

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
OCTOBER 2023



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Karim Bashir

Welcome to the October issue of the "new" Sword magazine!

There's been a lot of changes recently. In comparison to five years ago, people are now reading things in very different ways from before, engaging more with website news posts and articles. Some of our best performing news posts actually had more readers than any recent online issue of The Sword.

With the general shift to people reading things online in bite-size chunks, we have been exploring alternative options for The Sword in the future to deliver a better service to the members in light of rising costs.

In order that we can concentrate our limited resources on publishing timely features, articles and up-to-date information, the number of formal (magazine format) issues of The Sword will come down to two a year. (You'll also be able to order hard copies of these issues.)

The intention is that one issue, in October/November, will be the season round-up including reports from the major international events plus updates on the GBR pathway activities. The other issue in April will cover the other areas of BF activity including community projects, workforce development, club support and social impact projects.

The Sword will move to a new, members only online home, giving us the opportunity to publish articles and content between the formal issues. This will be available at thesword.britishfencing.com by 1st December 2023. We will continue to bring our members great fencing content plus



a few new things that will look a little different.

I've just returned from the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, where sadly I wasn't working on the fencing events. However, the Games were spectacular and, not that I needed it, gave me a real buzz as we

approach Paris 2024. (The Asian Games is now so big it actually hosts more athletes than the Olympics).

Whilst I was away, I kept a close eye on the start of the new fencing season. Yes, I can't get enough! What a start to the Cadet European Circuit which saw Finn Keen taking gold in Warsaw whilst Great Britain was represented in most of the European Cup of Club Champions events.

The senior Satellite fencing tournaments are also well underway. Congratulations to Kamal Minott, Alexandra Powell, David Sosnov and Caitlin Maxwell for their bronze medals in Sao Paolo, Belgrade, Timisoara and Ghent, respectively. Kamal Minott and Carolina Stutchbury also took silver and gold in Tashkent, and British Fencing's CEO Georgina Usher became 50+ Veteran's World Champion in Epee in Florida too, among many other medals.

With the Junior and Senior World Cups about to begin, I hope that you enjoy reading our article about planning in this issue. Our very own Pathways Director, Steve Kemp takes us through the incredible work that he and his team are putting in to support fencers with an eye on the biggest of prizes.

I also had a chance to talk with Jaimie Cook about his breakthrough season. This young fencer opened up about not only what it takes to get to the top of the sport but also about what goes on behind the scenes. I

certainly enjoyed speaking to him and hope that you enjoy reading about his journey. We also take a look at getting sponsored as an athlete, and exactly what it will take to get there.

Great news in para fencing too - this month Piers Gilliver retained his Cat A Men's Epee World title in Terni, Italy as well as bagging World Championships silver in Cat A Men's Sabre. There were also World medals in Italy for Dimitri Coutya who claimed the Cat Men's Epee silver and Men's Foil bronze. Nat Lewis give us a rundown of

the action in Terni, we talk to Piers about winning a prestigious award voted for by fellow athletes and look forward to the Wheelchair Fencing World Cup taking place in Cardiff early next year.

There are also reports from two of GBR's Weapons Leads, a celebration of British national champions and a brief look at staying sane in the digital world.

The season is very much underway. Let's fence!

MARCUS MEPSTEAD WINS IOC CLIMATE AWARD

GBR foil fencer and 2020 Olympian Marcus Mepstead has won in the Sustainable Travel category of the inaugural IOC Climate Action Awards, announced on Friday 29th September 2023.

Launched in November 2022, the IOC Climate Action Awards recognise Olympic and Paralympic athletes, international sports federations and national Olympic committees (NOCs) for proactive efforts in tackling climate change.

Mepstead, a long-time environmental advocate who has done work for the Trees For The Future charity, was shortlisted in both the Athlete Advocacy and Sustainable Travel categories. He won the latter award along with World Sailing and the Spanish Olympic Committee.

As well as the award, Mepstead also won a grant of \$24,000 for the charity Trees For The Future, along with nineteen other Olympic and Paralympic athletes, in a related award sponsored by Proctor & Gamble, as part of their Athletes for Good (AFG) programme in partnership with the IOC and IPC, to provide financial resources directly to the community impact partners important to athletes.

Marcus said: "I am really happy to be receiving the Airbnb climate action award for sustainable travel as well as receiving the grant towards Trees For The Future from P&G. It's really motivating to see so many athletes and organisations taking big steps towards tackling climate change, and I am really grateful to those within the IOC that are pushing these conversations into action."

In addition to selling his car and opting to commute to training on foot and by bike, Mepstead has also implemented a seasonal travel plan that minimises emissions. But his environmental work has been developing alongside his fencing for some time. "After my World Championship result in 2019 I was then in a position where I could really focus a little bit more



on the sustainability side of being an athlete, which is something I've always wanted to do. I studied economics and geography at university and I guess I've always been very conscious of climate change. What's been going on the world around us, then the individual and the large scale impact on the world that everyone has. In 2019 I got my funding back and was able to connect with with different kinds of partners to really flesh out what it means to be like a sustainable athlete.

On Trees For The Future, he said: "I wanted to support them. What they do is they basically manage unsustainable land use. They help farmers in sub Saharan and East Africa, on managing their land and turning it from pretty unproductive and low-producing into a forest garden, over a six year programme which helps generate food security, financial security, jobs, and opportunities for women. It reduces conflict with surrounding nature and also within communities.

"When I first started working with them, one of the goals was to be able to fund like a forest garden but it's expensive and with my funding, I didn't have a huge amount that I would be able to contribute towards it. So I work out my carbon contribution from all the flights I take to compete, and offset it, and also then promote working with the charity and giving them a platform using my social media to basically advocate and promote what they do. We don't get to choose which competitions we go to, because we have to go everywhere to collect points for Olympic qualification. So for me, the biggest thing I could do was was offset my carbon from my travel. When the end of the season comes, because we've had so many changes

recently, I can recalibrate if I need to add more on to that.

"Last year, with the help of of Trees for the Future and the Uganda Wildlife Authority, I went to Uganda to see some of the forest garden and meet some of the farmers, see gorillas and understand how they have created a economy out of sustainability and sustainable tourism and conservation."

"After agriculture, sustainable tourism is the second largest income for Uganda. In order to protect the gorillas that people want to go and see, you have to protect the ecosystem. And then in order to protect the ecosystem, you have to protect the people that are originally living in there, the indigenous communities, the people that live off the land on the outskirts, that people that are entering, exiting, all the different elements that are involved. An example of that, which I thought was really cool, was the people who were poachers in the park were given opportunities to work with the tourists that will come in. In doing this, you're providing an income, which then means that those people don't have to go and poach. It allowed them to really develop an income for their family and food security."

Mepstead previously worked on creating a fencing glove made out of recycled ocean plastic, with a distinctive wave pattern. "I wanted it to be like fighting for the ocean when I was playing in tournaments. The goal was to create a sustainable range and kind of change the conversation to get manufacturers looking at it, and saying 'okay, how do we get in on this?' My goal was to have different manufacturers competing on how they can be more sustainable."

He added: "The key to being like a sustainable athlete is creating change within the sport and creating conversations and it was really cool to hear back from the IOC and to be shortlisted for this award and others as well.

"In the run up to the Tokyo Olympics I got involved in cheering people on, and it was an effort to get people more active, but



plenty of ideas - it's about managing where it fits and where it works."

Read more about Trees For The Future at <http://trees.org>

Marcus in Uganda. Pic courtesy trees.org

for me it was also like a nice conversation about switching from your car to walking, taking greener transport where you can. I've had conversations with Team GB on how they can create a green space, and they're looking at developing an athlete panel, letting athletes look at or contribute towards making sport a greener space. I've



The sustainable athlete: small steps

Offsetting

Like Marcus, you can offset the carbon you produce as an athlete or whatever your life produces. Several airlines offer this service, as do other travel companies and dedicated organisations such as carbonfootprint.com which allows you to select from a range of projects to fund.

Reducing

Consider eco-friendly transportation options when travelling to training sessions or competitions. Use public transportation, carpool, bike, or walk whenever possible to reduce your carbon emissions. If you have to travel by car, try to share with teammates wherever possible.

Planning

For athletes like Marcus who have to travel a great deal, careful planning to minimise air miles and subsequent carbon footprint can make a big difference. On the ground, this can take the form of multiple decisions, big and small, from choosing a hotel location to packing reusable items with you.

Eating

Adopt a sustainable diet by choosing locally sourced, organic, and plant-based foods when possible. Reducing meat consumption, especially from industrial farming, can significantly lower your carbon footprint. Marcus suggests starting to make changes with one meal a day, such as breakfast.

Wearing

If you can, opt for sports equipment and clothing made from sustainable materials. Look for brands that prioritise eco-friendly production processes and use recycled or organic materials. Additionally, try to make your existing gear last longer through proper maintenance and repair.

GILLIVER WINS ATHLETE OF THE MONTH, WORLD TITLE

Piers Gilliver took an award for an impressive return in July, ahead of a successful defence of his world title in Terni.

Para-fencer Piers Gilliver successfully defended his world title in category A epee at the IWAS World Championships in Terni, Italy in October 2023, beating Emanuele Lambertini 15-4. Piers previously won the title in Cheongju, Korea in 2019. He also took silver in the sabre A final, losing to Ukraine's Artem Manko.

"Winning really means a huge amount," Gilliver told the BBC.

"It's been really tough and I've had to work as smart as I can to try to save the performance for these competitions.

"For me it solidifies that I really am in a good position for Paris now. I've been fencing for a long time, but the last couple of seasons have been my best so far and



it's a really exciting place to be, and one I never thought I'd be in to be honest."

Gilliver also won the Athletes' Athlete of the Month award for July after earning two gold medals at the Warsaw World Cup.

His achievement was particularly impressive given it followed his return from a six-month lay-off due to concussion, the symptoms of which he continues to face.

He won the category A Epee before going on to triumph in the category A Sabre,

overcoming home favourite Michal Siatkowski 15-14 in a nail-biting round of 32.

After sustaining a concussion in training in January, the 28-year-old fencer had previously tried to return to World Cup action but ended up withdrawing as his recovery continued. His involvement in Warsaw followed spells in which Gilliver couldn't leave home - let alone train - such was the extent of his injuries.

In an award facilitated by the British Elite Athletes Association, he was recognised for his success by his peers on the World Class Programme. "It was a really big surprise and it means a huge amount to be voted for by the athlete community," said Piers. "It means a lot to be respected by your peers, and there are some amazing athletes in this country. So it really means a huge amount to me."

Gilliver received an MBE at the end of 2022 for his services to fencing.

NEW LOGO LAUNCHED AS CARDIFF WORLD CUP PASSES 100 DAYS TO GO.

Preparations are underway to deliver a world class event, the final European-based qualification fixture ahead of the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

British Fencing is preparing to deliver one of the most prestigious events seen in the UK for many years; a crucial stage of the World Abilitysport Wheelchair Fencing World Cup, which will be held at the Sport Wales National Centre in Cardiff from the 11th to the 14th of January 2024. The event is being supported by multiple stakeholders including Disability Sport Wales, Welsh Fencing and the National Lottery. Georgina Usher, CEO, said,

"With 100 days to go, we are really looking forward to the upcoming World Cup and the opportunity it provides us to showcase our wonderful sport, provide a world class experience for athletes from across the world and show support to our GBR fencers. The support we've had from our partners in Wales has been incredible, as we work together to ensure we showcase Wales to visiting athletes from across the world."

The branding for the event has been created by Cardiff-based designer Lowri Howells, with the design representing the strength, speed and dynamic power of the athletes and the desire to drive the sport forward for current and future athletes. The city and associated text appear in both Welsh and English.



British Fencing will also shortly be launching a volunteer programme, which will include a range of roles to support the athletes, delivery team and spectators to have a memorable experience in Cardiff. The event will be streamed live on multiple channels.



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SABRE: BRINGING OUT THE BEST

Fran Whalley looks at sabre in 2023 and beyond

The sabre space has seen many changes this year in the background that many will not be aware of. Rob Cawdron departed his role as weapon lead in January, leaving Fran Whalley to take on the task of managing the Sabre Athlete Development Programme. Behind the scenes we have also set up a Sabre Working Group; our aim is to streamline the weapon, bringing together the different age bubbles to one common goal - let's get better together. We have been tasked with creating a selection philosophy across the weapon ages focused on both performance and development. Our hope is to see an increase of engagement from fencers at training camps and provide more and varied opportunities for our athletes to develop and grow. The sparring has been fast, the footwork has been brutal, and the learning has been shared and rewarding.

In the cadet space we have focused on developing a squad mentality as well as education on how to be the best team fencer you can be. During internationals, athletes have had the opportunity to experience each role, with the GB1 teams learning about the different stages of team development and creating a culture that brings out the best in them both on and off the piste. Keira D-Sallows had an excellent result at the Cadet World Championships making the L8 and finishing her season on a high.

Our juniors have had a busy season with international events and training camps. The Junior men were offered the chance to train in Orleans in France before the World Championships, with the women's team heading to train with the German team.

Caitlin Maxwell finished the season with another fantastic L8 at the Senior European Championships in Plovdiv, and a L16 at the Senior World Championships in Milan. Caitlin starts the 2023-24 season ranked 24th in the World, making her the joint highest ranked British fencer in any weapon, and the highest ranked British woman sabreur for almost 20 years.

It was great to see a full women's sabre team at the European and World Championships, with Caitlin joined by team-mates Sophia Potter, Kate Daykin and Maria Chart. At the Worlds, Maria made her first breakthrough into the L64 at this level, with a nail-biting 15-14 comeback win over world #19 Saoussen Boudiaf.

This season, the men's sabre squad was hit by some injuries, with regulars JJ Webb and Barney Halliwell missing much of the season through injury, but Will Deary continued to impress at the highest level, with a number of L64 and L32 finishes. At the end of the season Will scored a historic first-ever Senior Championships sabre medal for men's sabre, with his bronze medal at the European Games in Krakow. Will defeated Olympic silver medallist Luigi Samele to reach the top 4, where he only missed out on the final by just a single hit.

Over the season, some of our GB internationals attended training at camps

in Orleans and in Spala in Poland; we wish them all the best as they go into the second block of Olympic qualification events.

Our coaching team has also been very busy developing their skills and participating in learning. Fran Whalley and Phil Shepherd-Foster are on the UK coaching programme Explore, with Mike Evans-Jones from Wrexham fencing club on Horizon, and Bryn Saunders from PDFA is waiting to begin his journey with UK coaching on the Focus programme. A large number of the coaching community took part in the first cross sport 'Combat Club' day which ran in September.

Looking forward to another busy season we will see fresh new faces joining squads at every level, Junior and Senior fencers will be joining us for a GB performance camp in October, and the sabre coaching team will continue to participate in development opportunities both in house, across sports and with UK coaching. We are excited for the year ahead.



Will Deary on his way to European Games bronze in Krakow

EPEE: BUILDING DEPTH

Ian Lichfield looks at the epee landscape this year.

Epee in the UK has benefitted enormously recently from the support and generous contributions from the Epee Club. The funding has enabled the senior teams to build experience and move up the rankings in the team events, coaches to gain experience at the senior level and learn from the environment and build networks with other international coaches.

To this end, we've developed a GBR strategy based specifically around this weapon. There's a lot more detail than can be included here, but they include:

Time on Task - The fencer has to maximise their time, between preparation, training and competing. It requires a hyper focused approach on the activities to maximise development and performance rewards.

Appropriate Competition - The fencers time on task should be complimented by the right competition and the right window of opportunity to achieve the maximum gains either performance development and or ranking position.

Fencing Experience - Over the development and performance pathway the fencers need to gain the experience that will sustain

performance at the highest level - "world level" understanding and intuitive decision making. They need clarity of technical and tactical competencies and guidance on what they need to know and to expect.

This all has to be underpinned by a high-performance culture and standards, attention to detail, a mix of evidence-based and professional judgement, and effective and transparent communication.

The goals include:

- Building a greater depth of ranking athletes in both senior weapons
- U23 Squad functions and team qualifies for U23 Europeans 2022 and seasons beyond
- Junior - European and Worlds, fencers achieve qualification standard
- Moving the Senior team position into top 20 by 2022/2023 season
- 10 fencers (+2) with senior ranking points greater than 283 (320 for men)
- 5 junior fencers (+4) with junior ranking points greater than 350

Where possible, a coach has been sent to the Senior FIE World Cup or Grand Prix events to support the Senior athletes.

Where there is a team event or the opportunity to support athletes on trajectory to start the Olympic qualification cycle or help the younger athletes break through into the senior squads.

For Epee in the UK, our greatest chance of seeing an Epeeist at the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024 will be through the Olympic Qualifying zone as an individual. It will likely take another few years for the promising juniors to impact the senior team rankings.

Our relationship with Pentathlon GB continues to develop positively. Both sports continue to benefit from collaborating effectively together to provide training opportunities for GB epeeists. The camps also provide opportunities for coaches to come together and work with the athletes. The athletes are exposed to medal winning Olympians, gaining greater understanding of what it takes to win.

Results

Earlier in the year, the Cadet men's team took a European bronze in February in Tallinn, and Ben Andrews had a promising performance at the European Games in Krakow in June, alongside Susan Sica, who had a frustrating season after an injury at the Commonwealth Championships. At the Worlds, Will East and Matt Cooper fought hard to achieve personal bests to break into the top 64 at a senior major championship from 243 competitors - both succumbing to former World Champions. As a discretionary selection and still a Junior, Julia Caron competed well to place 60th out of 184 - a performance demonstrating the positive changes she has been working on whilst training and studying in France.

We look to the future with a clear objective: to create a growing community of athletes with the mental and physical fitness to maximise their potential, supported by a wider workforce focussed on providing the best athlete experience.

(NOTE: a foil report will follow at a later date.)



Matt Cooper at the senior Worlds in Milan. Photo: #BizziTeam

PARIS 2024 QUALIFICATION

Karim Bashir brings us the international half-term report

After a fantastic World Championships in Milan the senior international season has fully begun. It may 'only' be the satellite events but they are crucial for those athletes seeking qualification through the individual route. Just four points available to the winners but with the margins so tight in every zone for the Tokyo 2020 Games, they are a must-watch for the fencing uber-fan!

It's roughly half-way through qualification in terms of events completed so we're having a look at how things stand in each weapon. If you need a refresher on how the whole process works check out page 14 of the January 2023 issue.

At this stage a couple factors should be taken into account. Whether we like it or not, every Zonal event carries the same number of points and that skews the standings even at the halfway point. Clearly we know how challenging all events are in Europe and Asia and for some weapons in Pan America. That said, the International Olympic Committee understandably wish for the Games to be a global festival of sport. We can count ourselves lucky that we're not Italy, for example, who have to regularly leave top ranked fencers at home during the Olympics. It is what it is and our summary simply reflects the situation right now, in October 2023.

Men's Epee

It's no real surprise to see France and Italy, the two most successful Olympic fencing nations, occupying places in the top four



Men's Epee European Champion, Freilich for Paris 2024

AOR	FENCER	COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
1	KANO Koki	JPN	AS	58
2	BERAN Jiri	CZE	EU	51.5
3	YU Lefan	CHN	AS	41.75
4	FREILICH Yuval Shalom	ISR	EU	41
5	LAN Minghao	CHN	AS	37
6	PEREIRA Yulen	ESP	EU	37
7	KOMATA Akira	JPN	AS	35
8	BRINKMANN Marco	GER	EU	33.5
9	WANG Zijie	CHN	AS	32
10	RODRIGUEZ John Edison	COL	PA	31.25
11	ANTKIEWICZ Mateusz	POL	EU	31
12	EL HAOUARI Abdelkarim	MAR	AF	30.25
13	MINOBE Kazuyasu	JPN	AS	29
14	TULEN Tristan	NED	EU	29
15	HO Wai Hang	HKG	AS	27.25
16	JORGENSEN Patrick	DEN	EU	26
17	CAMARGO Alexandre	BRA	PA	24.25
18	VAN NUNEN David	NED	EU	23.375
19	ELKORD Houssam	MAR	AF	23
20	EWART Stephen	USA	PA	23

automatic qualification spots. Meanwhile, the USA were black-carded at the Pan American Championships which left the door open to the rest of the field and it was not a shock that Venezuela's London 2012 Olympic Champion, Ruben Limardo and team claimed the gold medal there. The 64 points they gained mean they occupy a top four spot which gives them a real hope of making it to Paris. You'd be forgiven for thinking that Kazakhstan's presence in the top four places is also a result of some good fortune, but you'd be wrong. They won the first World Cup of the season and backed it up with a silver at the Asian Zonals and a top eight finish at the Worlds.

COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
ITA	EU	193
KAZ	AS	172
FRA	EU	168
VEN	PA	164
HUN	EU	160
KOR	AS	152
JPN	AS	142
EGY	AF	138
GER	EU	105
ESP	EU	104
CZE	EU	104
CAN	PA	103
CHN	AS	92
SUI	EU	91
NED	EU	88

The four Zonal places are far from decided. Korea currently holds the Asian spot but has Japan just ten points behind them. Don't rule out China either; they may be trailing by some margin but they'll still be contenders. Egypt are unlikely to be caught by any other African nation but their job is to stay in the World's top 16 - a requirement for qualification.

As always with qualification, one zone's outcome can have an impact on others. That is very much the case for Europe and Pan America. Hungary occupies the European slot but has a realistic chance of leapfrogging Venezuela. If they do, Germany, Spain and the Czech Republic are all in the race for the European place - assuming France don't drop out of the top four too. Canada, who currently hold the PanAm place, will be hoping that Venezuela holds on to the automatic place.

It's too soon to call the individual places but for what it's worth the two Asian places are currently held by Kano (JPN) and Yu (CHN), the European places by Beran (CZE) and Freilich (ISR), the African single place by El Haouari (MAR) whilst Rodriguez (COL) sits in the PanAm spot.

The hunt is still on for the Asian and European places so we not only need to keep an eye on those currently holding their individual zonal places but also the athletes in the teams at threat of dropping out of that route to qualification. Rodriguez's place is under threat if Venezuela drop out of the top four teams and El Haouari's spot could be taken by an Egyptian should they miss out on team qualification.

Prediction: France and Italy will stay in the top four and will be joined by Hungary for team qualification. Everything else is up for grabs.

Women's Epee

Korea, Poland, France and Italy lie in the top four automatic places and by some way. Hunting them down will be some task.

The zonal places are held by the USA, Switzerland, Hong Kong and Egypt. The African spot that Egypt currently hold is



Women's Epeeist Alexandra Ndolo has a route to Paris via Germany and Kenya

AOR	FENCER	COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
1	MOELLHAUSEN Nathalie	BRA	PA	94
2	SUN Yiwen	CHN	AS	85
3	KUN Anna	HUN	EU	82
4	NDOLO Alexandra	KEN	AF	76
5	DIFFERT Nelli	EST	EU	64
6	XIAO Ruilen	CAN	PA	52
7	VIVEROS Montserrat	PAR	PA	45.5
8	LIN Sheng	CHN	AS	42
9	TALEB Ines El Batoul	ALG	AF	39
10	ZHU Mingye	CHN	AS	39
11	EMBRICH Irina	EST	EU	38
12	KUUSK Kristina	EST	EU	33
13	KUUSK Kristina	EST	EU	33
14	BOUSFIHA Chloe	MAR	AF	31.25
15	SATO Nozomi	JPN	AS	30
16	FORNARIS Susana	ISV	PA	26.75
17	DOIG CALDERON Maria Luisa	PER	PA	25.25
18	MACKINNON Leonora	CAN	PA	24
19	EHLER Alexandra	GER	EU	24
20	VANDINGENEN Aube	BEL	EU	23.75

likely to be unchallenged but the chances of them staying in the World's top 16 during the remainder of the qualification is in the balance. They are a team to keep an eye on. China are Hong Kong's only real threat

COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
KOR	AS	196
POL	EU	196
FRA	EU	192
ITA	EU	180
USA	PA	135
SUI	EU	134
HKG	AS	132
UKR	EU	124
HUN	EU	122
CHN	AS	114
CAN	PA	113
EGY	AF	108
EST	EU	105
ISR	EU	104
JPN	AS	98

for the Asian zonal place but would need to make ground on them early, almost certainly at the next World Cup in Legnano in November.

The USA's position is dependent on the ever-hungry Katherine Holmes but she was on crutches at the World Championships for the team event. Despite her protestations and probably to the USA team delegates credit - her physical welfare - she was not allowed to compete for the team. It's a young team too and without her their position is at threat from a Canadian team who are still hurting from failing to qualify for the Tokyo Games.

To some it's unthinkable that reigning Olympic Champions Estonia won't be in Paris but there's a real chance they won't qualify. They're 29 points behind a strong, but relatively young Swiss team and have both Ukraine and Hungary between them. That is the most exciting of races on the road to Paris.

For the individual race, whilst not guaranteed, Brazil's Moellhausen sits pretty at the top. Her team are very unlikely to challenge for a place but given her form, she's unlikely to be challenged for the only PanAm place. The same goes for Ndolo (KEN) who switched allegiances from Germany to compete for her father's country Kenya. A top sixteen fencer and World silver medallist, she's a medal contender for Paris and all but certain to qualify.

The Asian team places are up for grabs but if China and Japan don't make it, Sun (CHN) is likely to fend off any other Chinese athlete and Sato (JPN) is streets ahead in the race for the second Asian place.

Prediction: The top four stay the same. Moellhausen and Ndolo to qualify through the individual route. Watch the race for the Asian and European zonal team places and to see if Egypt can stay in the top 16 in the World.

Men's Foil

Japan, the USA, Italy and China currently hold the top four automatic spots and are joined whilst France, Hong Kong, Egypt and Canada hold their respective zonal places. Let's deal with the easiest zonal situations first. For the Pan American teams, you'd expect the USA to stay in the top four. If that does pan out then, Canada are in a race both to stay ahead of Brazil and Chile plus



Can Men's foilist Alaeldin Abouelkassem lead Egypt to the Games?

staying in the top 16 in the World rankings. Egypt should be strong enough to hold their qualification place but it's possible that they could challenge the top four.

Now things get a little complicated and with that, very exciting. As well as Egypt, we can expect that France, Hong Kong and Korea to challenge for a top four finish when qualification ends in April 2024. With Japan, China and Hong Kong claiming the top three places at the World Championships, the Asian teams have thrown a spanner in the usually European-dominated works. Korea's quarterfinal finish at the Worlds means they are playing catch up with their zonal counterparts.

We can expect Italy to be strong enough to hold on to their top four place. So the question is, can France do enough to join them. If they do then Poland, Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, Hungary and Ukraine are all in the running for the European place. If France doesn't make the top four, not only are they extremely likely

AOR	FENCER	COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
1	DOSA Daniel	HUN	EU	66
2	LLAVADOR Carlos	ESP	EU	57
3	HA Taegyuu	KOR	AS	52.5
4	HEO Jun	KOR	AS	40.5
5	CHOUENITCH Alexander	CZE	EU	40
6	TOLDO Guilherme	BRA	PA	39.75
7	KAHL Alexander	GER	EU	31.5
8	WINTERBERG-POULSEN Jonas	DEN	EU	30
9	ARCHER Kristjan	GBR	EU	30
10	DAVIS James-Andrew	GBR	EU	30
11	MEPSTEAD Marcus	GBR	EU	30
12	LEE Kwanghyun	KOR	AS	28.5
13	CERVANTES Diego	MEX	PA	26.5
14	RZADKOWSKI Andrzej	POL	EU	24
15	SIESS Michal	POL	EU	24
16	AGUIRRE Cesar	VEN	PA	23.5
17	ROBIN Noe	SEN	AF	22.75
18	BEKKAT Thibaud	ALG	AF	22.25

COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
JPN	AS	228
USA	PA	200
ITA	EU	180
CHN	AS	168
FRA	EU	152
HKG	AS	146
EGY	AF	140
KOR	AS	140
POL	EU	112
GER	EU	109
GBR	EU	97
BEL	EU	94
HUN	EU	91
CAN	PA	90
CHI	AS	84



GBR's Women's Foilist Carolina Stutchbury

a potential change of order. If that is the case, both Canada and China have healthy leads over their zonal rivals and will be confident of retaining their qualification status. Germany are just six points ahead of Poland for the European place with Hungary and Ukraine still in the hunt. Egypt's position in the top 16 is perilous and with no other realistic African challenge, it's quite possible that Africa will relinquish their place. That would release a qualification spot for the highest placed team not already qualified.

At the moment the individual places are held by Walczyk-Klimaszuk (POL), Berthier (SGP), Calugareanu (ROU), Estaban (CIV), Hong H. (KOR) and Pistoia (BRA). The race for the two Asian places is wide open with Chan (HKG), Hong S. (KOR) and Ilyosova (UZB) the closest challengers to Berthier and Hong H. Africa's place will boil down to whether Egypt can stay in the top 16 in World rankings. Inostroza (CHI) and Bulcao (BRA) are in the running for the PanAm place with Pistoia. The European places are difficult to predict at the moment but Great Britain's Carolina Stutchbury is in the hunt whichever European teams qualify.

AOR	FENCER	COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
1	WALCZYK-KLIMASZYK Julia	POL	EU	69
2	DUBROVICH Jacqueline	USA	PA	65
3	BERTHIER Amita	SGP	AS	40
4	CALUGAREANU Malina	ROU	EU	39.75
5	PASZTOR Flora	HUN	EU	39.5
6	ESTEBAN Maxine Isabel	CIV	AF	36
7	STUTCHBURY Carolina	GBR	EU	35
8	HONG Hyo Jin	KOR	AS	33.25
9	MEBARKI Meriem	ALG	AF	30
10	LYCZBINSKA Hanna	POL	EU	29.5
11	CHAN Nok Sze Daphne	HKG	AS	29.25
12	PISTOIA Mariana	BRA	PA	28.5
13	HONG Seo In	KOR	AS	27.5
14	CHENG Hiu Wai Valerie	HKG	AS	27
15	POLOZIUK Alina	UKR	EU	27
16	CASTRO Ariadna	ESP	EU	26
17	HONG Sena	KOR	AS	24.5
18	ZAKARANI Youssra	MAR	AF	23.5
19	INOSTROZA Arantza	CHI	PA	23
20	ILYOSOVA Umidia	UZB	AS	22.25

COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
ITA	EU	296
FRA	EU	256
USA	PA	228
JPN	AS	216
CAN	PA	182
CHN	AS	170
GER	EU	154
POL	EU	148
HUN	EU	130
KOR	AS	126
HKG	AS	123
UKR	EU	122
ESP	EU	116
ROU	EU	107
EGY	AF	100

to claim the European place but also one of China, Hong Kong and Korea will make the top four. The other two Asian teams will be in a tussle for the Asian zonal place.

Given the team situation it would be foolish at this stage to say more than the individual positions are currently held by Dosa (HUN), Llavador (ESP), Ha (KOR), Toldo (BRA), Robin (SEN) and Chen (TPE). If Great Britain don't qualify by team then Kristjan Archer, James Davis and Marcus Mepstead are all tied on points and in contention for a European individual place - although only one can make it.

Prediction: The French team will overtake China into the top four to join Japan, the USA and Italy. An Asian battle-royale between China, Hong Kong and Korea for one place plus an equally tight fight between the six European teams (mentioned above) for that zone's spot. Either Canada or Brazil will do enough to stay in the top 16, perhaps both and whoever leads will go to the Games. Egypt is strong enough to hold their place.

Women's Foil

Italy, France, the USA and Japan are the top four teams and currently hold the automatic places. At the half-way stage, the zonal spots are occupied by Canada, China, Germany and Egypt. With the gap between fourth and fifth place sitting at 34 points, the top four places are likely to remain stable, albeit with

Prediction: The top four teams - Italy, France, the USA and Japan - will be joined by Canada and China as qualifiers. Egypt's fate will depend on attendance and performance but expect them to drop out of the running. So if Korea can jump two of Germany, Poland and Hungary, they will qualify with the leading European team. If not, the top two of those European teams will qualify.

Men's Sabre

Hungary, the USA, Korea and France lead the Olympic qualification rankings and are currently joined by Italy, Iran, Egypt and Canada in the zonal positions. The top three hold a solid lead over the rest of the teams. So expect them to stay in the top four. The gap between France and Italy is 20 points and whilst not insurmountable that will be a tricky gap to close. Either way, one is likely to qualify in the top four with the other claiming the European place.

Iran, Egypt and Canada have healthy leads over their respective zonal rivals and are all strong enough to stay in the top 16 in the World ranking. In short the team situation looks to be the most settled of all the disciplines.

Bazado (GEO) is miles ahead in the race for the two individual European zonal spots. Szabo (GER) holds the second place but

AOR	FENCER	COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
1	BAZADZE Sandro	GEO	EU	184
2	YOSHIDA Kento	JPN	PA	59.5
3	SZABO Matyas	GER	AS	51
4	YILDIRIM Enver	TUR	EU	47
5	QUINTERO Jose	VEN	EU	39.625
6	DI TELLA Pascual Maria	ARG	AF	39.5
7	ALSHAMLAN Yousef	KUW	EU	36.5
8	GIRAULT Evann Jean Abba	NIG	AS	36.5
9	HRYCIUK Szymon	POL	AF	36
10	TEODOSIU Iulian	ROU	EU	36
11	HO Sze Long Aaron	HKG	AS	35.25
12	LOW Ho Tin	HKG	PA	34.5
13	AYMURATOV Musa	UZB	AS	34
14	KACZKOWSKI Krzysztof	POL	AS	33
15	ROMERO Eliecer	VEN	EU	32.75
16	FERJANI Fares	TUN	EU	31
17	FERJANI Ahmed	TUN	AS	25.25
18	YAGODKA Andriy	UKR	AF	22
19	MESSICA Lucas Maurice Andre	TUN	PA	21.25
20	BAZADZE Beka	GEO	AS	21

Yildirim (TUR) is just four points back and none of Hryciuk (POL), Teodosiu (ROU) and Kaczkowski (POL) can be ruled out. It's a similar story for the race for the two Asian places. Leader Yoshida (JPN) looks strong but Alshamlan (KUW) is being chased down by Ho (HKG), Low (HKG) and Aymuratov (UZB).

Quintero (VEN) is just 0.125 points ahead of Di Tella (ARG) in the PanAm race for their single individual place with Romero (VEN) in close proximity too. The African place, currently held by Girault (NIG) is within sight of three Tunisians – brothers Fares and Ahmed Ferjani and Messica.

Prediction: Hungary, the USA, Korea, France, Italy, Iran, Egypt and Canada to qualify through the team route. Bazadze and Yoshida to pick up two of the individual places whilst the race is still wide open elsewhere.

COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
HUN	EU	228
USA	PA	196
KOR	AS	193
FRA	EU	168
ITA	EU	148
IRI	AS	142
GER	EU	134
EGY	AF	128
JPN	AS	118
CAN	PA	116
CHN	AS	112
ESP	EU	89
TUN	AF	76
UKR	EU	76
GEO	EU	72

Women's Sabre

Hungary, France, Korea and the USA hold the top four places with Ukraine, Japan and Algeria occupying their respective zonal places. Mexico lead the PanAm race but are outside the World's top 16, a requirement for team qualification. The lucky beneficiary is currently Italy.

Ukraine has a more than reasonable chance of breaking into the top four, most likely replacing either Korea or the USA. So now we have to consider the Pan American position. Mexico, Canada and Venezuela are very closely matched in terms of both points and potential. However, their chances of staying in the World's top 16, whilst not mathematically impossible, are slim. As such, we will rule this trio of nations out.

AOR	FENCER	COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
1	GKOUNTOURA Theodora	GRE	EU	132
2	GEORGIAIDOU Despina	GRE	EU	82
3	ILIEVA Yoana	BUL	EU	81
4	YANG Hengyu	CHN	AS	68.5
5	BASHTA Anna	AZE	EU	55
6	DAYIBEKOVA Zaynab	UZB	AS	54
7	SHAO Yaqi	CHN	AS	52
8	MARTIN-PORTUGUES Lucia	ESP	EU	51
9	MAXWELL Caitlin	GBR	EU	44.25
10	HAFEZ Nada	EGY	AF	41.5
11	BRIND'AMOUR Pamela	CAN	PA	40.75
12	EIFLER Larissa	GER	EU	40
13	CHADALAVADA ANANDHA SUNDH	IND	AS	39
14	MATUSZAK Sylwia	POL	EU	37
15	NAVARRO Araceli	ESP	EU	36
16	FUNKE Julika	GER	EU	35
17	KARIMOVA Sabina	AZE	EU	34.5
18	TROIS Karina	BRA	PA	32.5
19	DEGHIEDY Mariam	EGY	AF	30
20	GORDON Tamar	CAN	PA	27

Therefore, there are three likely scenarios. If the top four remains as it is, Ukraine will probably claim the European place and Italy would pick up the one vacated by the PanAm zone.

If Ukraine replaces Korea in the top four, Italy, unlikely to be caught by Azerbaijan, will pick up the European quota and Korea will likely replace Japan as the Asian qualifier. Meanwhile Japan is best placed to claim the place vacated by the PanAm Zone.

If Ukraine makes the top four in place of the USA, Italy will claim the European spot whilst PanAm's will go to the USA and the Asian place will remain with Japan.

There is one further consideration to note in this intriguing battle. Whilst Algeria currently hold the African zonal place, the grip on the World's top 16 is a weak one, especially if they don't attend any or all of the remaining qualification events. If they do drop out, there will be one heck of a race

between Azerbaijan, Spain and China for the second vacated team slot.

The individual places are currently occupied by Gkountoura (GRE), Ilieva (BUL), Yang (CHN), Dayibekova (UZB), Hafez (EGY) and Brind'Amour (CAN). Speculation on these places would be futile at this point, other than to say that one of the European places will go to a Greek athlete. With Gkountoura and Georgiadou so closely matched, that race is one to keep an eye on.

This, by far, is the most unpredictable of all the weapons.

Prediction: Hungary, France, Korea, USA, UKR, Italy and Japan to qualify by team along with one Greek athlete through the individual route.

We'll know which teams and athletes have qualified for Paris 2024 on 1 April 2024 ahead of the special zonal qualification events. The starting line up for fencing at the XXXIII Olympiad will be completed once France have confirmed their host nation picks.

Photos: #BizziTeam

COUNTRY	ZONE	POINTS
HUN	EU	196
FRA	EU	193
KOR	AS	174
USA	PA	172
UKR	EU	161
ITA	EU	136
JPN	AS	132
AZE	EU	120
ESP	EU	116
CHN	AS	114
BUL	EU	104
GRE	EU	101
ALG	AF	100
GER	EU	95
POL	EU	86

Nat Lewis returned from the Wheelchair Fencing World Championships that saw some exceptional GBR performances, and looks ahead to the Paris qualification to come.

Returning from six days of competition at the Wheelchair Fencing World Championships feels like coming back from the scene of a protracted medieval siege. Under the burning Italian sun, and to the background whine of Vespas and mosquitoes, some of the greatest fighters on Earth have clashed in pursuit of medal-laden glory and Paralympic qualification; sleeping giants have been woken, foes both old and new have been laid to rest, and untested heroes have taken to the field. But gazing over the wreckage of pistes, swords, and discarded water bottles one question springs to mind: what happened here?

In short, British fencers from all categories and weapons competed in one of the most unforgiving competitive environments in sport and were not found wanting: medals from Dimitri Coutya and Piers Gilliver deservedly take the headlines, but the whole squad, across team and individual competitions, showed that we are a nation to be reckoned with.

Dimitri fired his opening salvo in the Men's Category B foil, dispatching Rojas Estrada

(VEN) 15-3, swiftly followed by Zhu (CHN) 15-10 in commanding displays where he was able to make good use of his excellent point control and strength to pressure his opponents into rash mistakes. In the quarter finals he crossed paths with Zhu's compatriot, Feng and had to endure a 6-15 defeat. This sent Coutya to the repechage competition where, through concentrated force of will, he was able to fight back into the 3rd place playoff against Qin (CHN), who he clinically dispatched 15-5 to lay his hands on the bronze medal.

Later in the week, coming off the back of 14th place in the Category B Men's sabre, Dimitri would medal in the epee event, enjoying a gutsy and undefeated run through to the final where he once again faced Qin. Despite enjoying an early period of tactical dominance, he would have to settle for the silver medal on this occasion as Qin roared back to life in the final five hits of the match.

In the Category A Men's sabre, Piers Gilliver returned from injury to claim the silver medal, only losing out by two points

against Manko (UKR) in a tightly fought match where both fencers dropped low-line bombs and took stunning parries to keep the audience guessing right up to the last hit.

Gilliver backed up this strong early showing by claiming gold in the Category A epee event against a robust field; Gilliver held his nerve at 14-14 in two successive matches against Chinese athletes Tian and Sun to reach the final against hometown favourite, Lambertini who was riding high from his victory in the foil competition earlier in the week. The boisterous Italian crowd's shouts of 'ITALIA!' were soon reduced to discontented murmurings as Gilliver savaged Lambertini 15-4, the Italian showing great spirit throughout.

Gemma Collis was unfortunate to draw strong underseeded Chinese athletes in both the Category A Women's sabre and epee events leaving her with a disappointing L32 and L16 in each event respectively, neither of which are representative of her season so far or of her qualities as an athlete. These qualities



Oli Lam-Watson in action in the men's team epee. Photo: IWAS

were highlighted in her L16 epee match against Chen (CHN) where she came within one point of victory, before being picked off by the smallest of margins. Nevertheless, she battled through the repechage to rise to 9th place overall by the end of the day. She was joined in the L32 of the Category A epee by Emily Holder who made excellent use of distance and aggression in a spirited battle with Drozd (POL), eventually succumbing to the Polish fencer's experience 7-15. Holder replicated her L32 finish in the foil event, proving she is growing into her place on the world stage.

Susie Seddon-Cowell, fencing in her first World Championships, overcame Tanwar (IND) 15-4 in the Category A sabre before running into the highly ranked French fencer Vide in the L32; she nevertheless produced a strong second half of the match to finish 6-15, showing guts and determination to change tactics at the break and finish 29th.

The experienced Justine Moore proved her mettle in the Category B women's epee, consigning Kaltsi (GRE) and Geddes (USA) to the history books before losing to Pasquino (ITA) in the quarter finals, and Rong (CHN) 14-15 in the repechage to take

a well-deserved 9th place. She showed her consistency to end 14th overall in the Category B foil, her run was ended in the L16 by the legendary Bebe Vio Grande (ITA) in front of a roaring crowd.

The Men's Team epee and foil both produced quality performances to achieve 5th and 6th place respectively: choosing to rest Gilliver, the task of closing out each match fell to Oliver Lam-Watson, ably set up by Josh Waddell and Dimitri, while Shah Rashid waited in reserve to pounce on any sign of weakness from the opposition. Following a bye through the L16, the foil competition started with a loss to the surprisingly low-ranked Chinese team in the quarter finals. The boys responded in fine style, holding their nerve to sweep aside Poland 45-40 followed by a dominant display over Germany that saw them claim 5th place with a lead of 30 points in their final match.

It was a similar story in the epee where, after again triumphing against Germany in the L16, GB was sent to the playoffs by the world no.1 Iraqi team who would go on to clinch the title 45-44 against China.

Lam-Watson and Waddell backed up their team performances with strong work in the

Men's Individual Category A foil and epee events, taking to the stage and producing fine performances to bag 9th and 23rd in the foil, and a brace of L32 positions in the epee. Shah Rashid endured a heartbreaking L32 loss to Jablonski (POL), suffering at the hands of the referee's interpretation at 13-13 but showing the strength of his character to continue to lend tactical support to his compatriots throughout the competition.

All attention now turns to the upcoming IWAS World Cup events in Thailand and Cardiff before the European Championships in March 2024; the Championships double as the European Zonal Qualifiers for the Paris Paralympic Games, and as such will be crucial to the hopes of many of our athletes. British wheelchair fencing has more depth and quality than at any time in the past, and we are poised on the verge of true greatness. The next year will be fascinating, stressful, and spectacular beyond measure. Roll on Paris - we will be ready.



Dimitri Coutya with his sabre silver medal.. Photo: IWAS

A PATH TRAVELLED WELL: JAIMIE COOK

Karim Bashir talks to the Scottish international in his breakthrough year

It's not unusual to see children following their parents into sport and at the very top level. Think Formula One and there's Graham and Damon Hill, Jos and Max Verstappen. Athletics has Liz and Eilish McColgan. Football's got Peter and Kasper Schmeichel.

Closer to home we have the Cook dynasty emerging. Father Keith was not only British Champion but also claimed nine Commonwealth medals, he was also part of the first British team to win a senior World Cup team medal and the GB men's foil team that claimed bronze at European Championships in 2013. That's some CV.

Keith has talked in the past about how fencing became his outlet as a child. It gave him focus and something to aim for. It came as no surprise that when retirement from competition came, he turned that focus to coaching. As an athlete, he not only had abundant talent but also a determination and tenacity that few are blessed with. He turned his slight stature into a lethal weapon, dishing out victories over some of the very best in the World.

Bringing his knowledge, experience and that tenacity to coaching, Keith now has a thirst for learning how to turn the world class fencer he was into a world class coach. Who better to have in your camp, especially if you happen to be his son?

Watching Jaimie from the side of the piste is like stepping back in time. The similarities between father and son are simply astonishing; the same shape, body position, movement, lightening change of direction, go-to patterns, energy, determination and tenacity. The same threat? Not quite - but more on that later.

Jaimie's journey began as a "wee kid" tagging along with mum (Jo, also a former international fencer) and his dad to the club. "It all started with my dad. At around five years old, I start with foam swords and stumbled through plastic, eventually

progressing to metal. I don't remember asking to do it but as I got older I began to enjoy it."

All parents will know the struggle of looking after their kids whilst trying to pursue their own hopes and dreams as well as day-to-day life. The picture is clear of Keith, a committed athlete and loving dad, trying to combine training and childcare. Perhaps what wasn't clear at the time, was Jaimie piste-side, unwittingly absorbing the nuances of our complicated sport as well as his dad's hunger and desire. He would have observed the good, the bad and everything in between. The moments of joy and despair along with dad's relentless desire to get to the next training session and milk it for all it was worth. An example set in the pursuit of success - in life, not just in fencing. Whilst not the priority back then, I'm sure Keith quietly wondered if Jaimie would follow in his footsteps knowing what fencing had given him.

"I began competing in Scotland in the YDS events," Cook Jnr. continues. "By the time

I was in the under-10 category I began competing down south in the Leon Paul Junior Series. I don't think I won the British Youth Championships at that level but I won them twice in the under-12 age group and once at under-14s."

Perhaps these comments are a reflection of Jaimie's young memory being just that but I suspect that this also illustrates Keith and Jo's desire for their young children to have fun. And then Jaimie tuning into his competitive streak as an under-12 fencer. His next uttering certainly suggests that his own pursuit for success had begun around that time.

"I made a top eight domestically in my first year as a cadet. The following season I got a top 16 at the EFC circuit event in Cabries and I thought 'd'you know what? I think I could go quite far. I could get a lot better if I work at it.'" At this stage Jaimie had three more years left at cadet level.

"Back then I used to train three, maybe four times a week with competitions at the weekend. There was no S&C, it was just



Jaimie and coach Keith on their way to the senior British title in 2023



At the European Games against Marini

training and lessons... and football. I used to play a lot and still do now."

"Dad has always been my coach but I have taken lessons from three other people." It's telling that Jaimie pauses at this point. He's taking stock as he checks his own count. "There's Sean (Walton), Richard Kruse - I've had one lesson with him and Ben Peggs. Oh! There's four!"

In 2019, Jaimie joined his father on a trip to the Shanghai Grand Prix where Keith was competing. The organisers were running a junior tournament alongside the main event and Cook Jnr competed in the under-14 event. Having just won the (senior) Birmingham International at just 14 years old, Shanghai was a landmark moment for Jaimie. A different world, different culture, different alphabet - an amazing experience.

"It was so cool. I got to compete on a massive stage and everyone was saying that I should have done the Grand Prix but was so glad I didn't. While I was there, Wojtek van Barneveld asked my dad if he could give me a lesson. (Wojtek has coached in many countries including Great Britain but was based at Dulwich College, China, at the time.) My dad said 'why not?' and that was it."

That openness and willingness to experience new things, challenge yourself, put yourself in difficult situations, go outside your comfort zone and embrace them with fresh eyes - and the acceptance that they may not go your way - is a feature of the Cook approach. So far, it's panned out well.

Jaimie already has a British senior national title under his belt, enjoyed success for Great Britain on the Cadet international squad, bagged European bronze and silver medals as a Junior as well as winning the Junior World Cup in Sabadell this year. He's also completed his first year as a senior international. Just looking at his events calendar for the past 12 months is tiring. The balancing act and feat of organising the logistics for tandem Junior and Senior seasons as well as school must have been something to behold. No doubt mum, Jo, had a big part to play in that!

A top 64 finish at his first Senior World Cup in Bonn definitely felt good. The reality of the jump from Junior to Senior level internationally came straight after as Jaimie didn't make the second day at the Turin Grand Prix. The Sabadell win and a top eight finish at the Junior Europeans preceded two more World Cups and a Grand Prix in which Jaimie delivered another top

64 finish. On to the big ones - the European Games, Senior Europeans and Worlds.

Krakow, home to the European Games, was Jaimie's next landmark event and perhaps more important than his first European and World Championships. His journey and his goals clearly include a shot at Olympic qualification. Paris 2024 may come too soon but is still a target for Jaimie. "Whenever somebody mentions it, it feels special. It feels like it's almost a dream. Like every athlete, you go, what can you go and do? Go to the Olympics, go to the World Champs. But it's the Olympics that stand out. And if the team made Paris that would be so, so cool. We have such a good chance of making it too. It would be so amazing to go. I remember watching London [2012] on TV, and thinking 'wow'. But now I'm in the team with some of the people I was watching." Jaimie featured in the bronze medal match against qualification rivals, Germany at the Games and the team narrowly lost out 45-43.

He went on to impress with individual top 64 finishes at both the European and World Championships, ending his debut Senior season inside the World's top 100. And this is just the beginning - albeit a very special beginning. Dad/coach is firmly grounded though, thinking only about the plan and what's next.

"I've said before that talent is as cheap as table salt. There's a lot of it out there but if you're not willing to work hard, you'll just be another one that was talented."

"I do this [coaching] full time and I know how sport can change people's lives as well. I realised that I could try to treat the next generation fencers coming through to actually do bigger and better things that I ever did. With Jaimie and a lot of other fencers from Scotland, they're showing that if you put the work in, anything's possible."

"It'd be amazing for me to get Jaimie to the level I think he's capable of. That's the hard part. I want my son to do well and to win lots of tournaments. But that doesn't always happen. You have to learn from making mistakes. So I like to talk about the holistic approach. I want him to make



Jaimie in Krakow

mistakes, I want him to learn from it. You can learn more from the ones you lose. The mental side of it is so important, especially when you go into a multi-sport event like the Olympics.”

Jaimie is Keith version 2.0. This new model comes with something extra - Keith version 1.0. The upgrade comes with new features, not least of which is twenty-plus years of experience on the international circuit. Uploading this software will take some time but rather than twenty years it will be complete way before Jaimie turns twenty years old. Beta testing is already well underway and once complete, this fast track to all of that experience can be unleashed on the senior international circuit. The only thing that can't be fast tracked is the time on task; you have to fence the best opposition to get that experience first hand - there is no other way. However, there's no doubt that the 'upgrade' gives Jaimie an advantage - a 'leg-up' that provides him with huge potential. That might seem like a huge amount of pressure but Jaimie's personality suggests that he doesn't see it that way. He sees that potential and is determined to convert it into gold. (And that's not all from the Cook family - younger sister Imogen is coming through, hot on Jaimie's heels.)

Meanwhile, Keith is going through his own upgrade along side Jaimie's development, and has become a coach hungry to seek

out new methods to compliment those tried and tested. He is the epitome of the modern coach and that hasn't gone unnoticed by those above. Unlike another Scottish sporting dynasty - the Murray tennis clan - the Cooks are firmly and willingly working within British Fencing's ADP structure in a symbiotic relationship. There is no doubt that both Jaimie and Keith reap rewards from the relationship, but it's a truly mutual deal. The benefit is clear for those that want to see it: every foilist within the ADP structure can and will benefit from the upgrade that Jaimie is testing for them.

If you're inspired by this story and want to help Jaimie out, check out his GoFundMe Page here: <https://gofund.me/28498dc2>



Team huddle at the European Games

Photos: #BizziTeam

SPONSORSHIP 101

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR ATTRACTING SPONSORS.

By Karim Bashir.



Whilst there is some overlap in the skills, successful crowdfunders play to hearts whilst those seeking sponsorship play to minds.

Let's be clear from the start. Finding a sponsor is not easy. It takes time, effort and a little bit of strategic thinking - a little like fencing!

It would be impossible to cover everything in a magazine article and following this guidance by no means guarantees that you will find backers. However, many athletes, clubs, coaches parents and event organisers approach finding potential sponsors without understanding what makes a good proposal and what gets discarded without being read. This article is intended to provide a platform for you to create a proposition that is compelling and one that will at least get you through the door.

For the sake of clarity, the guidance that follows is for those that are looking for 'serious' sponsorship - one that is likely to come with a contract or at least a written agreement. None of the guidance will hurt those looking for the odd £100 or £500 contribution or donation. However, the advice given here is intended for those looking for four (or even five) figure sums.

What is sponsorship?

Sponsorship, put simply, is the financial or otherwise support of a sponsor. This can come in a number of forms. There's financial - an exchange of money in returns for services. There's VIK or Value in Kind - where discounted products or services are offered in exchange for services. You also have Media and Promotional sponsorship where the 'property' benefits from increased exposure in exchange for association with a media platform or an event.

Property

Let's start with some terminology. It may seem a little impersonal but 'property' is the term used for what is being sponsored, whether that is an athlete, club or event - or even a TV program, as in: "this episode of Big Brother is brought to you by...". Rather than alluding to any kind of ownership, the term 'property' is best thought of as an item of real estate - a piece of land or a building if you like.

Sponsors invest in 'property' to realise a Return on Investment (ROI). ROI covers a wide range of areas, not limited to pure financial return. It could be measured by the company's additional customer, supplier or employee satisfaction, media exposure, reputational gain, amongst many other Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that a company measures itself by.

This might all sound rather dry when you have a training session in France to attend, but the bottom line is that the 'property' must come with some value and by understanding how a company calculates its ROI and the KPIs it uses to measure that, you already have an advantage over the huge competition you face for their sponsorship budget.

This is how sports agents make their money, but my experience shows that fencers only become attractive to agents once they find success. More often than not, this is far too late for the fencer.



You're always displaying brands as a fencer.

What to offer a sponsor

How simple life would be if potential sponsors reached into their pockets and gave us money just because we are good, maybe a fencer that has achieved internationally as a cadet or junior, or who has qualified for a major event? There are a few people and fewer companies out there that do fit this bill but they are benefactors rather than sponsors. Their endeavours are philanthropic and have no need for any return.

On that note, you may and perhaps should, consider crowdfunding. It has proven to be a valuable route to generating income to fund training or attendance at an event for many. The key difference is that, rather than looking for one (or a few) backer(s) to finance all of your needs, this route relies on multiple backers paying a small amount each to cover your requirements. Whilst there is some overlap in the skills, successful crowdfunders play to hearts whilst those seeking sponsorship play to minds.

So, what can you offer potential sponsors? This is neatly broken down into four simple areas - endorsement, branding, imagery and appearances. Let's deal with these one by one.

Endorsements

Endorsement, put simply is the 'property' backing a product, service or the sponsor themselves. Cristiano Ronaldo has been

the face of Nike since 2003. Rory McIlroy endorses EA Sports game "Rory McIlroy's PGA Tour". David Beckham and H&M, Jack Grealish and Gucci - the list goes on. Companies looking for 'properties' to endorse them, their products or services are looking for big names. However, "influencers" are now receiving huge endorsements and there is no reason a fencer cannot be seen as an influencer. It's most like that a fencer is likely to receive VIK sponsorship in the endorsement space. For example, your local gym may give you free membership in exchange for allowing them to display your best international medal with a podium image by reception. Note that the benefit of that may not be limited to the free membership itself - you could ask to display some contact details along with the medal for anyone interested in supporting you financially!

Branding

Branding, on the face of it, is simple. Where can you stick the sponsors logo on you or your kit, that gives them exposure? Now, there are some strict rules about this which change depending on your environment. The FIE has a set of instructions about the size of branding spaces on breeches, masks, jackets etc. When on GB duty, fencers must abide by the team branding rules to ensure that there are no conflicts with team sponsors. No branding is allowed for TeamGB Olympians and Paralympians other than those approved by the British Olympic Association and British

Paralympic Association. Make sure you know what rules apply when and where.

However, there are plenty of branding opportunities still available to fencers. You can wear branded t-shirts, hats, shorts etc. In some cases, your fencing bag can carry logos and your water bottles. The spaces for branding are almost limitless - you just have to be a little creative

Imagery

Imagery also comes with rules but there is a little more freedom than those associated with branding. Images of you with the sponsor's CEO or other members of staff or at an event are usually ok. Your sponsor may wish for you to have a professional shoot done which could be in your kit, casual or at an event. If you're an Olympian, you won't be able to wear your TeamGB tracksuit and you should seek permission from British Fencing if you want to wear international kit. That said, imagery is a valuable asset to a sponsor and an easy one for you to gift to them. Make the most of it.

Appearances

Appearances are not quite as simple as just turning up somewhere. They will usually coincide with a fixture or event that the sponsor is running. It could be as simple as going to their head office to meet staff or perhaps the opening of a new office. They could be entertaining guests with you as the guest of honour. You could appear at a promotional event or conference. Think outside the box with appearances. Firstly, you have to be 100% comfortable with any appearance that you make and communicate clearly to your sponsor when you are not. Secondly, make sure you are clear about when you can and can't make appearances. Let your sponsor know your training and competition schedules and whether or not you will require a parent to attend with you. Finally, think about what you could offer. Perhaps you are comfortable speaking to an audience about your story? Most sponsors will love that - an athlete who has the ability to speak publicly is more attractive than one that can't. If you haven't already, write and practice a 10-15 minute speech about your journey so far.



How many brands can you spot? Podium gear looks very different from fencing gear - with good reason (Pic: #BizziTeam)

Identifying your values and creating your personal brand

Your values and brand are important to potential sponsors and it's not as complicated to work out as you may think. Essentially, your values are all about you and your personality. Only you know what your values are. All aspiring athletes are hardworking, dedicated and make sacrifices. Potential sponsors will assume you come with these basic values. What they are looking for is what makes you, well, you. Perhaps you are and advocate for environmental issues, education for all or animal rights. Perhaps you are a keen volunteer or passionate about giving back to your club or the sport.

Your values shape your brand and your brand is whatever you want it to be....as long as it's authentic. Any potential sponsor wants to work with authentic individuals and organisations.

Create your 'elevator' pitch based on your values-driven brand. This exercise takes time and patience but the good news is that there are plenty of examples freely available online to help you shape your ideas.

Who is going to sponsor me?

Many people take a scatter-gun approach to sponsorship. That's not always a bad idea or even a bad start. Write a sponsorship proposal letter outlining what it is that you are looking for and what you can offer in return. Start by targeting every company within 30miles of where you live and try to find the name of someone in their marketing, PR, media or corporate social responsibility team to send the letter to. Leave it for a week and then call them and ask if they received your letter. Whilst rarely successful, this approach can be considered as training. You will learn the basic process for applying to potential sponsors and you will get a chance to practice your 'elevator' pitch.

In the meantime, spend your downtime (when you're not training, competing, travel or resting) to search for companies that fit your brand values. If one of your values is always being on time, there's watch manufacturers. If it's precision, there's

engineering firms. If it's enjoyment in what you are doing, there's entertainment companies. You get my drift.

Once you've identified a target list of ten or so companies, tailor your pitch to each one individually. Go through their websites and match your values, specifically to theirs. By demonstrating that you have taken an interest in them, they are much more likely to take an interest in you. It's also advisable that you target the most senior person or people that you can within the organisation, whether that's the Chair of the Board, the CEO or one of its Directors - start at the top and work your way down. Be relentless!

Social Media

All potential sponsors these days will look at your social media, often in more detail than you might think. It has to be spotless! That doesn't mean boring - far from it. It should be entertaining and represent you but posts should always be carefully considered. The best advice on this front is to have social media accounts associated with your real name that are used purely for the purposes of promoting your sporting endeavours. Ensure that your settings are open enough for engagement and interaction but secure enough that they can't be abused. It is recommended that you turn-off sharing to other accounts and that you moderate all comments, deleting

when necessary. If moderation is not an option for you, don't allow any comments.

There is no reason that you shouldn't have personal/private accounts too but only allow access to your trusted family members and real-life friends. Change your name slightly or use a nickname so that only those you trust can find you. And finally only allow your contacts to view your profile and switch off all sharing facilities. The advice still holds as it should for all social media accounts, don't post anything you don't want your parents or grandparents to see!

Summary

Be You! Be Different! Stand out as best you can. Find angles that others haven't thought about. Get together with teammates or other clubs and go to sponsors with compelling packaged deals. Make a video pitch for potential sponsors or do an explainer video about your weapon and why you love it.

If you're lucky and have worked hard enough to find a sponsor, seek professional help at contract stage - British Fencing would be a good place to start. Good luck!



Red Bull associated with World Champion Miles Chamley-Watson - who likes to make sure you know just what he's achieved. (Pic: #BizziTeam)

WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

Karim delves into how our National Governing Body plans to help our athletes increase their Probability of Success with the British Fencing's Individual Athlete Development Plan.

At the beginning of September the new international season kicked off with the foil satellite in Sao Paulo, Brazil. As I checked the entry list, I noted British fencers Kamal Minott and Carolina Stutchbury in the line ups. The season has definitely started for me! Keeping an eye on those results - and those to come - for British Fencing is one of many things that will keep me occupied in a season that concludes, one hopes in spectacular style, with Paris 2024.

My 'to do' list includes writing for and editing this magazine, contributing to British Fencing's social posts for international events, commentating for the FIE as well as my commitments to other sports commentary, the day job, my family and my own personal welfare. It's a busy, sometimes stressful existence but as I regularly say, half tongue-in-cheek, 'it's better than having a real job'.

None of it would be possible without an inner motivation - in my case to earn doing what I enjoy doing - a commitment to work hard even when I don't want to, learning from my mistakes (and there have been plenty), planning for periods of rest and a dusting of luck along the way. And it all began with a goal - a goal that I needed to create and aim for when I put my foils down in the mid-noughties. My life, to that point, had been consumed by fencing. I lived and breathed it over two decades of competitive fencing. When that ended, I found myself in a decent job in London but which lacked the inspiration I needed to get out of bed each day. There's certainly no better way to get your creative juices flowing than to quit.

My goal, though simple, was quickly formed - find something I enjoy and work out how to become the best I could be at it. I'm still working on that bit but as they say, the rest is history.

I couldn't help reflecting on my own journey when I was asked to write about how BF is approaching fencer development - hence the preamble.

I've not only been a developing fencer but since retiring from competition, I've maintained my involvement in the sport both professionally and as a fan. A large proportion of my close network of friends are still involved in the sport in various roles. So my access to all aspects domestically and internationally has been a close one. As both a fencer and retired fencer, everything that I have done has been based on goals and then planning to achieve them. At the very least, I hope my insight into this important area makes for an interesting read.

The first stop for this article was obvious. "It's by no means the finished article but it's a start based on well-founded research and analysis," was Steve Kemp's opening gambit. BF's Pathway Director is the man in charge of the masterplan - a plan designed to give every competitive fencer in the UK the chance to achieve their goals. He continues and I paraphrase, "It may not be for everyone but it's certainly not going to hurt anyone."

Put simply, Steve is suggesting that this is a starter plan for BF's fencer support structure and one that he fully expects to develop over time, and it's been carefully crafted to ensure that no fencer is harmed by being involved. So far, so good.

As Steve takes me through the plan, again I reflect on my own vocational journey since I finished fencing. It makes sense to me immediately - start with a goal and make a plan to give yourself the best chance of achieving it. It certainly isn't for everyone. It's admin! It could be perceived as time consuming and boring. It's not fencing. It's not footwork and it's not sparring, lessons or competing. It requires a level of discipline to stop what you are doing, reflect and review what is being done. The challenge is an honest assessment of where you are that makes it difficult to be undertaken. The top athletes are always looking at where they are and importantly what they need to do to get competitive advantage.

Any serious fencer must now consider some form of planning and profiling as part of their preparation... Let's face it, your serious opponents will be doing it.

What it is, is a template to understand where you are, what paths to take and what you should and shouldn't be working on or competing in - all based on your own goals. To be clear, that's YOUR goals. Steve may be in charge of the masterplan but he's not in charge of your goals. He and the rest of the team are there, if desired, to help you achieve them.

So how does it work? What are the nuts and bolts? It's all based on simple equation:

$Ability - Interference = Performance = Potential + Opportunity$

Or in other words, "your performance is equal to what you are capable of when interference is removed or reduced, which happens on a given day and can change in short periods of time. Potential and opportunity are the right opportunity with the right athlete at the right time. If this is done, athletes are significantly more likely to achieve."

What is interference? "Interference can come in all shapes and forms including, the



Steve Kemp

current level of ability (tactical, technical, physical, and mental), the contextual situation and the level of preparation for an event.”

When you begin to unpick this, based on your own circumstances - and you have to be completely honest with yourself for it to be meaningful - there's a lot to go over. I believe that a lot of us have dealt with the 'current level of ability' to a greater or lesser degree since before I was fencing. 'The contextual situation' though? 'The level of preparation for an event'? (Note: that is far deeper than 'preparation for an event'.)

In talking to Steve, it's these areas that intrigue me the most. "Interference is a broad subject area. One consideration is the interplay of physical, psychological, technical, tactical, the environmental, nutritional and coaching factors. With the athlete it is the plans or strategies to address these areas."

"With the ADP training camps, we are doing a lot of work around managing moments and the 'thrive, manage and survive' model, something Jonathan Katz brought to the programme. If athletes are developing those lived experiences they can build from them and explore the interplay. The Athlete

Assessment is there to explore some of those factors in more depth."

So, this global approach is founded on each and every individual fencer's personal circumstances. The template IS 'one-size fits all' but once complete it turns into a bespoke guide for each fencer. There is no doubt, for many it's new, maybe even

daunting but a 'baby-steps' approach is being adopted by BF. You are encouraged to become self-sufficient but only eventually.

As the conversation continues, Steve evolves from teacher or guide to the approach to enthusiastic, passionate and caring guardian of our fencers' dreams and goals. "It is all about choice. Fencers are not exited from the ADP. They choose by their actions and behaviours. They exit themselves and there is always a way back. It is hard though. I hope they choose to embrace the opportunities they have to use the IADP - the Individual Athlete Development Plan. The recent ADP talk by Olympic rower Ollie Cook highlighted his disciplined approach around his development plan and his performance planning for Tokyo 2020.

For Steve it's a simple statement "finding the way to your success or choosing to fail."

It's hard not to be impressed. The confidence exuding Steve is tempered by reality and humbleness. It's not 'the golden ticket'. It's not a case of 'do this and you'll become Olympic Champion' and it's not 'this is the only answer'. My take on this, mid-conversation, is that if you don't adopt this approach, or at least your version of it, you are hampering your chances of achieving what you are capable of.



Dr. Jonathan Katz, behind the 'thrive, manage and survive' part of the programme

Still though, I have questions. For starters, we're not talking about planning for a power or endurance-based sport. Let's face it, if you're planning for running, swimming, cycling etc, your targets and goals are simple. They are time-based.

"Yes. You can take data from previous events and predict the race times and if you race at this speed or time you should be in a medal winning position."

"The difference with fencing and in fact all combat sports, is that you may analyse and understand your opponent. They are doing the same to you and you cannot predict what your opponent is going to do with 100% certainty. As a programme we are looking at how we can increase the probability of success and what that means for fencing. For the individual the IADP supports the concept of increasing the probability of success."

Translate this into 'fencing language' and it starts to come together. Let's take a sabre fencer who knows that they are going to struggle against a strong opponent in the middle. Job one: get the fight out of the middle, thus increasing the 'probability of success'. At some point, certainly at elite level, the opponent is going to adapt. What next? Steve's approach would mean that the fencer will already have a plan B. For example, they'll know, that their attacks (outside the middle), will have a higher 'probability of success' if they push their opponent to their end of the piste before finishing. If only it were that simple! The fencer will also have plans C, D, E, F.... This, after all, is the beauty of the sport.

The devil of course is in the detail but at a very high level here's what the plan looks like:

The BF Individual Athlete Development Plan (IADP) is a Performance Profiling and Planning tool. Profiling is a valuable technique, used to identify and organise training, preparation, and the development of an individual (Richards, 2008) and their supporting plans. These will be either an individual development plan or a performance plan.

The BF IADP covers a number of areas:

- Your Goals - Short, Medium and Long Term
- Fencer Assessment - Where you are at your age and stage compared the Performance Pathway

- Competition calendar to support the selection of meaningful and purposeful competition, and it can link to the use of periodisation of training
- Improvement goals by selecting a number of personal performance factors for which to base the performance profile around. These factors can be broken down into four performance components; Tactical, Technical, Physical and Mental (the TTPM model)
- Strength and Conditioning training programmes
- Periodisation and Season Plans

SUPPORTING THE FUTURE

The benefits to performance profiling and planning are:

To provide important information on fencers, which can be used to implement

realistic goal setting strategies and training intervention. These training interventions can help focus the individual on the key aspects of their performance and help direct their training to the areas of perceived/agreed need.

The fact that the fencer and the personal coach can clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the fencers' performance, it affords the fencer to work individually, or with their personal coach, and with the Fencer Development Programme Coaches. This training improves the weaknesses, as well as building on the strengths.

It provides tangible evidence of the fencers' development and improvements over a

Athlete Assessment Results Record										
Athlete Name:										
Gender		Female ← Male/Female?								
DATE:										
	RAW SCORE	CATEGORY	RAW SCORE	CATEGORY	RAW SCORE	CATEGORY	RAW SCORE	CATEGORY	RAW SCORE	CATEGORY
			% CHANGE FROM T1-T2		% CHANGE FROM T2-T3		% CHANGE FROM T3-T4			
30-15 Intermittent test	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Repeat Spring Ability Test	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
5-0-5- Change of Direction	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Broad Jump	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
3 Hops Dominate Leg	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
3 Hops Non-Dominate Leg	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Side Plank	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Plank	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Calf Raise Right	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
Calf Raise Left	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	#DIV/0!	0	0	0	#DIV/0!
CUMULATIVE SCORE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suggested Training programme Level	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Raw Score and Corresponding Category			
Exercise Category	1	2	3
30-15 Intermittent test	16.5	18.5	19+
Repeat Spring Ability Test	<80	<85	>86
5-0-5 Change of Direction	19	17	16
Broad Jump	<250	<289	>290
3 Hops Dominate Leg	<300	>300	>600
3 Hops Non-Dominate Leg	<250	>250	>500
Side Plank	0-59	60-119	120+
Plank	0-60	60-119	120+
Calf Raise	0-19	19-24	25+

ASSESSMENT 1

ASSESSMENT 2

ASSESSMENT 3

One of the IADP programme's components



“By breaking down how they fight, fencers gain a clearer picture of their fencing, their abilities and how to work towards improving them.”

period of time, a season, or longer, such as a four-year Olympic cycle.

Performance profiling and planning helps to motivate fencers to improve areas of their performance, therefore enhancing their overall ability. If the fencer's development are theirs, part of their vision, they will be motivated to improve.

The targets are set by the fencers and will provide an on-going motivation to improve in the direction that they have agreed with their personal coach.

The performance profiling process can highlight any differences between the coach and the fencer's perception of the fencer's performance. If both the fencer and the personal coach do come up with some differences. This is a benefit as these differences will increase communication between the coach and the fencers.

It helps maximise their intrinsic motivation. Profiling does this as the fencer can clearly identify their development areas, this means that they can easily work toward improving.

Coaches who are not aware of their fencers' perceptions of their own game/ fight risk losing the interest, focus and motivation of the fencers to their own development.

Performance profiling has been demonstrated to be a useful tool for any

fencer to analyse their own performance effectively.

Steve summarises, “By breaking down how they fight, fencers gain a clearer picture of their fencing, their abilities and how to work towards improving them. The targets set by the fencer will provide an on-going motivation to improve in the direction that they have agreed with their coach.”

“Involving the fencer in the creation of the performance profile increases intrinsic motivation, and the fencer-coach relationship can be enhanced, leading to more effective training and development. Whilst spending time on profiling and planning may not feel as important as spending time in the session or individual lesson, the time spent to identify key work development areas that will make the biggest difference means that training is more precise to the needs of the fencer. It will accelerate learning and increase the probability of success and the fencer may gain more confidence by improving a different attribute that holds more concern for them during performance.

“This added confidence could have a positive impact on their whole fight game. By discussing each other's perceptions of the fencer's ability, the coach can seek to question and remove negative, ‘irrational’ thinking the fencer has about their ability.”

Returning to part of that equation then:

Ability - Interference = Performance

Without question, a major factor for any fencer stepping onto the competition piste is how well prepared they feel. Lack of preparation breeds self-doubt and leads to decreased confidence. Any serious fencer must now consider some form of planning and profiling as part of their preparation along with footwork, sparring, lessons, strength & conditioning, nutrition, psych etc. Let's face it, your serious opponents will be doing it.

As my lengthy conversation with Steve comes to a close, again I reflect on my own experience. From a personal point of view, I can see that quite by accident I've followed this path. It was far less structured but the principles are almost identical: start with a goal and make a plan to achieve it. My plan is still developing but how I wished I had had a Steve to guide me through it when I started.

It also made me think of the piece I wrote about for The Sword in October 2022 which included a section about the French team at the World Champs in Cairo. Steve remembered it. “They had a plan and it was simple: get the best results at Paris 2024. That plan was implemented way before Cairo. What you wrote about was a culmination of the plan at a landmark in the journey. Team meetings, an injured Brunet actively involved, acknowledging performances whilst keeping focus on the overall goal. We're not France... not yet anyway.”

So back to Kamal and Carolina. Individual fencers both in Brazil. Kamal, a senior fencer looking to become a feature of the men's foil team who are in the running to qualify by team for Paris 2024. Carolina, not yet a senior, undoubtedly seeking Olympic success and perhaps Paris 2024 qualification, juggling with Junior and Senior competition schedules. I wondered what their plans would look like.

In fact, I wonder with great excitement, if they or any of the young fencers today who are part of BF's ADP can achieve what hasn't been done since Bill Hoskyns in 1964, and get a place on an Olympic podium.

It can't hurt to be involved!

CADET & JUNIOR NATIONALS 2023

The annual finals didn't disappoint

The Cadet & Junior Nationals, sometimes called the 'C&Js' took place in September 2023 in the familiar location of the David Ross Sports Centre in Nottingham. The cadets competitions was held on Sat 16th September, and the juniors on the 17th, with many of the Saturday competitors also staying for another day's competition and some valuable experience. For the first time, there was also a pilot U14s event alongside the main events. Many congratulations as usual to all who podiumed, participated, volunteered and worked behind the scenes to put on the event.







Junior Women's Sabre: Bethany Brierley (TMFC Fencing), Hui Xin Sezille (Paul Davis Fencing Academy), Melissa Jane (Truro Fencing Club), Keira D-Sallows (Leon Paul Project)



Junior Men's Sabre: Samuel Allen (Truro Fencing Club), Henry Martin (Truro Fencing Club), Ryuki Hiyama (Shakespeare's Swords), Jacob Wahl-Byde (Cardiff Academy of Fencing)



Junior Women's Foil: Zoë Wagstaff (Salle Holyrood), Sophia Tsang (Newham Swords), Isabella Johnson (Fencers Club London), Rachael Adams (Bristol Cavaliers)



Junior Men's Foil: David Sosnov (ZFW Fencing Club), Jaimie Cook (Salle Holyrood), Thomas Walton (Salle Holyrood), Callum Penman (Salle Holyrood)



Junior Women's Epee: Hannah LeBor (Knightsbridge Fencing Club), Gabrielle Holland (Crawley Sword Club), Reya Farlam (Dacorum Modern Pentathlon), Sofia Gerhardt (Chelsea Fencing Club)



Junior Men's Epee: Sameer Sunder-Rajan (Brixton Fencing Club), Cador Beautyman (Knightsbridge Fencing Club), Jem Green (Four of Clubs), Tristan Lumineau (Salle Paul)



Cadet Women's Sabre: Keira D-Sallows (Leon Paul Project), Hui Xin Sezille (Paul Davis Fencing Academy), Ava Davies (Paul Davis Fencing Academy), Maya Sutton (Paul Davis Fencing Academy)



Cadet Men's Sabre: Joshua Bryden (Salle Ossian Fencing Club), Yoji Hiyama (Shakespeare's Swords), Calum Kettles (Salle Ossian Fencing Club), Henry Pick (Shakespeare's Swords)



Cadet Women's Foil: Madeline Beard (Fencers Club London), Victoria Amore (ZFW Fencing Club), Katie Johnson (Fencers Club London), Abigael McVinnie (Salle Holyrood)



Cadet Men's Foil: Finn Keen (Fencers Club London), Mohammed Belbouab (Newham Swords), Ashley Crees (Salle Paul), David Kelly (Salle Holyrood)



Cadet Women's Epee: Sofia Gerhardt (Chelsea Fencing Club), Olivia Eadie (Plymouth Fencing Club), Isabella Cruickshank (Chelsea Fencing Club), Sophia Pickering (Norfolk Fencing Club)



Cadet Men's Epee: Fin Bennet (Abingdon Vale Fencing Club), Alex Nicholas (Chelsea Fencing Club), Tristan Lumineau (Salle Paul), Charlie Lutyens-Humfrey (Knightsbridge Fencing Club)

BRITISH OPEN & GB CUP

Back to Sheffield for two days of incredible competition

The 2023 British Open and GB Cup took place on the first weekend in June. This was a 'new' British championship for all licensed senior members of British Fencing, including those not eligible to compete for GBR and international visitors. There was a wheelchair fencing event on the side which was open (not restricted to only classified athletes).

The GB Cup is an event for beginner and intermediate adult (16+) fencers, with the goal of providing a friendly national competition experience for fencers that are not yet at senior national championship level.

Saturday saw men's foil & sabre, women's epee, and men's and women's wheelchair epee, while Sunday saw women's foil & sabre, men's epee, and men's and women's wheelchair foil & sabre.

Once again, the event returned to the English Institute Of Sport in Sheffield.

As with all BF events, special thanks go to the armourers and volunteers, without whom nothing would be taking place!





Senior Women's Sabre B: Raluca Lazarescu, Thalia Seale, Samira Tasneem, Grace Clarke



Senior Women's Sabre: Maria Chart, Jessica Corby, Jenna Bray, Bea Abram-Moore



Senior Men's Epee B: Will Gem, Benedict Graham (not pictured), Finn Russell, Huw Richards



Senior Women's Foil B: Sophie Schofield, Georgia Gardner, Rachael Lever, Avni Pande



Wheelchair Senior Women's Foil Open: Anri Sakurai, Emily Holder, Abigail Marshall



Senior Women's Foil: Isabella Johnson, Jekaterina Solodkiha, Katie Smith, Chin Man Yang



Senior Men's Epee: Paul Sanchez-Lethem, Matthew Cooper, Joseph Walmsley, Benjamin Andrews



GB Cup Senior Women's Epee: Abby Ragazzon-Smith, Amelia Millward, Amy Silk, Laura Jamieson



GB Cup Senior Men's Sabre: Nico Ignacio, Jordan Daniels, Vlad Cotorogea, Dan Kviat



GB Cup Senior Men's Foil: Elliot Christianson, Joseph Kerr, Timothy Waghorn, Hugh Kocan



Wheelchair Senior Women's Sabre Open: Susanne Seddon-Cowell, Olivia Scott, Nedah Darabi



Wheelchair Senior Men's Sabre Open: James Burke, Leo Pugliese, Charlie Stumpf



Wheelchair Women's Epee Open: Abigail Marshall, Anri Sakurai, Emily Holder



Wheelchair Men's Epee Open: Oliver Lam-Watson, Dimitri Coutya, Shah Rashid



Senior Men's Sabre B: Dylan Galazka, James Martin, Jack Geddes, Benjamin Kirby



Women's Epee B: Darcy Herring Johnson, Kira Grahamslaw, Ingrida Hesketa, Lucinda Naughton



Men's Foil B: Daniel Elliker, Edward Lusted, Ben Carr, Harri Picton Tully



Senior Women's Epee: Georgina Usher, Imogen Bulman, Danielle Lawson, Abagael Black



Senior Men's Sabre: Samuel Allen, Barnaby Halliwell, Rory McLellan, Nicholas Howes



Senior Men's Foil: Alberto Mascioli, Dario Stenbeck-Schiavo, Jake Hurst, William Lonsdale



GB Cup Senior Women's Sabre: Yue Shao, Apryl Brincklow, Evie Shimmin, Yun Shan Hsieh



GB Cup Senior Women's Foil: Tegan McCallum, Francesca Sparrowhawk, Julie Clerc, Lauren Elliott



GB Cup Senior Men's Epee: Kola Ayanwale, Wilf Horton, Jamie Watt, Gareth Morris

TAKING BACK CONTROL

Something that could be holding you back is right in your pocket.

THE BLAME GAME

Smartphones, particularly combined with social media, have been blamed for all kinds of things in the last few years; most notably, an immense and well-documented rise in mental health issues across the globe, especially anxiety. There is an increase in the inability to concentrate or focus on tasks requiring specific attention. The number of children admitted to hospital after accidents in public playgrounds has climbed by about a third in five years, according to NHS data - several experts have suggested that some of the increase may be a result of parents being too distracted by their phones and unable to supervise children properly. Dr Sherylle Calder, a South African vision specialist recruited by the England rugby team, even blames smartphones for a significant decline across all sports in skill and visual awareness over the past six years or so.

Blaming technology for social and health problems is not new. But smartphones in particular are a far more adaptably invasive technology, and one we have grown to rely on, perhaps more than anything in modern history.

Most people reading this will have played some kind of computer game either on their phone, a computer, or a console. The best games usually are great at keeping you hooked in some way and coming back; we can even figure out the cunning hook and marvel at it, even while we are nearly powerless to stop playing. However, we all know it's a game. Social media is more

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A recent study suggested that most of us are now rarely ever more than five feet from our smartphones.

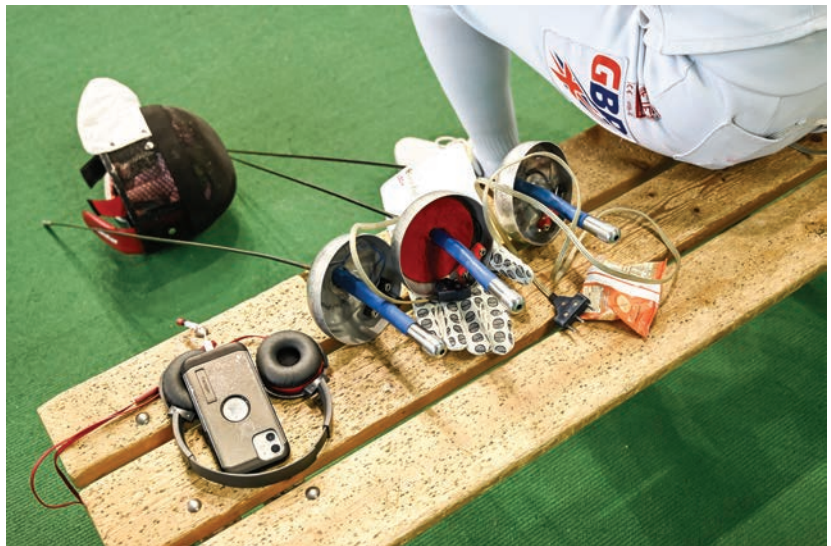
Numerous articles and books are quick to attribute these changes to smartphones, social media, or internet technologies, and in some cases, they are indeed correct. However, even with this awareness, our behaviour often remains largely unchanged. It's challenging to envision a world without smartphones, given their utility and the multitude of distractions they offer. In essence, a significant portion of the global population across various walks of life has developed a co-dependent relationship with internet-enabled devices.

We continue to reap the benefits of the digital revolution initiated by the internet, which has undeniably ushered in remarkable advancements across the globe. Nevertheless, succumbing to varying degrees of smartphone addiction has become alarmingly easy. It is an issue that can affect individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and cognitive abilities, as well as those from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The usage of smartphones has the capacity to stimulate the release of dopamine, a brain chemical that can alter one's mood. Interestingly, as smoking rates have significantly declined in the Western world, leading to improved physical health, a different kind of addiction has emerged unexpectedly, affecting our collective mental well-being. A recent study even indicated that most of us are rarely more than five feet away from our phones.

Have you noticed a potential decrease in your attention span lately? Do you catch yourself tapping on an app or clicking on a link without a clear understanding of why you started? Have you encountered challenges with sleeping, completing a book, or beginning a new one? Have you, recently, picked up your phone - or opened a new browser tab on your computer - intending to do one thing, and without thinking found yourself doing something completely different?

Let's get more sport specific: have you ever been unable to concentrate during a training session? Continually distracted or fidgety while waiting to fight?

Fencing, much like many sports and various skills, revolves around achieving a state of 'flow.' This state of flow is a well-documented phenomenon in scientific literature, where one operates at their highest capacity, time seems to stand still, and you feel completely immersed in an activity. It's often described as being 'in the zone.' You may have noticed a decline in experiencing this state in recent years.



pernicious than that; because it provides what some researchers have called 'infinity pools'; an endless scroll of information and ads that literally will never end. It's harder to perceive it as an addiction. What has been called 'the attention economy' produces constant demands on the brain: often tiny slivers of time, but with each one adding to the cognitive load very slightly. It turns out that the human brain is actually terrible at multi-tasking. Several recent studies have shown show that people who engage in constant multi-tasking - which can includes checking your phone constantly - have essentially rewired their brains, resulting in lower IQ scores, decreased cognitive performance, and perhaps most frightening of all long-term, a lower capacity for emotional empathy. Essentially, our phones have turned us into chronic multitaskers, and it can deeply affected some areas of the brain. Putting in the kind of deep work which requires focused attention becomes exponentially more difficult.

But the technological cat is well out of the bag; smartphones and social media are not going anywhere. Most of us cannot give them up for all manner of reasons - I am sure you can supply your own.

So what can we do?

GETTING FIT

A good analogy is to food and fitness. In the post-war 20th century most people got a huge influx of processed and fast food, with people in the West having abundant calories for the first time. Naturally, there was an enormous increase in obesity, heart disease and diabetes, which became the primary killers in most countries. For a long time there was general advice about food pyramids and exercise, which broadly speaking has been mostly ineffective. People know what they should do, but they don't do it. But if you think of the healthiest and fittest person you know, they will most likely subscribe to a particular philosophy of either eating or exercise. They make consistent decisions about what they will do and what they will consume, and they do this in the pursuit of feeling their best for the greatest amount of time. In the 21st century, many people are embracing consistent health, exercise and diets, and the levels of heart disease and strokes have fallen concurrently.

Similarly, having a consistent philosophy on how you will have technology such

as smartphones in your life is a way out of the forest. The writer Cal Newport recommends assessing all technology: an app, a gadget, or a digital service - with the question: "What's the cost in terms of my time attention required to have this thing in my life, and what's the best way I can use this to support myself?"

For example: Instagram may bring a great deal of value into your life, but if you spend three hours a day on it, that will cost you many other opportunities. Could what you need to accomplish there be done in 10 minutes of an evening, and would that actually get 99% of the value you would get from being on a service? If you could make that a strict rule (and there are technological solutions to enforce something like that), you could be on the way to owning the technology, rather than the technology owning you. If you're reading this, you are a fencer, and you don't need the benefits of fencing restating to you. The sense of flow, calm and satisfaction you get when you are performing really well is irreplaceable by anything else. Sport, and indeed all



activities you do just for the sake of them, for the quality, joy and camaraderie help build resilience in other areas of your life. Papering over boredom with a constant stream of distractions means you will end up avoiding the self-reflection that you need to actually build essential skills - and indeed, a life.

Taking back control

Make it positive

Limiting the use of smartphones - or many other things - quite often will make you feel like you are giving something up that you enjoy, which makes it more likely that you will backslide. Try and reframe decisions you make: you are rebuilding your relationship with technology for positive ends, not just eliminating something.

Awareness

Amid growing concern, the major tech companies started building tools into smartphones that enable users to keep track of their smartphone use. On iPhones, this is called Screen Time, on Android the same tool is called Digital Wellbeing. Becoming aware of just how much you use phones, and how, is the first step towards making changes.

Turning off triggers

Turning off notifications for all apps and preventing the inevitable micro-distraction is invariably the first thing recommended by most writers on the subject. There are also tools built into to modern operating systems that allow you to filter notifications to just messages from your boss or your spouse, for example.

Leave your phone out of your bedroom

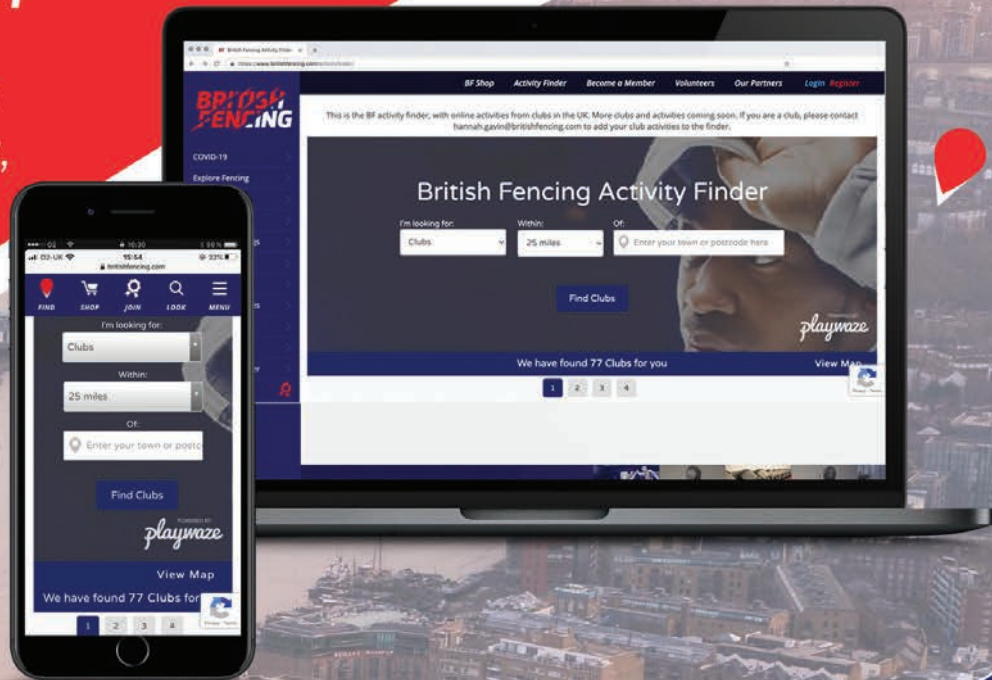
Almost all digital detox advice mentions this as an essential part of taking control of technology, and it is credited with improving sleep.

Using site and app blockers

There is software available for smartphones and computers that can block specific apps or websites for a set period of time. This is an extremely effective tool for changing behaviour - use it.

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exciting **Activity Finder**.



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