everyone feels included. The group is very diverse, but we focus on what we have in common; we are women who love to fence and spend time together. We build self-worth, give power to voices and most importantly, we bring communities together to share questions and ideas, and also to break the negative stereotypes that we carry on a daily basis."

A Maslaha Project Manager added, "We are so proud to see how Coach Binni creates and builds community by bringing together women from different ages and backgrounds to enjoy both fencing and socialising. Coach Binni shows what happens when you listen to your community's needs."

Virginia Bailey, Participation Director at British Fencing said, "We are excited to see how we can apply the new research from This Girl Can to support fencing clubs and coaches in ensuring they have the knowledge and understanding to play a role in closing the Enjoyment Gap. We are very proud of all the wonderful coaches involved in the project and would like to thank them for their continued hard work and commitment."

To find out more about the research, visit the [This Girl Can website](#) and check out the BF Community Discussion Page to see how you can learn more about the role that fencing can play in dismantling the barriers that contribute to the Enjoyment Gap.



THIS  
GIRL  
CAN

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## DIGITAL CONTENT CONTRIBUTORS WANTED

BF is constantly seeking to engage with the fencing community across our communications platforms and is looking for digital content contributors to broaden the range of content available on BF channels.

BF is seeking digital content contributors for a range of platforms. If you have experience in writing, photography, video editing or content creation, please contact [media@britishfencing.com](mailto:media@britishfencing.com).

The opportunities include but are not limited to:

Content contributor for The Sword. BF is seeking writers to contribute to the quarterly Sword magazine. This would involve working with the editor of The Sword to propose and/or fulfil a brief, including interviews and/or research. This is a paid-per-page opportunity.

This opportunity may be right for you if one or more of the following apply:

- You have experience in writing articles or online content.
- You enjoy discovering and writing about interesting and varied topics.
- You are able to deliver articles on time.
- You have a fencing topic you would like to explore more through an article in The Sword.
- Video editor. This opportunity involves editing previously gathered footage to create exciting and engaging short videos to be used on digital platforms. The videos may range in subject and may be part of a series.

This opportunity may be suitable for you if any of the following apply:

- You are interested in video editing.
- You have experience in using video editing software.

- You would like to edit videos of fencing.
- You have ideas for exciting and engaging videos for BF platforms.
- You can deliver videos on time and to a brief.

Photographer. BF welcomes photographers to apply for media accreditation for events. Recently, we welcomed Positive View to photograph the London and Eden Cup 2022.

As well as volunteer event photography, we welcome contact from photographers who are interested in capturing images for our partners and projects on a paid basis. Images can be seen across our platforms and can also be viewed on the BF Digital Portal.

If you have any questions about these opportunities or would be interested in providing creative services, please contact [media@britishfencing.com](mailto:media@britishfencing.com)

**WE ARE FORGING  
FUTURES**

# **INCLUSIVE LEARNINGS**

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# BLUE PLAQUE FOR BOB

## Britain's Most Famous Fencer Bob Anderson to be Honoured

By Carl Morris - President of the British  
Veterans Federation



Bob Anderson, 1954

Last year Gosport Heritage Society contacted Portsmouth Fencing Club about Bob Anderson, one of Great Britain's most famous fencers who was born not far from where Jenny and I live. It turns out that he was born 100 years ago on 15 September 1922 and the Heritage Society are trying to arrange an event to honour the centenary of his birth.

Many of you will be very aware of Bob's career and probably even attended a few of his excellent training courses, but for those of you that aren't I have written a short precis of his career using articles from The Los Angeles Times and, with their kind permission, information from an article from the British Academy of Fencing for which Bob was President for many years.

Bob, probably more than any other fencing coach of the 20th and 21st century, represented the ideal of the Fencing Master, both at every level of coaching and competition in Great Britain and also in the wider world of film and television. He was an Olympic fencer who went on to train champions, then to train the coaches of champions, and, if that were not enough,

he went on to become one of the world's foremost fight choreographers - more on this later.

Bob was born in 1922 in Gosport, Hampshire, and the beginnings of his career lay in his distinguished record as a competitive fencer during his time in the Royal Marines. He was the Royal Marines Foil Champion five times, Sabre Champion six times and Epée Champion once. He also won the Inter Services Championships numerous times in all three weapons. In September 1950 he won the European Military Sabre Championship and, in both 1951 and 1952, he won the Corble Cup International Sabre Championship.

He then went on to represent Great Britain at the Olympic Games in 1952 and the World Championships in 1950 and 1953 in the sabre event. He finished tied for fifth in the Team Sabre event at Helsinki in 1952.

On 1 September, 1954, Professor R. J. G. Anderson was appointed National Fencing Coach to Great Britain, having been released from the Royal Marines to take up this appointment.

As National Coach, his main task was to travel around the country running the National Training Scheme, as well as training and qualifying amateur coaches for the then Leader's Award. During this time he also ran courses in personal performance, and presiding (refereeing).



Anderson & Crosnier Demo

He directed residential courses in all aspects of fencing at the National Recreation Centres and at Loughborough University and supervised courses for the Army, Navy and Air Force Fencing Associations. In addition to all this, he was responsible for directing the squad training for all the British Teams.



Anderson - taking a class at Bisham Abbey

It would be achievement enough to have had such a profound impact on the sport of fencing in his own country, but Bob's skills were to become known and influential on a far wider scale. Ten days before he was due to compete in the Helsinki Olympics on the British Sabre Team, he was asked to act as a double and as the fight arranger in the Errol Flynn movie The Master of Ballantrae. This was when, after the filming of a duel between the two of them, he achieved the reputation of being 'the man who stabbed Errol Flynn' as a result of a mishap for which Flynn claimed responsibility, saying that he was distracted by some fans and forgot to parry (happens to me all the time!).

Flynn insisted upon having Anderson as his double in many of his scenes, and Bob's reputation as an inventive and skilled sword choreographer quickly grew.

Actors including Sean Connery, Johnny Depp, Richard Gere, Charlton Heston, Roger Moore, Anthony Hopkins, Charlie Sheen and Catherine Zeta Jones and many more were to learn the skill of the sword under 'Grumpy Bob', the nickname he earned

through his relentless desire for perfection. On the Mask of the Zorro he put actors through two months of training; sometimes up to 10 hours a day until he was as satisfied with their performance. A refusal to allow shortcuts, mediocrity or excuses characterised his film work as much as it did his work as a fencer, a coach and a teacher of coaches.

Anderson also doubled for David Prowse as Darth Vader during lightsaber duels in two "Star Wars" films – "The Empire Strikes Back" and "Return of the Jedi." Mark Hamill, who played Luke Skywalker, said in a 1983 interview with Starlog magazine that Anderson's doubling as Vader "was always supposed to be a secret, but I finally told George [Lucas] I didn't think it was fair anymore. Bob worked so bloody hard that he deserves some recognition. It's ridiculous to preserve the myth that it's all done by one man."

Anderson's expertise earned the lasting respect of Lucas: "Bob Anderson was essential in defining what a lightsaber duel would look like," Lucas said in a statement to The Times. "He was the Jedi Master of the original trilogy, training the actors to duel with a new kind of weapon. In 'Empire' and 'Jedi,' Bob donned Darth Vader's cape and helmet to battle Luke Skywalker in all of the amazing lightsaber battles. It was pure movie magic that Bob became Vader."

More recently, Bob's work may be seen in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy and in the Pirates of the Caribbean. The list of all his film credits, both as swordsman and choreographer would take be too long to relate here – suffice to say that if it has been made in England or America in the last fifty years and includes fighting with swords of any description, then the chances are that Bob had a hand in it somewhere. A tiny selection of his credits include The Legend of Zorro (2005: Sword Master), The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003: Sword Master); Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003: Additional Sword Trainer); The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (2002:



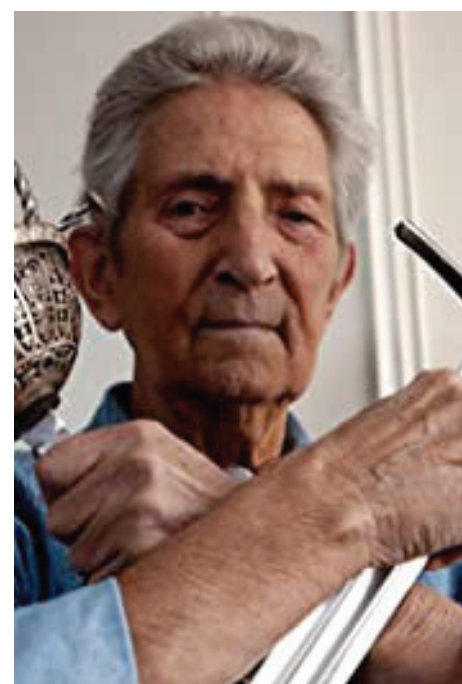
Bob Anderson, 1952

Sword Master); Die Another Day (2002: Sword Master); The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (2001: Sword Master); Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi (1983: Stunt Performer); Superman II (1980: Stunts (uncredited)); Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back (1980: Stunt Double for Darth Vader). His full IMDB profile is [here](#).

After competing in the 1952 Olympics, Anderson went on to coach six subsequent British Olympic teams – from the games in Melbourne in 1956 to Montreal in 1976. Bob retired as National Coach in 1979. However, soon afterwards, he received a phone call from the president of the Canadian Fencing Association inviting him to take on the post of Technical Director for the association. This post was originally meant to last 2 years but he ended up holding it from 1980 to 1988. During this time he developed their Olympic Programme and wrote two books on fencing for Sport Canada and the Coaching Association of Canada. He lived on and off in Ottawa for some 15 years, and it was during this time that his association with Star Wars began to develop.

After an amazing life, Bob died peacefully in his sleep at a hospital in England in the early hours of 1 January 2012 at the age of 89. He was survived by his wife Pearl and three children.

It is no surprise and quite fitting that Gosport wished to honour the memory of their famous son. A film showing of The Princess Bride took place in Gosport on the evening of the 15 September and local fencing clubs offered fencing demos during that week. The Heritage Society is currently negotiating with the current owners of the house where Bob was born with the intention of fitting a Blue Plaque in his honour. Last year we held fencing demonstrations on the weekend of the 15 September and The Heritage Society intend to honour Bob's birth in some way on this date every year. We hope that they do.



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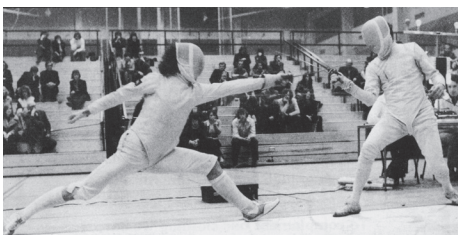
# ROBERT JOHN BRUNIGES (3 AUGUST 1956 - 6 FEBRUARY 2023)

## Malcolm Fare

Rob Bruniges, who died from heart failure at the age of 66, started fencing at Catford School in south-east London where, from the age of 11, he was taught by John Fairhall. He came to prominence as a 15-year-old, when he won his first international junior foil tournament at Gelsenkirchen, followed a few months later by another victory at Basle. In 1973 he reached the L16 in the strong Paris Martini and came third in the World Youth Championships, becoming a member of the British Foil Team for the first time at the age of 16. He went on to represent Great Britain at a further six World Championships and three Olympic Games (twice as Captain). Equally promising as an epeeist, he won at Budapest in 1974 and Zofingen in 75.

After a year of injuries and now coached by Steve Boston, Rob went to his last World Youth Championships in 1976 fully fit. His extraordinary L16 bout in the foil Championship lasted two hours on four pistes, as electrical problems caused persistent off-target lights. Only at 8-all was it realised that the batteries in the box were running down. He calmly won the last two hits and the next bout to reach the final pool. Despite losing to Fabio Dal Zotto (ITA), who was to become Olympic Champion four months later, Bruniges won all his other fights, including against future Olympic and World silver medallist Pascal Jolyot (FRA), and future World and European Champion Andrea Borella (ITA), to become Junior World Champion.

Over the next few years he displayed fluctuating form, beating the then double



Bruniges wins the 1976 Junior World Foil Championships



Bruniges powers his way through the defence of Kuzma (POL) in the final poule

World Champion Alexander Romankov at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, but scoring only one hit in his following three fights. In 1981 he won the British Foil Championship (he was to be runner-up three times) and capped this performance by beating future World Champion Philippe Omnes in front of his home crowd in Paris to win the Duval.

A fencer of outstanding natural talent, Rob Bruniges could unleash beat-fleche attacks of devastating speed from a perfectly relaxed stance and developed an amazing close-quarters parry-riposte that whipped round the back of his neck and became his trademark hit.

Graham Paul recalls that at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the team was invited to a reception at a house with a swimming pool. Somehow Rob's false hand ended up in the pool. The water dissolved the glue and the hand fell apart. Knowing Rob needed the hand for balance while fencing, team manager Allan Jay persuaded British Airways to fly out a replacement.

Over the 54 years that he knew Rob, teammate Pierre Harper remembers him as extremely competitive on the piste, but a great friend away from fencing, with a similar down-to-earth and wicked sense of humour. Linda Strachan remembers him for

the support and advice he gave her when she first got into the senior squad, as well as his practical jokes at training camps.

Some years after Rob had stopped fencing, Jane Hutchison met him by chance in Bath and he asked if she could sell his fencing kit. Shocked that he was considering giving up the sport he loved, she invited him to visit Bath Sword Club. He brought along his partner Sandra, who joined a beginners' course whilst he watched and encouraged. When a place came up for an epee coach, Jane suggested he should apply and that was it - he was back in the fencing world again. Within no time he had built up a group of keen young epeeists at the club; he was also proud when Sandra did her epee qualification in Hungary and joined him in coaching. They were a great double act.

In 2017 BF's Pathways Director Steve Kemp suggested Rob join a coach developer programme, which involved working with activity providers such as sports and holiday camps, where young people often try fencing for the first time - up to 250,000 a year are introduced to the sport this way. His fun and active approach to sessions made him a popular coach developer and fencing became one of the most asked for sports at activity provider venues. In 2019 he introduced fencing to Saint Lucia by way of a core coach course. He loved the island and its people and they loved him, making him the ultimate ambassador. At the same time, he and Sandra developed their skills at other BF courses and they often ran events as a team. In order to run 3-weapon courses, he completed Level 3 at foil and epee and Level 2 at sabre.

Rob leaves Sandra and four children (from a previous relationship): Abby, Alex, Daniel and Ben.



Bruniges parries a fleche attack from Steven Paul during the 1983 Champions Challenge (photo: Peter Barrett)

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