

THE SWORD

BRITISH FENCING MAGAZINE
OCTOBER 2022

**Queen
Elizabeth II
1926-2022**

Call It Attitude pp7-8

Paris 2024 Paralympics pp9-10

Meet Eleanor Harvey pp17-19

**BRITISH
FENCING**

The Apex FIE Blade

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Cover photo:

The official Platinum Jubilee portrait of Her Majesty The Queen at Windsor Castle was taken by photographer Mr Ranald Mackechnie.

British Fencing accepts no responsibility for the contents of advertisements and reserves the right to refuse inclusion.

The Sword, a quarterly magazine founded in 1948, is distributed to all individual and club members of British Fencing and its affiliates. It can also be obtained on subscription - UK £20.

Overseas airmail £26 - direct from HQ. Contributions are welcome. Photographs should include the names of those pictured and the photographer.

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Next deadline: 30 October 2022

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



My condolences to our new King, Charles III, his family and all those who feel the loss of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II - a constant who, for many including me, was the only monarch we have known. Her Late Majesty's dedication to duty has quite rightly been marked and celebrated. Taking in Balmoral and Windsor before her final journey through London, passing Buckingham Palace before being laid to rest at St George's chapel in Windsor provided the Queen, her family and all of us with a respectful and fitting period of mourning - marking the significance of the moment in world history in the most British of ways. This issue begins with Malcolm Fare reminding us of the ties between fencing and the Royal Family followed by some of your messages of condolence.

With the greatest respect and inspired by Her Late Majesty's sense of service this issue also includes news and features from all different corners of the sport. Siân

speaks to BF's Head of People and Culture about "Call It Attitude" - a new document outlining the development pathway for fencing in Great Britain. On first reading "Call It Attitude" does more than just setting out the vision for the pathway. It sets out the present by encouraging and supporting us to be inspired and live by good example whilst embracing the fact that everyone's journey is unique and more importantly not linear.

By the time you are reading this, qualification for fencing at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games will have begun. We feature some of GBR's contenders for places at the Games and talk to them about the development of the sport in the country since Piers Gilliver claimed silver at Rio 2016.

I take a look back at some of the special moments from the World Championships in Cairo and look forward to the European Games in Poland which incorporates fencing's European Championships - an Olympic qualifier. With Tokyo 2020 and all that came with it, not so far in the memory, it's hard to think that Paris 2024 is just around the corner. However Olympic qualification begins in April 2023 but the jostling begins now.

Elsewhere, Canadian Eleanor Harvey tells us about her rise to the top echelons of

women's foil - a fascinating journey of ups and downs and meageries. Siân is at it again too! Her interview with Elizabeth Fraser is a must read for anyone interested in what volunteering in sport means. Siân also talks to Lorraine Rose about her own development which has led to becoming an integral part of the travelling British team. We also get Siân's take on a new sports magazine with a difference, Club71.

With news of BF's initiative, We Are Forging Futures and the newly formed Athlete Representative Panel, the magazine is a packed one and we even have room to give Kristjan Archer the "last word".

I want to finish on a personal note. For as long as I can remember, Kim Robinson has been the voice on the end of the phone when calling British Fencing. She is retiring at the end of 2022 after years of dedicated and unwavering service to us all. You have been incredible and I wish you all the very best in your retirement. Whilst I'm sure you'll miss proof-reading this magazine, I'm convinced you'll find something else to fill your time. On reflection, it turns out that one of your many great super-powers has been to avoid being captured in a photograph!

Thank you Kim.

Karim Bashir, Editor

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

karim.bashir@catchsport.com

FENCING'S ROYAL CONNECTION

Our resident historian, Malcolm Fare takes a look at the royal links to the sport of fencing in Great Britain.

The popularity of fencing in Tudor times was largely due to Henry VIII who encouraged displays of swordplay and who had, in 1540, given the London Masters of Defence a monopoly of teaching arms. However, the Monopolies Act of 1624 put an end to the teaching privileges of the Masters of Defence and with the Civil War the guild was disbanded (not to be officially reformed until 1931) and the popularity of fencing declined. Royal interest in fencing only revived in the mid-18th century when the leading fencing master of the day, Domenico Angelo, was appointed to teach the Prince of Wales (later George III) and his brother the Duke of York in 1758. The following year two younger brothers, the Dukes of Gloucester and Cumberland, also started to fence. A special presentation copy of the original drawings for Angelo's book, *L'Ecole des Armes*, published in 1763, was sold at Sotheby's to the American collector, Paul Mellon, and is now in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, USA. The Royal Library at Windsor has a proof set of reduced plates commissioned in 1765 for Diderot's encyclopaedia. Hand-coloured, mounted and bound in red morocco with a cusped yellow leather border, the plates are prefaced by a manuscript dedication by Angelo to the Prince of Wales. Angelo also presented specially bound copies of the book to members of the Royal Family; the Prince of Wales had one bound in red pigskin with extensive gold tooling on the borders, his coat of arms embossed in the centre and his feathers badge in each corner (now in the Royal Collection); others bound in olive morocco with the same gold tooling and the Prince of Wales feathers badge in each corner were given to the Dukes of York, Gloucester and Cumberland and two Princes of Mecklenburg, brothers of Queen Charlotte.

The Prince Regent's active participation in fencing is well documented. A painting in the Royal Collection commissioned by him in 1789 from Charles Jean Robineau shows the Prince attending a match at

Princess Elizabeth with her uncle, Vice-Admiral Earl Granville, President of the AFA, attend a fencing competition as part of the Festival of Britain



Carlton House in 1787 between the two most famous fencers of their time, the enigmatic transvestite Chevalier d'Eon and the French-West Indian Chevalier de Saint-Georges, who was considered to be the finest swordsman in Europe.

In the mid-19th century, a fresh impetus was given to the sport with the arrival of Prince Albert. In 1838 while at Bonn University, he received a certificate for fencing and his fellow student Prince William of Lowenstein later recalled, "In fencing and the practice of the broadsword he was very skilful. In fencing especially he excelled so much that once in a fencing match he carried off the prize from all his competitors." This interest was passed on to his children, the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) and Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, who were members of the London Fencing Club from 1865 until the end of the century. The princes were taught fencing by Pierre Prevost until his death in 1869 and then by Baptiste Bertrand, the first of three generations of fencing masters, who later taught the three daughters of the Prince of Wales, Louise, Victoria and Maud. Their example was

followed by many younger members of the Court circle and made fencing for women fashionable.

In 1903, when a British epee team fenced at an international match in Paris for the first time, Edward VII sent a telegram expressing his interest in the occasion. At the Athens Olympics of 1906 he and Queen Alexandra watched the British epee team beat Germany 9-2 and rumour had it that the king won a substantial bet on the outcome from the King of Greece. After the Games, Edward VII announced his pleasure to become the patron of the Amateur Fencing Association and, in memory of the Tudor Masters of Defence, permitted the Association to adopt the Tudor rose. Ever since, the reigning monarch has been patron of British Fencing. In 1951 as part of the Festival of Britain, Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh attended the gala final of an international foil competition at Chelsea Town Hall.

The last member of the Royal Family known to have tried fencing was Prince William, who took lessons from John Llewellyn while at Ludgrove School in the 1990s.

BOOK OF CONDOLENCE - QUEEN ELIZABETH II, 1926-2022

Following the death of its patron, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, British Fencing opened a book of condolence for members and clubs to share their messages, with the option of sharing to the British Fencing website and The Royal Family.

The Book of Condolence closed on September 20th, 2022. Thank you to all our members and guests for your contributions. Some of the messages are below.

"Welsh Fencing are deeply saddened to hear of the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II and send their heartfelt condolences to the Royal Family at this sad time. Cwsg Mewn Hedd." - Welsh Fencing

"East Midlands fencing region send their thanks and condolences to the family of our Late Great Queen Elizabeth II who was an inspiration to all. She showed what hard work and determination can achieve. How a leader should lead by caring, listening and guiding. Swords should only be used for honour, competition and creating friends." - East Midlands Fencing, East Midlands

"Salisbury Fencing Club wishes to express its profound sorrow at the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Our thoughts are with all who mourn at this time. Thank you, your Majesty, for your service to the nation." - Salisbury Fencing Club, Salisbury

"Thame Duellists Fencing Club offers its condolences and those of its members on the sad occasion of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II" - Thame Duellists Fencing Club, Thame

"To the Royal Family, on behalf of our fencing club's members, nothing I can say will take away the pain you're experiencing.

Just want you to know that we care about you, and share in your sadness. Rest in peace Your Majesty." - Peter Ellinger, Head Coach, Sheffield Hallam Fencing Club, Mercia School, Sheffield

"I'm so sorry to hear of Her Majesty the Queen's passing. She has been an amazing role model her entire life, no one could have given more than she has. Rest well Your Majesty." - Jenna Griffiths, West Hallam, Derbyshire

"On behalf of Newbury Fencing Club, I would like to offer our condolences to the Royal Family at this time. We are very saddened by the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth after such a long, supportive and enduring patronage of British Fencing." - Simon Moore, Chair of Newbury Fencing Club, Whitchurch

"Members of Bristol Fencing Club express their great sadness at the death of Her Majesty The Queen, Patron of British Fencing, and give thanks for her life. They send their condolences to the new King Charles and the Royal Family." - Kristin Payne, Bristol

"On behalf of the members of Wingerworth Fencing club we would like to extend our condolences to the Royal Family. Her Majesty's passing has saddened us all, the whole world will feel her loss. Thank you for a lifetime of dedicated service." - Wingerworth Fencing Club, Derbyshire

"Our Hearts are full of sadness over the loss of our Queen and patron; she touched the lives of all of us. Queen Elizabeth the Second was the finest Monarch this country has ever known. Val Hoodless and Joy Fleetham thank her Majesty for the wonderful day they had at your garden

party in 2010; courtesy of the fencing related letter written by Joy Fleetham. Rest in peace Ma'am." - Valerie Hoodless, on behalf of Bridlington Blades fencing Club

"We are saddened to learn of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. On behalf of Oxford Fencing Club and its members we send our condolences to the royal family. We thank her for her service to the nation during her long reign." - Oxford Fencing Club, Oxford

"Dear Your Majesty, We thank you so much for your decades' long service for this country. We are from Hong Kong, an ex-colony which was built and developed from a small fishing village into the world renowned Pearl of the Orient under your reign. We thank you for giving us a helping hand so we could formally be a part of this great country. Words are not enough to express our deep gratitude. You have done your remarkable service. Goodbye, Ma'am. May you rest in peace, Your Majesty. Yours faithfully, Thomas, Wendy, Andromeda and Theseus" - Thomas Tam, Bristol

"On behalf of the Officers and members of The Epee Club, I would like to offer our condolences to the Royal Family at this time at the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who during her reign was a patron and supporter of Fencing in the UK." - David Partridge

"20 years ago my family affirmed allegiance to her after moving to the UK for work and prosperity. I've grown up under her reign and proudly called you a great neighbour for 5 years after moving to Windsor. Thank you for your years of service. Decades of human history that no one today or in the far future will ever forget." - Brandon Brittain

**BF BOOK OF
CONDOLENCE**

Queen Elizabeth II 1926-2022

THUNDERFLASH DUSTY AND THE MANIFESTO OF ATTITUDE

Siân Hughes Pollitt

I've had that much fencing on - writing about it, parenting around it, volunteering in it - that I feel like Dobby the Fencing House Elf, in need of a bit of freedom.

My hopes lie in talking to Dusty Miller - BF Head of People and Culture. This wizard of interpersonal dynamics will immediately detect my troubles and release me by giving me a (clean, neutral-smelling) fencing sock, or some other item of House Elf emancipation so that I can be on my way.

In fact, it turns out that Dusty has been more mired in fencing than me.

He has been working flat-out on British Fencing's latest opus magnus: 'Call It Attitude' - a multi-page document with supporting content to help to communicate the purpose of the ADP Performance Pathway.

Dusty explains, "Call It Attitude is designed to start raising our consciousness of everything we have learned and we know in fencing. We've learned it informally and through osmosis and reverse-osmosis but then this information tends to then lie hidden in plain sight. Call It Attitude is a way of us reconnecting with the stuff we've learned along the way."

Dusty is pleased with the wide-ranging message crowning the document. Call It Attitude advocates that, in order to perform within the roles that we live out in the fencing community, we should be embracing a central mindset.



Getting Ready for Success @denpollitt



Dusty Miller, Head of People and Culture

"Be it the Chef de Mission, the support staff, the parent, the referee or the armourer, we want to support the fencing athletes and their coaches in having the best possible opportunity to enjoy the processes and to perform," says Dusty. "British Fencing wants everyone to develop the emotional make-up where they relish the sense of fun, togetherness and achievement, welcoming both wins and losses, being comfortable with the uncomfortable so that we can continue to learn and grow as a community."

It's a bottom-to-top, top-to-bottom ask in terms of an attitude. Dusty - the ex-naval officer and submariner that he is - prizes the very basics along with the minutiae of elite behaviours. He has a track record in sublimating himself to shining his shoes, making his bed to perfection and knowing how to contain any manner of malfunction on a submerged warship. He expects that the attitude of a fencer to be the same and that they hold themselves responsible for all their kit and equipment.

"It may seem a small example but it plays pretty big. I'd like to think that if a fencer keeps their weapons and kit immaculate, they will extend that mentality to every aspect of their fencing - like their nutrition, mental preparation and their personal development. As such, the fencer is weaponising their own self to be more effective in their sport."

Dusty's own track record extends to world records - breaking and setting one that

still stands. As a twenty-two-year-old, the young sailor went in for the major championships of the military world by qualifying to compete in the Field Gun Race at The Royal Tournament. Seven years on in 1999, and in front of Princess Anne and a crowd of thousands, Dusty was a member of the 18-man team who won the field gun race by 0.9 of a second. In so doing, the team holds the record time of 2.40:42.

Footage capturing the event is online and the film is a proper belter.

I'm not kidding.

The field gun race is such a great demonstration of the power of the right attitude. It brings to life what attention to detail means, like you cannot have imagined it.

For a start, the team runs at top speed with a gun - not a hand-held one. Their weapon is a great big clunky and chunky cannon kind of affair - with multiple parts and paraphernalia - that they have to assemble and dismantle on repeat while fielding obstacles and zip wires. It is a contest that relies on every conceivable detail - from decision-making, laser focus and silent yet flawless cooperation down to the contestants' shiny shoes and pristine uniform.

If I had been part of the winning team at the Greatest Field Gun Show on Earth, I'd still be flexing it nearly a quarter of a century later. Dusty isn't and he wasn't at the time either.



The Right Equipment @denpollitt



The Pride of GBR @denpollitt

“When we set the world record, there was a sense of euphoria and elation - sure,” says Dusty swiftly. “But straight after we went into a mode of review and reflection and held a meeting because we were curious to know how to improve and do things differently.”

As I watch the field gun footage, Dusty’s words ring in my mind. I see the crew working furiously like machines in a huge orchestral concerto where the symphony is that of sheer labour and application. I can hear him telling me how they all had to be the best version of themselves - a routine habit of excellence learned on the submarines which he affirms “compel you to learn, to know your place; otherwise, they can’t carry you.”

Dusty underlines the importance of how in sport it is crucial to balance the desire to win with the acceptance that every experience is an educational moment in its own right. If we are ever to catastrophise those times then the learning take-out will vanish, and we won’t know how to deal with those kinds of snags in the future.

One such emphasis on learning came in British Fencing’s Learning Week at the end of August where British Fencing concentrated on their bedrocks of communication. “The Week was crucial in bringing to life the notion of Fencer-Centred, Development-Driven and Competition-Supported that is at the heart of the ADP vision for its athletes”, expands Dusty. “We are doing so much as a community but it was clear - for example in the coaching space - that there is an appetite to come together more to dwell upon and discuss what good practice is.”

It’s clear from how Dusty talks that he is trying to instil a culture of a supply of information and reflection to satisfy demand. He talks about the community as “customers” and Learning Week as a “call to action” where BF can help the

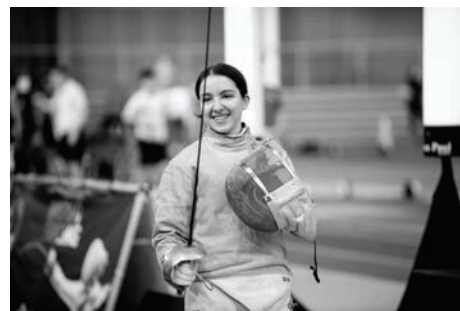
community “flex their curiosity muscle” and understand that learning through experiences and through failure is ok.

Dusty says that planning for Learning Week August 2023 is already underway now that we have learned what it can be and what it can do for us in coming together as a community, thinking and talking as one.

There’s a determination and drive about British fencing on their mission and such themes become quite transferable. Dusty reckons that success, and just the pure will to be better, becomes compulsive; realising how to be successful is the learning that brings satisfaction, driving us to keep coming back to fencing. He asserts “Fencers are fighters who have to out-think, out-fight opponents. They have to step onto the piste and own it.” One such fencer who stepped up, to Dusty’s eye, was Kristjan Archer at the team event in Cairo at the World Championships.

Despite a high hamstring strain, Kristjan came out of the gates fighting. Dusty describes how you could see Kristjan rely on a huge reservoir of approach and attitude that meant he gave his all, and gave his all to great effect. In the play-off for thirteenth place, and in the sixth leg of the team match, Great Britain were trailing to Hungary 30-20. Archer came on determined to do business. He knew his opponent, Andras Nemeth of old. He had scored highly against this opponent before. Kristjan completed the bout 15-4, taking GB to a narrow 35-34 lead. The turnaround was enough for team-mates Marcus Mepstead and James-Andrew Davis to capitalise and lead the team to finish victorious at 45-39.

Back to Call It Attitude and the reader can digest the trajectory of the British Fencing Pathway. It is a document that is intended to breathe, to live and to be re-



Fencer-Centred @denpollitt

iterated when needed. It will be regularly maintained and updated, and Dusty is keen that the community contributes to it.

“It is not my document,” clarifies Dusty. “Call It Attitude belongs to us all. It is about how GB Fencing and the ADP coalesce with everything else. That’s what it’s all about - a sense of togetherness, a sense of connectedness, a sense of attitude. It should mirror who we are.”

Talking to Dusty has certainly quietened the woes of my inner House Elf. This process has in part been gentle; listening to BF’s Head of People and Culture talk me through the acquisition of excellence as a thought-construct has been stimulating and full of reflection.

But there was a moment that made me sit up. As I sit glued to Dusty’s field gun race, I see that to start the event they ignite a thunderflash - a small pyrotechnic canister which flares with a loud bang. It is the field gun racer’s equivalent of “en garde, ready, fence.” It is not lost on me that Call It Attitude is the thunderflash that can certainly catalyse everyone set on performance to understand what is needed to prep, and then to begin, our individual and collective races to excellence - both in our hearts and in our minds.



Signalling The Way @denpollitt

DESTINATION PARIS 2024 PARALYMPICS



'Wheelchair Fencing', as it was known, has recently gone through a transformation including being renamed 'Para Fencing'. The international competition scene continues to grow in line with new athletes taking to the sport in multiple countries.

British Disabled Fencing transferred responsibilities for Para Fencing in the UK to British Fencing back in April. The English Institute of Sport continues to receive the funding for the elite programme but in the meantime the development of the sport will be incorporated into BF's Athlete Development programme.



Lam Watson, Gilliver, Coutya & Waddell
Secure Warsaw Gold (Coutya Facebook)

Undoubtedly a lot of work has gone into 'merging' the two organisations and clearly there's lots more to be done. That said, at The Sword, we can't help but get excited about what this will look like in the future. Para athletes coming into the programme now will be looking beyond Paris 2024 for themselves. Even better for them, and for us, they've got role models in place right now to guide them through their journey.

The Rio 2016 Paralympics marked the beginning of this chapter with Piers Gilliver fighting through to win silver in the Cat A Men's Individual Epee event - Great Britain's first Paralympic fencing medal in 24 years and a launchpad for what was to come four years later.

During the elongated cycle to Tokyo 2020, our para fencers shone. Regular news about international medal-winning performances raised the athletes' profiles amongst the wider community. Names like Collis, Coutya and Gilliver were now sharing

the limelight with Mepstead, Kruse and Sica.

The medal-run at Tokyo 2020 was phenomenal. Gilliver upgraded his Rio Cat A Men's Individual Epee silver to gold, making him Great Britain's first Para Fencing Paralympic Champion since Caz Walton took the Women's Individual Epee (4-6) title at the Seoul Games in 1988. Also, and making his Paralympic mark, Dimitri Coutya claimed two Individual medals in Tokyo as well. Cat B Epee and Foil bronze medals was just the start of Coutya's four-medal haul at the Games.

He then lined up with Gilliver and Ollie Lam-Watson as the three of them went on a double medal-winning run in the team events. It was GBR bronze in the Men's Team Epee event and the trio did one better in the Men's Team Foil competition, claiming silver.

These incredible results were enough to elevate Great Britain to third in the Para Fencing medal table. China were dominant, taking top-spot in the table with twenty medals including eleven golds. That said, this buoyant British team will certainly have at least second in their sights as they begin their Paris 2024 cycle.

Since then the team have competed in Poland (Warsaw World Cup) picking up eight medals from six different fencers, Thailand (Chon Buri World Cup) where nine podium places were gained from five fencers, Brazil (Sao Paulo World Cup) where Gemma Collis, travelling solo picked up a silver medal and Italy (Pisa World Cup) where four medals were collected between three athletes.



Gemma Collis (Photo: Yuka Fujita)

This hard working group of athletes, whilst having a strong bond between them, are welcoming of new faces, integrated training and any opportunity to improve. With Paralympic qualification already underway we spoke to Piers Gilliver about the development of Para Fencing in the UK and the future.

"For me the Rio cycle was all about learning fast, I started the cycle with only distant hopes of qualifying and as the years passed it became more of a reality. By 2015 a full time training program was created. This made such a difference and demanded a big outlook change, going from basic club based training to a training system focused on the complete package and what it takes to be an elite athlete.

Winning silver in Rio was a dream come true but I could see where my flaws lay and I was keen to work on those to go one better in Tokyo. This cycle was all about meticulous learning. Rio had proven again that preparation was key. At a Paralympic or Olympic Games, everyone is physically capable of winning gold but it's the psychology and planning that decides the winner. So this became my key focus for the next five years.

Despite the tough years and difficulties with Covid that followed, our team based in Bath pulled together and always found new and creative ways of improving. Eventually culminating in five medals in Tokyo.



Collis Warsaw Silver (Photo: Yuka Fujita)



Piers Winning Another Gold (FIS)

Now looking ahead to Paris I'm not only keen to pursue my own goals but also to push the sport forward. Our program has come a long way in its professionalism and way of training. So I'm excited to see more people getting into the sport and I'm passionate about helping our athletes to champion the holistic approach, making the transition from great fencers to elite athletes."

One athlete who has clearly grabbed onto this new approach is Gemma Collis who tells us her thoughts leading up to the next Olympiad.

"Heading into the qualification period for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, I'm feeling really positive about the progress I've made since Tokyo and what I can achieve this cycle. I've had easily my best year on the circuit, winning six individual World Cup medals - bringing an end to a long spell without any!

I've still got a long way to go to achieve what I want to achieve, but this year feels like it's been a bit of a breakthrough for me - psychologically as much as anything. I'm finally starting to believe I belong in the latter stages, which I think is half of the battle! I largely put that down to the support of my team (my personal coaches, sparring partners, family and many more,) as well as the vastly increased focus I have been able to give every area of my fencing since moving down south to the Leon Paul Project during the coronavirus pandemic. But it's also a knock on effect of the success of my teammates Piers, Dimitri and Ollie. They've been there and done it, and

are always happy to give others in the team the benefit of their experience if asked.

Beyond my personal ambitions of medalling in Paris, I'm also hugely excited to be back competing on the World stage in the women's team events again. Prior to our fourth place finish at the most recent World Cup in Warsaw we'd not been able to field a women's team at all for ten years due to insufficient numbers - but we're finally back and have set ourselves the goal of qualifying for the 2024 Games. Having a women's team again is not only hugely important in terms of visibility and growing the women's side of the sport which has lagged behind in terms of participation in recent years, but it's also just amazing to be part of a team of hugely supportive, and inspiring women again!"

It's striking that Gemma focuses on fourth in the team event in Warsaw given that she also bagged individual silver medals in the Cat A Women's Sabre and Epee events. In fact the British team claimed eight medals in total in Poland with Coutya, Gilliver, Lam Watson and Waddell joining Collis on the podium, along with Shah Rashid winning his debut World Cup medal - Cat B Sabre bronze.

By the time you are reading this, the team will have competed once more at the World Cup in Pisa. See how they progressed [here](#).

The Road to Paris 2024 has begun and expectations are high for much more British Para Fencing success. To find out more about Paralympic qualification for Paris 2024 [click here](#).



CAIRO IN REPLAY

We note who is making their way through the tableau, we see the results, but what of the ins and outs behind the scenes at a Major Championships? Karim tells it how it was at the Worlds in Cairo.

Après Piste

My hotel housed a number of teams including the French. On day T-2, I noticed that their coaches, across all weapons, were sitting at the pool bar and restaurant in the evening - drinking beer and playing cards. Given the weather and the fact that the hotel was normally for tourists, this did not seem the least bit unusual to me. They were there the next evening too in exactly the same spot and the one after that. In fact they were there every night. By the third evening the bar staff had already prepared their tables before they arrived and marked them as reserved. That's when the picture became a little more clear and the reasons for this seemingly relaxing get-together unveiled themselves.



French Women's Foil & Men's Epee Team World Champions #TeamBizzi

The two obvious ones were a daily debrief and planning for the next day. Like clockwork, the day's off-duty coaches were in place first awaiting the arrival of their colleagues from the venue. No matter the performances during the day and expectations for the next, there was a relaxed atmosphere. In contrast to the highly-competitive nature during the day, there was an air of mutual support between the coaches when needed and celebration of good performances - and those performances were not measured by



Guichot Giving Taster Session to Army when GB Sabre Coach

medal-count but by each individual fencer's development and fencing performance. My French isn't great but discussions not only centred on the athletes but also the referees, where the fencing action was taking place the next day, who was bringing supplies in and at what time etc etc. They were all working together in a joint effort to maximise their own and each other's chances. The level of trust between them and the unity it gave them was clear. It was a safe place where the coaches were able to get and give support.

Perhaps less obvious was that it became the hotel base for the team every evening. If a fencer needed something from their coach, they knew where they would be. I'm pretty sure that this wasn't necessarily announced to the team. It appeared to



Men's Epee & Women's Foil Teams with their Coaches #TeamBizzi

be something the coaches (maybe the senior ones) made a priority early on. They immediately realised that with the pool and gym right next to each other, the outside bar provided a perfect location for them to be visible, if needed. It gave the athletes the freedom to relax if that's what they wanted with the comfort of being able to interact with the coaches as and when. And it worked. Athletes would regularly join the coaches for ten minutes or so and then get on with their evening. It gave the athletes the freedom to "clock in and out" of fencing as needed. Clearly this did a lot to reduce athlete stress.

The last thing that struck me was the fleeting visits from Head of Performance Programme for France, Pierre Guichot. Pierre, the former head of the GB sabre programme, gave the coaches the same freedom they afforded the athletes. It was a master-stroke from the man who



Flying France #TeamBizzi

only recently moved into the role. He was ever-present without being at the base very much. He checked in every day, sitting in for less than an hour. Otherwise, he would only visit to celebrate podium success. This disciplined approach from Pierre was the cherry on the icing on the cake. He managed a relaxed but supportive environment throughout the entire team.

You could measure this approach in medals but that would be missing the point. I think you'd get much better feedback by asking the athletes and coaches if the team environment helped them perform at their best on their competition days. I have no doubt that they would all say, "Cent pourcent!"

Team Bazadze

Finishing fourth at the Olympic Games, for sure, will produce devastating emotions for an athlete. Georgian sabreur Sandro Bazadze lost the play-off match in Tokyo 15-11 to Kim Junghwan and whilst I'm sure crestfallen at the time, Bazadze used his experience to go on to have his best season to date.

He won his first World Cup on home soil in Tbilisi followed by taking the European title later in the year in Antalya. Before I go on, it's worth mentioning a little about the 'Big Man's' background. Born into a fencing family, Sandro "fell in love at first sight" with the sport when watching his father and brother fence in the Georgian National Championships. Starting out with dad as coach, he sacrificed his love of football for a sabre. Fast forward to the Rio cycle and he started to regularly appear at the business end of tournaments, claiming his first World Cup medal - a silver at the Madrid World Cup - in 2016. Striving for more Bazadze made his next big sacrifice, moving from his homeland to permanently work under Christian Bauer in France. Another fast forward to 24 July 2021 and that Olympic bronze-medal play-off, and perhaps it's now easier to see the result, or more specifically his performance, served to spur the man on.

His result at the following Europeans marked his first senior Major Championship title but still anyone around him could see his hunger for more. That desire to keep climbing - the raw determination - continued to grow. I never fail to be curious about who will claim the big medals at the end of the season and Bazadze was on my Men's Sabre watchlist for the



Bazadze World Bronze Medalist #TeamBizzi



Georgian Men's Sabre Team #TeamBizzi

Worlds. Losing to Hungary's triple Olympic Champion Szilagyfi in the semi-finals was not in Bazadze's plan but a place on the podium was. Mission, at least for now, accomplished.

Impressive but still not enough for the Georgian whose attention immediately switched to fencing for his country in the team event with brother Beka and Nikoloz Tcheishvili. I saw them training the day before the event and got a chance to speak with the 'Big Man'. The hunger was still there but now mixed with the responsibility of leadership. By far the most experienced on the team, he took on the responsibility of strategy-maker and team manager. On paper, Georgia were fancied to win but he knew that China was a real threat - even more of an unknown than usual thanks to the travel restrictions that had hindered their season. Even in that knowledge he took a confident team into the match and led from the front. The fact that Georgia lost the match (31-45) is irrelevant. Without Bazadze's effort on piste combined with his man-management off it (both before and during the match) China would have won by a bigger margin. That sense of responsibility to himself as a fencer and to his team as a leader and mentor stood out as one of the moments of the tournament for me.

With all his individual success he could have been excused from being up for the team but Sandro is a man that doesn't like to lose. Despite this, he has been quoted as saying "you have to learn how to lose before you can learn how to win".

He led a team debrief in which he guided them through what could be learned from that experience and they are clearly looking at a shot of qualifying by team for Paris. The 'Big Man' as I have dubbed him

is the epitome of a true fencing contender. Fiercely competitive on the piste with the air of a relaxed gentleman off it; he knows the value of 'après piste'. I even got invited to go skiing in Georgia with him.....staying at Chalet Bazadze!

Manon Brunet - Reasons To Be Cheerful

Handling an injury is never good at the best of times but if you're an Olympic individual bronze and team silver medalist handling a surgery-requiring injury during the World Championships requires great resilience. That's exactly the experience French sabre fencer, Manon Brunet, faced.

Rather than hide away and lick her wounds, so to speak, Brunet did the exact opposite. Not only did she turn up in Cairo, she became an integral part of the French team from the sidelines. Now I say "sidelines" but really she was an ever-present, ever-constant source of positivity. Unable to wield her sabre, instead she took to social media promoting the team daily in a way that I've not seen from an injured athlete. Her Instagram feed became compulsive viewing for fencing fans around the globe, whether they were waving the Tricolour or not.



Manon Brunet #TeamBizzi

Putting this into perspective, Manon would have been a favourite to claim a podium spot in the individual event and leader of the French women's sabre team. With Paris 2024 very much in her mind and given the shortened Olympic cycle, she decided that the only window open for her to sort out her injury fell during a period including the Cairo World Championships - during the peak of her competitive career. Now the French women's sabre team are in

transition but Brunet has to be at the centre of their thinking for their home Olympic Games. She and her team turned an undoubted negative in Cairo to their mutual advantage. Her absence from the starting line-up in Egypt allowed the management team to test less experienced fencers in the hottest of contests. Her presence at the event ensured continuity for her within the team, allowed the other fencers to benefit from her experience and management gain from her feedback whilst she became the team's cheerleader extraordinaire.

It was nothing short of a medal winning performance. Allez Manon!

Surely Wins The Race

The USA's Race Imboden is currently considering his future on the piste. He's far from having decided his next steps but two things are clear - he's enjoying the break from the intense routine involved in top level competitive sport BUT he can't stay away from fencing! He turned up in Antalya for the European Championships to be piste-side with his partner, French women's foilist Ysaora Thibus. A bronze medal was the outcome there so it was no surprise to see Coach Imboden alongside Thibus in Cairo.

I'm not going to pretend that I fully understand the workings of French Team Manager, Pierre Guichot or his team of foil coaches but having a "stranger" in the camp could have caused some consternation. That, however, wasn't the case in Egypt. Whilst Race wasn't part of the evening coaches meeting mentioned earlier, his inclusion in the French set up was focussed on purely on Thibus and he was ever-present piste-side on the run to her first world title ... and wearing a French tracksuit.

Clearly it worked if you simply consider the result but there's so much more to consider. The focus of the French team is



Coach Imboden #TeamBizzi

clear - the biggest medal-haul possible at their home Olympics. Having a tight-knit group will be key to them achieving that goal but given Race's unknown future may have presented something of a spanner in the works. Again, the agility and flexibility of the management team ensured that the situation was handled perfectly. They are maximising their team potential whilst remaining athlete-centred.

On a personal note, the world of foil fencing will be poorer without Race Imboden. If he decides to hang up his weapons (something I'd prefer not to see right now) having him on the circuit as a coach would be a lovely new chapter for him and us fencing fans.

Yannick - The Big Friendly Giant

A world title, four European titles and five Grand Prix wins makes French men's epeeist Yannick Borel a key player on the circuit. For me, on his day Borel is unbeatable and those days seem to be occurring more regularly.



Yannick #TeamBizzi

Having won his fourth European title a few weeks earlier, a top 32 finish would not have been Borel's objective in Cairo. Redemption came in the team event though as he joined forces with Bardenet, Olympic Champion Canone and Fava to claim the world title. Watch out for this team in this cycle. They are top of their game right now and will only improve on route to Paris 2024.

What has struck me most about Borel though is his nature off the piste. Emotions run high at sporting events as we all know. That said, the giant that is Yannick Borel is a calm, friendly and warm individual... when he's not fencing! Speaking to him after the individual, of course he was disappointed but he was already looking forward and he summed his feelings up in three seconds. "It happens. I'm not happy about it but now I have my team." And yes,

it is "his" team and they cannot do without his skill, experience, tactical knowledge and massive personality.

My Replay Reflections

Unsurprisingly, I'm a keen supporter of the British team and continue enjoying watching their steady growth in the performance space. No longer simply the fiefdom of the men's foil team, stand-out showings - if not medals - are popping up in all disciplines. However, rather than look at the athletes, what fascinated me in Cairo was the coaching staff - specifically two "new" faces in that part of the team.

Bringing Richard Kruse into the foil space has been a stroke of genius. The shortcut to immediate trust between him and the fencers is the best of all. Moreover, I can't tell you how many fencers and coaches from other nations quizzed me about it. It will be no surprise to anyone that he's taking the job very seriously. He knows that he can impart a serious amount of knowledge in a short space of time and not just about the stuff that happens between the back lines. The immediate trust doesn't end with the athletes either. Having him in the box at the end of the piste gives the referees both peace of mind and knowledge that decision scrutiny will be at the highest level. That may not affect the big calls that much but if there's a 50/50



Kruse & the GBR Men's Foil Team
#TeamBizzi

decision and Richard is cheering for it, that probably does make a difference.

This model of recently retired athletes stepping into the coaching space is tried and tested. Think Trillini and Italian women's foil, Tarantino and Italian sabre, Golubitsky and foil, Obry-Grummier and

French epee, Anstett and French sabre or Lei and Chinese foil. Time will tell how successful Richard will be but the early signs are great.

Another fencer-turned-coach within the GB set-up was Curtis Miller. He finished fifth at the British Championships in June but didn't qualify to compete at the Worlds. Lockdowns did not help the seasoned international athlete but his industry led him to starting his own clothing brand, **Global Boy Clothing**, during the enforced break. Spotting the opportunity British Fencing offered Curtis the chance to keep his hand in the game by attending the event in Cairo as a mentor and coach.

Now, I always rated Curtis as a fencer - one that hadn't quite achieved his undoubted



Curtis Player-Manager #TeamBizzi

potential - and whilst I knew he coached at his club, I'd never come into direct contact with him piste-side. What a revelation. Curtis is one of his own harshest critics as a fencer but Curtis the Coach is a different beast. Nurturing and confidence-building, his softly spoken approach is perhaps the

touch that any team would need. His eye for the game and knowledge that tactical decisions need to be made quickly in sabre makes for a glowing CV. It would be no surprise to see him in that hot seat again and perhaps for some time to come.

Cairo marked something important for world fencing. It felt like the sport had returned to as near as it will to normal post-Covid. After nearly two years of fencing developing in geographic silos, it's back, kicking and screaming like it always did.



EUROPEAN GAMES

An Opportunity Like No Other

Karim looks towards the end of the season and the Paris 2024 dress rehearsal.

What a season we have ahead of us. Paris 2024 Paralympic qualification is already under way with Olympic qualification beginning in April 2023. The satellite events for seniors are well underway and the World Cup and Grand Prix events start in November. Looking further ahead, for the first time ever Europe's finest fencers will experience a multi-sport event as part of their Olympic qualifying run.

June 2023 will see Poland host the third edition of the **European Games** which this time doubles up as the European Fencing Championships. Host cities, Krakow and Malopolska will be the home for twenty-six sports representing an opportunity like no other for athletes preparing for the next Olympiad.

This event stands out as the only chance to have a "dress-rehearsal" for Paris 2024. It is the only other multi-sport event on the calendar, of course, but it's everything that surrounds the competition that offers athletes, coaches, team managers and support staff the closest thing to an Olympiad.

Speaking about fencing's inclusion, EOC President Spyros Capralos said, "Fencing has appeared at every edition of the modern Olympic Games since Athens 1896 and is therefore an indispensable part of the Olympic Movement. We couldn't be happier to welcome them back to the European Games in 2023, where Poland has a long and storied tradition in the sport, having sent fencers to the Olympic Games since 1924. Kraków-Malopolska 2023 will be the perfect Olympic test for Europe's best fencers just a year out from Paris 2024."

In 2015 Europe became the last of the continents to initiate a multi-sport event in the tradition of an Olympiad following in the footsteps of the Asian Games, Pan American Games, Pacific Games and African Games. Administered by the European Olympic Committee (EOC), announcing the inaugural event three years earlier, the Games first took place in Baku, Azerbaijan.



IGRZYSKA
EUROPEJSKIE
KRAKÓW
MAŁOPOLSKA
2023

I was lucky enough to be there to experience the atmosphere, compare the layout and logistical processes, the venues, accommodation, transport and the coverage. All were set at an impressive level so I knew it was going to be a special event made even more special because I was working in the fencing venue. Whilst not quite as slick as an Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2015 European Games impressed. All the components of an Olympiad were there - accreditation, official hotels, an athletes' village including accommodation and dining, venue transport with athlete-only entry points, training areas with schedules, competition protocol timed by the minute, an officially accredited competition organisation team including referees and a mammoth broadcast, communication and media operation including wall-to-wall online coverage, some TV takers, media and photography positions in every venue and mixed zones for athlete interviews before leaving the field of play.

These events clearly give the zonal host cities the experience needed to prepare to bid to host an Olympiad but they offer so much more to many others. The long term economic value is up for debate but there's no doubt the influx of additional people boosts the local economy for the duration of the event. The "workforce" gains valuable learning opportunities which benefit future Olympiads. The most important factor for me, and my reason for writing this article (!), is the opportunity it offers athletes and teams.

At this point it's worth addressing why fencing was included in the schedule for



Baku 2015 but not for Minsk 2019. Put simply the FIE were able to juggle the calendar in 2015 to accommodate the event but with no World ranking points available some countries didn't send their top teams. Perhaps more importantly, the Games came with a qualification criteria which limited entries. Aware of this the EOC were keen for international federations to incorporate their zonal championships within the European Games. That wasn't possible in 2019 but fencing is back on the schedule for Kraków-Malopolska 2023. Moreover, entries have been increased to ensure that the event can double up as next year's European Fencing Championships.

This news makes the event all the more special because points gained there count towards qualification for Paris 2024. So not only does the Games come with all the valuable learnings from the environment and logistics, it also comes with competitive meaning. This circumstance-cocktail has to be on the radar for any aspiring Olympian.

If Paris 2024 is on your agenda, the primary goal will be securing points as an individual and/or team for qualification. However, you need to be prepared. Clearly, if you have already competed in an Olympic Games or at Baku 2015, you will have



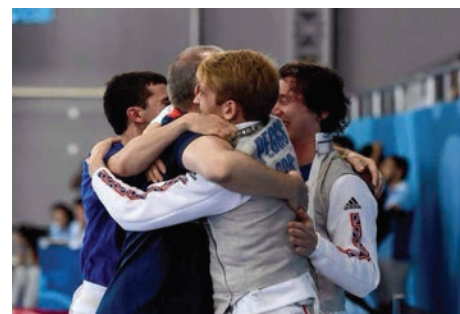
some idea of what to expect. If not, the best preparation for the environment and knowing at least some of what to expect will serve you well in terms of your on-piste performance. Speaking to those who have had that experience – not just athletes but coaches and support staff too – is an obvious route to knowledge. They will be able to guide you on what to expect and how to prepare for mixing with athletes from other sports, some of whom will have high profiles. They will have knowledge of the protocols involved and what to do in the days leading up to your event – whether to go to the opening ceremony, the quickest routes to dining, venue transport, team meeting rooms and even the facilities. It may well be the first time you will encounter a major Championships communications environment with media interest at the highest level that you have ever experienced. Have you planned what you would say whether you win or lose? This learning opportunity cannot be undervalued.

Perhaps Paris 2024 is one cycle too soon but you still have eyes on qualifying for Great Britain for the European Games. The opportunity to learn is perhaps even greater. With LA 2028 or even Brisbane 2032 your target, your experience will be less results-orientated. Of course you will want to perform to your best ability but with reduced expectation comes the ability to soak up the atmosphere and work out what works best for you in that environment.

If, however, Paris 2024 is your target then the 2023 European Games will be critical to qualification. Doubling up as the European Fencing Championships means that the points scored in Poland will count towards your Paris tally both individually and for the team. Moreover, the environment in which they are scored will all but mirror the experience to be had in France should qualification be achieved. The excitement levels just thinking about it, as someone who will not be competing, are through the roof. One can only imagine the anticipation and nervous energy building in those that will be on the piste or by the side of it.

In some respects, and certainly on the field of play, nothing will be different to a “normal” European Championships. Take one step off it and you will find everything is different. The field of play management team will be a mixture of the regular fencing-people along with event protocol representatives, TV floor managers and production staff – all preparing for a show, with you providing the entertainment to what is likely to be the biggest live and TV audience ever experienced outside the “big one”. Unlike a magician, a concert pianist or a circus clown, athletes and coaches have a job to do – scoring ranking points – along with entertaining. Every athlete attending the event will have experience of the competition side of things but few will have experienced everything else that comes with a European Games.

Seize this opportunity. It's gold dust!



GBR Men's Foil Team Baku 2015 Champions

2015 Flashback - GBR Claimed Men's Team Foil Gold

Back in June 2015, fencers and teams were three months into the qualification period for the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games as the first European Games began in Baku, Azerbaijan. Whilst no points were available the content in the Crystal Hall – venue for the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest – the event represented a fantastic opportunity to spend time on task in what effectively was a training event.

With the individual events complete there were top 16 finishes for Great Britain's Corinna Lawrence (WE), Natalia Sheppard (WF) and James Honeybone (MS), top 32 finishes for Aliya Izkowitz (WS) and foilists Richard Kruse, Marcus Mepstead and Alex Tofalides.

The British men's foil team (Kruse, Mepstead, Peggs and Tofalides) had a mammoth task on their hands but handily dispatched Germany 45-26 in the quarterfinals. Surely France would prove too strong in the semis but no. Following an incredibly tight match Great Britain emerged victors (45-41) and were guaranteed a medal. Always formidable, their opponents in the gold medal match were Italy who lined up with Alessio Foconi (the individual champion), Francesco Ingargiola (individual bronze medallist), Lorenzo Nista and Damiano Ingargiola. This was certainly not the Italian A-team, missing the likes of Baldini, Cassara and Avola but they were no mugs. However, the British team, emboldened by their previous victories, went on to win 45-41 and claim the inaugural European Games title. It represented the last time that the British national anthem rang out in a fencing venue at a senior major fencing event.



Baku Fencing Venue (Photo: Fencing Photos)

Rewatch that victory [here](#).

INTRODUCING ELEANOR HARVEY

Who said fencers were different?

Karim talks with World number three women's foilist, Eleanor Harvey from Canada. The honesty with which she spoke has led to a must-read far-reaching story that takes us through her enlightening fencing journey littered with moments of joy and self-doubt, determination and compassion.

I confess to not knowing Eleanor as well as some other top fencers but 90 minutes with her convinced me that I'd been missing out. In the first few minutes of my interview with her I was struck by her describing herself as "not liked" and "awkward". Nothing could be further from the truth. She's not only likeable but couldn't be further from being described as awkward. She speaks her mind with a cut-through delivery that is not only refreshing, it's bold, displays confidence of spirit, compassion and bare, unashamed honesty. Awkward no. Entertainingly quirky, yes, in bucket-loads.

"I've wanted to go to the Olympics since I was five years old. At the time it didn't matter which sport I competed in and I hadn't even heard of fencing! My parents were into running and doing triathlons so I naturally fell into that. By the age of seven I was winning championships in my home city, Hamilton, at 100m, 400m and cross-country and that continued for a few years.

I had the chance to start karate through my dad's work at the local YMCA and immediately loved the combat element, something that running didn't offer. Better still, I was the only girl there and really enjoyed beating all the boys. I didn't have any friends at the club but I didn't care that much. I just wanted to win and started to win some provincial stuff but at the age of ten I discovered karate wasn't in the Olympics. So that was me done with that sport!

One of my family suggested that I watched a video featuring an interview with then two-time Canadian and Ottawa fencing Olympian, and 2005 World Championships bronze medalist, Sherraine Schalm. That was it. I was hooked and loved the idea of fighting with a sword. Despite not being able to start fencing for six months, I began telling everyone that I was a fencer and was going to the Olympics.

I began fencing foil at a mainly sabre club in my hometown and was quickly beating everyone because I was simply trying harder. I was unable to take individual lessons unless I switched to sabre so I quickly started competing in regional competitions and in every age group that I could enter.

Some weekends I'd start the under-12s at 9am, then the under-14s at 12pm and then the under-16s at 3pm or whatever. There aren't many fencers in Canada so it became my training and I wasn't liked on the circuit because I was slight, difficult to hit and left-handed. It didn't bother me though. My mum was there and I'd play with my hedgehog between rounds and....."

Wait a minute! Remember I said "quirky" earlier? It turns out that Eleanor would travel, sometimes for seven hours in one direction, to fencing tournaments with her pet hedgehog! Trust me, I'm not making this



Fencing Fan: Ginger The Hedgehog

up and that wasn't the only animal-related tale she had to tell.

"Yeah. I took my hedgehog. They're a nocturnal animal so mum would hold her in my beanie (hat) whilst I was fencing and in between rounds I'd play with her. Nobody ever knew, of course.

My love for animals began early. At just three years old, driving along the highway, I saw a truck of pigs and asked my mum why they were travelling in the back of a lorry. The answer was enough for me to immediately become a vegetarian! By the age of ten I became vegan and got criticised on the circuit. 'You're not a good fencer. You don't get enough protein. You're just too hard to hit.' But I still didn't care.

I did have cats, dogs and guinea pigs when I was growing up but along with a hedgehog I also became a breeder of Sugar Gliders. They're a kind of marsupial and I had a pair. Before we could get the female "fixed" they started breeding so I just went with it. I was selling the off-spring for 200 bucks a pop which was handy money! I wouldn't recommend them as pets though. They've got really long claws and zero bladder control. They're fine if you want your place to smell like....."

Aged twelve, Eleanor moved clubs and began learning the finer art of fencing



Eleanor with Mum, Lise



Eleanor (aged 16) with Orange Boy

under Alice Lu – a member of the Chinese women’s foil team in the 1980s. Her eyes widened as she told me how her love for and understanding of fencing grew immeasurably under Lu’s guidance. Moreover, she “made” Josh McGuire go to her school in her breaks to give her lessons. At the time McGuire had competed in the Athens 2004 Olympics and he went on to compete four years later at Beijing 2008.

“He had no choice. He was my idol. Not only was he a Canadian Olympic fencer, he was from my hometown. I don’t think he was coaching anyone else at the time but I had to have him.

By that point I was travelling from Hamilton to Ottawa or Montreal most weekends to compete in the NACs (North American Cups). By high school age I was commuting 90 minutes each way to train in Toronto, doing my homework in the back of the car. I was taking my education as seriously as my fencing. I’m not sure where that drive came from. My parents were proud of me as long as I did my best. If I got a B+ they’d say ‘well done’ but I was like ‘no, that’s garbage’.”

The pattern of determination and the self-generated drive to achieve was clear. It may not be unique but Eleanor is. She qualified for the Canadian Cadet and Junior team at the age of 15, competing at her first World Championships in Baku in 2010, going on to top the rankings on the European Cadet Circuit and winning NACs but she “wasn’t ready for the World Championships” until her penultimate year as a Junior.

“I was used to competing in single weapon events, even the big ones but the World Championships are different. There are more people, more distractions. That first

World silver was tough too. I beat Meinville (FRA), Shaito (LEB) and reigning Champion Mancini (ITA).

By then I was studying at Ohio State University switching from Film Studies to Psychology and Gender Studies so I could fit in my training and competition schedule. The experience I had built up through the NACs had set me up for this stage of my development. They’re really hard and previously I was intimidated by fencers from the USA. Not any more. I was ready for the next Junior Worlds and I went in believing I would win. Making it all the way through to the finals where I faced American Sara Taffel. It’s a loss I haven’t got over until this day.

Moving from Juniors to Seniors was perhaps a little different for me. I come from a small fencing nation which has its positives and negatives. I was doing Senior World Cups from the age of 16 and, um, they didn’t start well. Getting out of the poules was an achievement for me and it took me at least two years to make the 64. By the time I became a fully fledged Senior, I already had bags of experience. But I was way too focussed on myself, my nerves, my tension. It hadn’t dawned on me that everyone else had those same doubts.

Once that clicked in me I began thinking about how to agitate my opponents and develop my own game based on the responses I got. I got a random 32 somewhere [at the Algiers World Cup 2015] before making the top 8 at the Gdansk World Cup in 2016, on my 21st birthday! I beat Golubitsky, Thibus and Volpi on the way and that’s when I realised that I could make the Rio 2016 Olympics. That’s when the belief started. Previously, people had underestimated me but now I had a target



Determined Eleanor #TeamBizzi



Alex Martin #TeamBizzi

on my back. People began respecting my fencing and would take their time against me. That was a bit of a problem because to be honest I didn’t have a decent attack. I had a couple of attacks but they were predictable. To be honest I’ve qualified for two Olympics without having a world class attack!”

Talk about honesty! The commentator in me has always held back from saying a fencer can only counter-attack. Now I had one in front of me, telling me that was almost her entire game! The rest of that conversation is not for this magazine! For someone who thinks they’ve got a fairly good handle on the top end of the sport, what came next was a sobering revelation and one that Eleanor was not only happy to share with me, but with everyone.

“After graduating I moved back home to Hamilton, ranked seventh in the World, and was able to train harder than ever before both at home and in Toronto. But my ranking plummeted along with mental health. I left training every night crying asking myself why the sport I loved so much, my obsession, was causing me so much pain. I was pretty depressed. To be honest, I was done with fencing. I wanted to go to the Tokyo Olympics and then quit. Then bang. Everything stopped – the Olympics were postponed and I was pretty p****ed off. If I wanted to go I had to carry on for an extra year.

With fencing limited in my home town, I decided to go to training camps in a bubble with my friend and teammate Kelleigh Ryan in Calgary. The problem was I was still suffering and started having panic attacks during training. Kelleigh’s husband, Alex

Martin was the coach and he reached out to me, knowing that I loved the sport, to find out why I was in trouble. We talked and he got me. We just clicked and I began taking lessons from Alex.

Immediately my fencing changed and changed for the better. I started to feel better about the thing I was obsessed with. Maybe obsession is a bad thing but I don't care. I was loving fencing again. I moved to Calgary almost exactly a year ago to the day and I'm absolutely loving it. I've had my best season ever. I'm ranked third in the World, winning two World Cup and one Grand Prix medal and I won the Pan-American Championships.

I've started coaching too in the new Canadian set-up which has given our younger fencers a much greater opportunity to spend time with us seniors. I'm slightly injured at the moment - but don't worry I'll be at the first World Cup of the season firing on all cylinders. It does mean though that I can travel to coach some of our younger fencers at the next NAC - one that I'd normally be competing in. We're still a small fencing nation and I want to give back to these young fencers and help them have the healthiest relationship with their obsession fencing, but also to help them be wholesome rounded people using fencing as their experience platform."

I can't tell you what a pleasure it was to spend this time with Eleanor. I've watched her compete over many years. I called that Taffel fight at the Junior Worlds in Tashkent....although I haven't brought myself to go back and watch it. Not



They Just Click (Alex and Eleanor)
#TeamBizzi

because of her fencing I might add. She's an incredibly likeable person, passionate about her sport, had the troubles I'm sure most of us have faced in some way shape or form in our lives and is completely upfront about everything. Quirky is great and I hope I've just started a new friendship!

I asked her about her funding and she said that she gets great support from Canada Sport (a publicly funded body) and CanFund (a non-governmental trust) but also a private sponsor. My curiosity got the better of me and...

"There's this Canadian Chess Master, Edward Porper who wanted to give back to sport. He went to the Canadian Olympic Committee and then subsequently Canadian Fencing looking for an athlete who had achieved something but could really benefit from some financial support to achieve more. After being put forward by my federation Edward is now my personal sponsor and I can't tell you how much that has helped. He has a belief that every Canadian athlete should be doing the same thing. It's great."

We talked about so much more including her team - the reigning PanAmerican Champions and LennyGarbs, the eco-friendly fashion brand that she started during the Covid restriction. Sadly, I've reached my word count though.

Eleanor is the full package. She exudes determination, drive and a high-achieving attitude packaged in a delightfully entertaining manner full of compassion and inspiration.

Watch out everyone! Two Olympics down and now she heads into qualification for Paris with an attack (or two). Coach Alex clearly has her back and Edward is also in her corner. I can't wait to get to know her better off the piste and see what she's going to bring to it.



Eleanor Tops The PanAmerican Women's Foil Podium #TeamBizzi



Team Canada Women's Foil PanAmerican Champions #TeamBizzi

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THE NOT SO LITTLE WOMAN

BF Workforce Development Officer, Lorraine Rose talks to Siân about completing UK Sport's Women in Leadership Programme and quite a lot else besides ...

Photography by Den Pollitt

Lorraine, on the video line from her home in Fife, has unwittingly given me my new favourite game. But more on that later.



Lorraine Rose

She has just landed home after the Commonwealths, before which she had just landed back from her role as Team Manager at the Senior World Championships in Cairo, just before which she had been at Senior Euros in Antalya in the same capacity, before which she'd been in Dubai and before that in Novi Sad, Serbia for the Junior and Cadet World's and Euros - again in the same capacity. All the while she has also been doing her day job as well as completing a Women in Leadership course with UK Sport.

I say 'the same capacity'. But Lorraine did have to step into the high-performance coaching space in Antalya when one of the coaches came down with Covid. She took the helm in the box because she had to, making her draw on insights gleaned from her Women in Leadership training programme which had encouraged her to push her own boundaries.

"At Euros, I was coaching Women's and Men's Team Epee. I asked them what they wanted of me and what should the support I am giving them look like. I asked eight different athletes and got eight different responses. I also had to consider how I

would let those athletes be themselves. Thankfully they were great to work with and so accepting of me."

I say that if it were me, I'd be so daunted that I'd give up before I'd even tried. So, what's her secret?

"This" says Lorraine as her face breaks into her characteristically broad, beaming smile.

She looks squarely into her video camera, as she pops on her spongey, red clown nose.

I'd been with Lorraine in May when she went down to Cheltenham to do a series of workshops on how coaches could approach getting performances from themselves so as to better inform them on how to elicit performances from their athletes.

One workshop focused on clowning. It is a well-established tool to gently push participants out of their comfort zone and encourage them to think differently. It had its desired effect on Lorraine. "Every morning on a trip, I shower, do my hair and my face and then I put my clown nose on and have a little chat with myself in the mirror about what we're going to do that day. Then I take the nose off and get to work."

I just love this. It brings to mind Beyoncé singing: "If I were a boy, even just for a day, I'd roll outta bed in the mornin', And throw on what I wanted then go...". But Lorraine shakes up the discourse quite a bit further - she's happy to embrace her familiar routines while chucking in a red hooter so that she can make a pact with herself on how she is going to assert herself for her remaining waking hours.

Back to Cheltenham. I remember that Lorraine threw herself heart and soul into the activities while - I also recall - always looking out for me as a bit of an odd-bod-

out on the day - making sure I was fed, watered and not ignored.

Lorraine doesn't beat around the bush about her caring nature. She knows it and she owns it. She met her husband Ken over twenty years ago while they were both working as research biologists at Edinburgh University and she spotted him - already a fencer - lunging and fleching with a plastic pipette in the corridors.

It was a 'never-look-back' moment. They married and soon set up West Fife Fencing Club where they both coached. "We really wanted children but that didn't happen for us," says Lorraine briskly. "So, I am very aware that looking after other people's children is a true privilege."



Talking with the Referee in Antalya

After about ten years in various fencing team manager-style roles on various trips for various fencing bodies, Lorraine left her job at the Edinburgh University Labs in December 2021, and started in her role with British Fencing in March 2022. She was nominated and then accepted for UK Sport's Female Coaches Leadership Programme in January of this year.

The scheme is meant to double female representation in the Paralympic and Olympic high-performance space by Paris 2024. At present, approximately only 10% of coaching positions within the high-performance community are held by



Team Cheer-Leader

women. The leadership programme is part of UK Sport's long-term plan to address the current under-representation at all levels of the talent pathway and nudge that percentage up to 25% by the time Paris is underway.

Lorraine was thrilled to be picked, giving the course her full gusto. She proudly shows me her certificate for having completed the training and gives me an unexpected take-out on what she got from it.

"Permission" she announces. "The main benefit was that I allowed myself to ask where normally I wouldn't have found my voice to speak up. For me, it was about the confidence to be myself, and to go ahead and do something despite any fears I might have. The leadership course opened up the confidence which was always there but that I didn't want to show in case people might think I was bragging."

Lorraine equally touches upon another learning insight: that sometimes it's a good thing to acknowledge a lack of confidence and turn that apparent negative into a positive. Her confession that "I am not very good at saying 'no'" seems to me to explain her habit of accepting the task of all the major trips and championships she has done this year.

Moreover, her inability to refuse is indeed a positive and brings vast rewards, according to Lorraine. The trips build upon her day-to-day work in developing people within our entire community - referees, armourers, volunteers and the like. She doesn't just focus on the championship athletes but also on the support staff. She says, "I do get such a lot from these events in terms of building relationships, a sense of personal satisfaction and a whole skillset derived from being with people and all the admin and organisational aspects I need to tackle."

Lorraine draws breath. She pauses before affirming, "But mostly I get enjoyment from my work. I feel a real, deep joy in helping others to achieve."

It certainly is a sentiment felt by Tori Hide, a member of the Women's Epee Team at the Euros who was on the receiving-end of what Lorraine had to offer in Turkey.

"Lorraine was such a good motivator while out in Antalya and she was aware of all our individual differences. This was important as all of us have different ways of communicating as well as different fencing styles. Throughout the championships she showed a clear commitment to looking after us. She just had our best interests at heart and was an all-round positive support system. She was great."



Supportive Presence

Lorraine is, by her own admission, "24/7 on trips. Vigilant. Trying to spot where extra support is needed and can be given. I'm learning constantly. After one athlete needed a hot water bottle at the Euros to calm her period cramps, a hot water bottle has now become a staple feature of my Team Manager pack."

What we may have dismissed even just months ago, we do not today. The importance of this narrative in women's sport has been recently highlighted by the likes of Dina Asher Smith and Eilish McColgan. Already, Lorraine was quietly onto it.

I ask Lorraine what she does to relax. She gardens. She walks. And she sews. I could almost second-guess that she did. In everything she recounts to me, it is as though Lorraine is constantly stitching together a gigantic, metaphorical life quilt. She is almost 'Little Woman'-like in her capacity to tackle all aspects of existence and bear them with a smile, a great degree of enthusiasm and passion, as well as a clear capacity not to sweat over the small stuff.



Downtime with Steve Kemp

But to liken her to the heroines of Louisa May Alcott's Great American Novel just doesn't do her justice ... She is so much more in such a very modern, Lorraine-like way ...

Anyhow, changing the subject, what of my new favourite game?

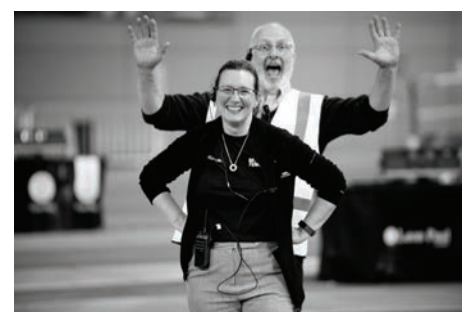
Let's call it: "Pick a Portmanteau".

For those still in the dark, a portmanteau combines both the sounds and meanings of two different words - like 'brunch' which is blended from 'breakfast' and 'lunch' which then denotes a later morning meal.

The name 'Lorraine' comes from the Germanic 'Lothar' meaning 'famous army' and 'Rose' - as the Bard assured us - is the most exquisite of flowers.

So, let me give you 'Lorrose' - the portmanteau term evoking the not-so-little woman who can motivate a legion of ten thousand fencing folk for the fun and for the fight.

I think that does it.



With husband Ken

CLUB71 - GENERATION NEXT

Siân looks at a watershed development in sports printed media and a young magazine with an old soul. (Photos: Amy Maidment)



If you don't wish to directly show gratitude to Victoria McIntyre and her colleagues for giving us the new magazine Club71, then please thank them silently from saving you all from a thirty-eight-page treatise - written by me - on: 'The Defunct Win-Lose Binary of Modern-Day Sporting Narratives'.

Wot?

I feel that society in 2022 is still heavily dependent on who won what - especially in a sporting context. Social media crows and echoes with such stuff. So much does it irritate me that I had been trying to write a paper on this subject. But I can happily discard the unfinished - ahem, unreadable - manuscript and give way to a better, sassier, funkier and cooler kind of genius.

So it's time for me to introduce Club71. In fact, let me let them introduce themselves:

"We are a community. A collection of stories for those long-lost in the shadows.

We shine a light on stories that deserve exposure. On tales of triumph and defiance, of resilience, of strength.

Time to focus on more than sporting talent.

We are more than our gender, our ethnicity, our disability, our religion, our sexuality.

All people, all sports. Time to create a world where everyone has a platform to tell their story.

We are Club71."

That is the best thing I never wrote.

It makes clear that Club71 is not just a magazine; it is also a concept. Talking to one of its founders, Victoria McIntyre and the idea was to launch a publication that set forth some of the fantastic stories that exist within sport. Victoria had worked as a physiotherapist in pro-football, and says she knew that there was, "So much more to athletes, organisations and brands," and that she and her collaborators wanted to provide a platform to show a different and deeper side of sport and its people.

The initial idea had come about in October 2021 following conversations between Victoria and co-founders Amy Maidment and Chris Payne. Victoria handed in her notice, and by January 2022 had set about constructing a framework for Club71. The first shoot for the magazine was on 6 March and a four-week Crowdfunding effort was orchestrated in May. On 30 June, the first copies were in the post and on their way to the readership.

The first issue of Club71 features thirteen individuals. With such stories come spoilers and I will not do that to you. I will say that you'll recognise Lioness, Leah Williamson, and you will meet the likes of Lloyd, Serena, Naomi, Craig and Giulia - amongst a few more - who tell beautiful, eye-opening, wonderful stories that you can savour - all from the realm of being in some way an outsider.

The name Club71 itself relates to 1971 - the year that the ban on women's football in Football Association clubs was lifted. The prohibition had been in place for fifty years, having been introduced by the FA's Consultative Committee just over one hundred years ago. Their ruling had stated that, after having received complaints made as to football being played by women, they "felt impelled to express the strong opinion that the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and should not be encouraged".

The FA's stance in 1921 is depressing but what is so special about Club71 is that it takes that mentality and doesn't let itself

be bogged down by any such vibe. You only have to sneak onto Club71's Instagram page or its LinkedIn account to see that it is never ruled by despair. Rather it flips and reverses, it dances and it laughs. It loves and relishes. The editorial team ask and keep on asking - always through some kind of lens related to sport and the cultures and commerce surrounding sport, trained on what adds joie de vivre to our very existence.

Footballer Leah Williamson responds to this journalistic environment with grace and intelligence. When Club71 asks this England captain what is the key to great team work, I am sitting up to take note. Her answer is 'accountability', derived from the forensics of experience. She is equally straightforward and eloquent about prevailing attitudes and life. Again, Leah's observations are derived from the forensics of simply being human.

If I were allowed to use only one word for Club71, it would unequivocally be 'soul'. It reminds me of the somewhat undefinable essence of what it is to be an Earthling. In terms of its look, Club71 programmes my mental microwave to burn through desaturated yet groovy memories of the times of Wigan Pier and lets them meet an up-to-the-minute, glossy, ultra-hip media space.

Interestingly, in their interviews with those featured, Club71 consistently poses the question, "What makes your soul shine".



Leah Williamson



Lloyd Kelly

Ask an exquisite question and get exquisite answers. Amputee surfer Zoe Smith is playful. Her soul shines with, "My dogs, surfing, nice food and a banging box set!" Karenjeet Kaur Bains, the Sikh powerlifter who represents Great Britain, melodiously echoes, "That's a really good question. Oh, I love that question. Umm I guess what makes my soul shine in a sense is being able to inspire people. I think that's when I really feel like I'm glowing. It's giving back, inspiring, especially the next generation."

Victoria says if she were allowed to use only one word to describe Club71, it would be 'authentic'. "Three of the main things we want to achieve with the magazine is a sense of community - where we very much want to make Club71 something that people want to engage with. We want it to be thought-provoking and for readers to come away feeling as though they wish to level themselves up. In turn our readers wish to make the world more inclusive and that inspires both personal development and social change."

This is certainly quite unique in the world in general, never mind in publishing. When initially researching their approach, Victoria and her Club71 colleagues spent a fortune on other sports magazines and found Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to be a bolt on or a tick-box. "We at Club 71," she says, "wanted to be redefining the mainstream."

The level of detail that Club71 applies to its editorial approach in terms of a genuine, heartfelt and authentic sense of EDI is breath-taking.

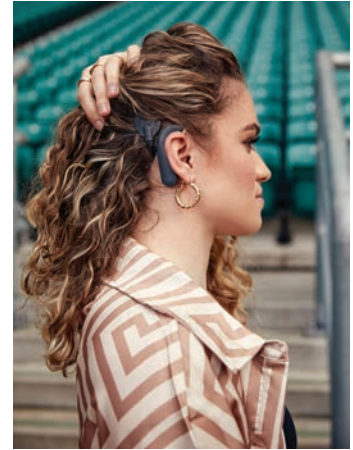
"We adopt a collaborative process," elucidates Victoria. "We encourage every one of our contributors to bring with them a friend, family member or an agent; someone who can put an independent set of eyes on the interviewing. We give

them a range of options in how they can be photographed and featured - like the physical setting or the range of outfits. They choose which option they wish to go with. Then in terms of all the content, the contributors can proof and check everything; we don't make those decisions on behalf of people. Our job is not clickbait." Victoria finishes by describing the Club71 methodology with mentioning how they offer an aftercare service with experienced sports psychologist Kate Green, who offers to debrief contributors and offer appropriate after-care after their particular magazine feature had been completed, should they like to access this.

The photograph at the start of the feature on Rugby 7s' Jodie Ounsley is one of the most eye-catching I have ever seen. The rugby player, who was born deaf, holds back her perfectly-styled tresses, sweeping over a beautifully-blushed cheek to reveal the 'hardware' of her cochlear implant. It was Jodie's choice to pose for such a photo, as well as her decision to use it as the main image for her feature - and it was a great one.

The second issue of Club71 is already well underway. Victoria starts to whet my appetite, telling me that she is off to do a shoot with Alice Dearing. Alice is only the second black swimmer to represent GB and the first at Olympic level. Even today, perpetual myths surrounding ethnicity and swimming that exist could have almost come out of the Dark Ages. But in true Club71 style, there will be twists and turns that will intrigue and delight. That issue will be available in January 2023.

The first issue can be purchased and ordered here www.club71.co.uk/shop. It



Jodie Ounsley

retails at £10 plus postage and packaging, with worldwide delivery options available.

My copy of the magazine is already well-loved - not just by me but also by my children and husband who have keenly thumbed their way through the pages. It has been both my inspiration and my relaxation - start to finish.

The magazine ends by talking with Steph Essex, a one-time architectural engineering academic turned entrepreneur who heads the netball brand, Flyhawk. A quote of Steph's is isolated in bold quotes by a portrait of her. She says, "The key is to be specific and create a community around your niche. You can't be all things to all people."

You might not be able to be all things to all people, but what you are to some is what truly matters. That thought is what lives, breathes and repeats at the heart of Club71.



Naomi Dattani



Karenjeet Kaur Bains

A SPORTING LIFE

FIE Master List, Friendships and Feeling the Craft ... Adrian Speakman talks about his fencing world through a referee's eyes

I guess I have a good sense of humour. What makes me laugh? Cheesy jokes make me smile and fun things. It's like the old saying - it's better to laugh than cry. Certainly, as a referee, I find it's always better to find humour in any situation. Otherwise, some competitions could prove very long and painful. If we can enjoy it, then let's enjoy it.

I'm thirty-six and I grew up in Blackpool - there's the laugh or cry part! I started fencing because my old chemistry teacher was Mavis Thornton, and in my first year of secondary school, she started a fencing club - with only eight of us - in a little dance studio. I started fencing foil when I was growing up, the scoring boxes were on the old contact timings. Refereeing left a lot to be desired. I remember competing at the Cadet and Junior Nationals where I advanced along the piste, step-lunged and hit my opponent. They then flicked me on the back and they got hit. For the next hit, the same happened. So then I walked down the piste with my arm tucked behind my shoulder, my opponent hit me full in the chest and I flicked him to back and I got the hit. The rules at the time allowed it and I thought - no, I can't be doing with that.

But I stayed in the sport because I love fencing. I suppose the biggest factor in my starting to referee was that as I moved into fencing epee and my competition day would usually be on the Sunday. I'd go to referee at the competition on the Saturday morning and normally manage to either cover my own entry fee or a



Adrian Speakman ©denpollitt

hotel room for the night. It became more financially manageable. At Uni, I got asked if I wanted to go abroad to referee cadets and I did. I enjoyed it. While also at university, I tore my shoulder and that ended my fencing.

I was then invited to travel with the U17 Cadet Epee Squad. In 2009, I got my FIE Licence and began travelling to lots of places. In terms of the competitions I do, I am on the FIE Master List but if it is, say, for a Junior World Cup then the country sending the squad selects the referee. For the European Championships, British Fencing proposes referees to the European Fencing Confederation and for Senior World Cups, the FIE selects.

In summer 2022, I refereed at both the Euros and Worlds. In Antalya, it was great to see old friends like Ambre Civiero. Ambre is one of my best friends. When you have been seeing each other ten or twelve times a year, you do create good friendships.

As referees, we tend not to talk about fencing. After the competition, we go back to the hotel and relax. We would probably watch the finals on the livestream - yes, we are that sad! - but quickly adjust to the evening afterwards. We are not all consumed by fencing.

In Antalya we talked about sightseeing and visiting downtown Antalya. In general on trips, we talk about football. I have a good friend who is a Juventus supporter so I tend to rib him about that. We chat about rugby, sport, about being British ... I get mocked for Brexit but it's all good-natured. It's just like being down the pub.

At the competition in Antalya, I was struck by how some fencers were motivated by fair play and honesty if they had hit the floor with their weapon or something. Also, I saw how nervous a lot of fencers seemed. I guess it's because, so soon after lockdowns, we are starting to gear up to the Olympics again. It's been a long time since we have had a major championship. I



Adrian (centre) at his school's fencing club

noticed that the women's epeeists seemed to be very good-natured and I think it might have been that because they had had so many events cancelled on them; everyone was happy to be in the room again.

As you'd expect from the World Championships in Cairo, it was a lot more intense. However, it certainly felt nice to be back and to have a bit more of a crowd. The Cadet and Junior Worlds were also in Cairo last year. After a fencer had lost a fight, they had to leave the venue. Consequently, in terms of atmosphere, the finals were dead, absolutely dead. This year there were some great moments such as when Aron Szilaygi finally won his world title and the response when the French won both the team and individual - the joy on their faces was memorable.

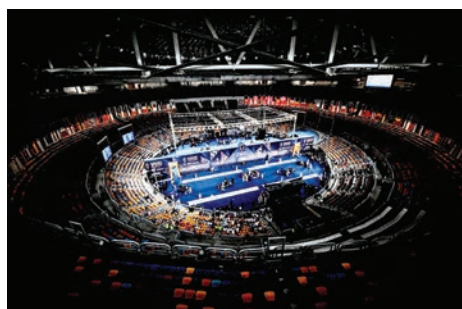
In terms of going to these competitions as a referee, the best way I can describe it is that when you sit your GCSEs or A Levels or university Finals, you are terrified. Then when you're doing your finals, how easy do the GCSEs seem? The first time for everything is nerve-wracking. As you move up through the levels in refereeing, there's more and more pressure, more and more TV cameras. The field of play is roped off, there are coloured pistes, the entire stadium can be decked out. All I can say though is that when you get to the finals and spend those final ten minutes in the call room, you all share a nervousness and a bond that helps forge a relationship between people.

In a sense, you get to see athletes from several angles. You see them when they're fencing and when they're preparing but you also get to see them at the airport or at the hotel. Sometimes you can even end up sharing transport with them for hours on end. You see them and get more context on their life story. Athletes are really nice people off the piste; coaches are the same. In the competition venue, they can seem angry or excited. But they're doing their job which is helping their fencer get hits. Just that they get annoyed at a mistake from a referee does not make them angry people who hate the ref. In Cairo, there was a fencer notorious for being difficult with referees. But this is an athlete who has to do everything for his fans and sponsors. Then you see this guy who presents as arrogant on piste but behind the scenes he is so nervous and timid. Seeing those moments encourages you not to judge. You're forever learning in refereeing.

In approaching my role, it comes down to my own integrity. I will never deliberately make a mistake. Of course, it happens. We make mistakes. Everyone does. But I set out to do a perfect job. If I make a mistake when it has not disadvantaged the fencer, I feel bad because I have not done a perfect job. I know that there's a mistake in there.

I love watching fencing and I love watching good fencing. In a way, I want to see a fencer who has lost in despair. Fencing is a very passionate sport and I want to see that passion. By that, I don't mean I want to see the fencer who is losing and getting all churlish, snappy or whiney because that's poor manners and disrespectful. But to have a tear in your eye - because you care - that is passion. I think we all want to see that. You want to see the drive to win.

Watching the fencers all the time and I definitely get to see the attitude in them and how that is going to affect their future career. You can see people who are going to stop because they don't have the drive



Cairo Venue #TeamBizzi



With Fellow Referee Ambre Civiero
@denpollitt

or desire. Often you see that kind of fencer blaming the referee or the coach. Better for them to try and use self-reflection. Fencing is a fight and you've got to look at what you can do better. People who have a penchant for blame never look at themselves. They never improve.

The same kind of drive applies to referees. When I am refereeing well, I actually feel fencing rather than just watching it. When I am refereeing an intense final and I am refereeing it well, I just see everything. It's a very direct experience filled with adrenaline. Before one of my first finals, I was incredibly nervous and I was told that being nervous is good because if you're not nervous then you don't care - so why are you there?

It's great to see some people who you have known for their whole fencing career. I've had my Licence for thirteen years so I've seen some fencers who are now seniors come through cadets and juniors. Watching those careers progress is special.

There can also be such a massive fall-off between cadet and junior and then senior. That's a product of lifestyle - in cadets, everything is organised and prescribed for you. In juniors, you can fence alongside uni. When it gets to over-20s though, then you're paying your own bills and fencing becomes very intensive - often with the fencer competing every other weekend. If you're looking to get a job and have a family, that can be tough to achieve all at once. Seniors is a far bigger age group. Juniors and cadets are for those born in a three-year window. By the time Valentina Vezzali became World Champion at the age of 40, she was in the same age group as fencers who hadn't even been born when she had been competing as a junior.

In terms of my own learning experiences, I would say that one of biggest eye-openers is into the behaviour and attitudes of

different cultures and backgrounds. There are so many little things as to how one country will react to any one situation as well as towards one another. Even the way they say 'thank you' can have different meanings according to how they say it. Those kinds of interactions have given me a better appreciation of things. And it's great for learning lots about culture and the world. It takes a certain kind of individual to be involved in an adrenalin-fuelled combat sport but there are still such massive variations.

In GB, the fencing is naturally fairly similar as it comes from the same place. When you go abroad, you of course learn how different countries do it. Sometimes it's just silly little things like how certain nations will check a part of the kit. It made me learn to test weapons at 14-all. Because then if it goes the full minute and then a weapon doesn't work - all hell going to rain down.

And it goes back to seeing the other side of people. You see people travelling tired and exhausted through countries and airports or when the hotel has run out of food ... that gives you empathy. It works both ways. When you have had those shared experiences, it makes us all understand that everyone is human too.

As a referee, I am like every athlete - my ambition is to go to the Olympic Games but it is a tough thing to achieve. Twenty-four referees make the cut. Although my career has taken off more post-2020, there's no knowing but it's the aim. I'll just work towards it and see what happens.

I'd like to realise my ambition by Paris 2024 - if not then Los Angeles 2028. I do have to keep in mind the long, long term. If I were to go to the Olympics, then how long could



Mid-Match @denpollitt

I keep at that level? In Italy, once a referee makes an Olympics they retire and are done. Some go on and on but it depends why you are refereeing in the first place and what your ambitions are.

I do have interests outside of fencing. I play cricket most weekends for my local cricket club. The badminton season is starting up again. I got married last year and am about to celebrate my first wedding anniversary. Oh, and I spend too much time on my Xbox. But as long as I can be at the top of refereeing, then I will stay at the top and then when I can no longer do it, I'll just turn up at the equivalent of a local Sunday league and have a nice time.

I like a lot of the people in the sport, especially now in Britain. Our referee cadre is very strong and I find myself looking

forward to attending British competitions simply to see people.

I do think that referees should be involved in the ADP. Ultimately, we are British referees so we can't referee Britons abroad but we can still help drive fencing forward. At major championships, referees have to take part in seminars



Arms Up! @denpollitt

about different interpretations of the rules. That is the stuff that we should feed back to our athletes as it could be costing them hits and progression through rounds.

The more that the fencers get used to fencing with that depth and breadth of refereeing experience, they can get used to adjusting their fencing to that. In turn, that gets a better reputation for British Fencing and then the referees get a better reputation too. Making everyone within BF better at fencing is good for everyone.

DEAMER AND McLELLAN PASS FIE REFEREEING EXAMS

BF Referees Euan Deamer (Foil) and Sam McLellan (Sabre) have passed the 2022 FIE refereeing exams held in Budapest this week.

Two British Referees were entered for the 2022 FIE Refereeing exams held in Budapest, Hungary, in September.

Sam McLellan said, "I am very pleased to have passed the exam, and do it alongside my close pal, Euan. The long process to get the licence requires a lot of mentorship and support. I am particularly grateful to the EFC mentor, Vasil Milenchev, British Fencing's pathway led by Adrian Speakman, Patrick Jennings for his Sabre support, BF referee manager Nickie Bailey for her unwavering help, and the fairly awesome people who mentor me quietly and privately from the sidelines. They know who they are. I accept this licence as an invitation to officially keep learning and progressing in international refereeing, not as an end in itself. It merely marks, in my view, the end of the beginning."

Euan Deamer added, "I wanted to say a massive thank you to all those who have



supported me on my journey from a shy 17-year-old referee to achieving my FIE licence in foil. I know my work isn't done but huge credit must go to the refereeing pathway and all those involved in helping me. British Fencing has been key both in helping me prepare for the exam and in a broader sense through mentoring, feedback and support."

Georgina Usher, BF CEO, concluded, "On behalf of BF I'd like to extend my congratulations to Sam and Euan. Since gaining their EFC licences, both referees

have worked incredibly hard in further developing their skills to FIE level and preparing for these exams. I'd like to thank everyone who supported this, both formally and informally. These referees are a credit to British Fencing and further evidence that our referee training and development activities are producing high quality referees that meet the professional standards set by the FIE."

More information about the Level 3 referee qualifications can be found [here](#) and the Referee Pathway Programme [here](#).

For those who would like to see what their potential referee journey could look like, click [here](#).

The work of the GBR International Referee Pathway Programme is supported by UK Sport International Relations funding.

IT'S GOODBYE FROM HER AND IT'S GOODBYE FROM KIM

After nearly three decades, British Fencing's Head Office Manager, Kim Robinson will be retiring from her role at the end of this calendar year.

We see her here, we hear her there ... Kim - the presence that is our Head Office Manager started by working with the then General Secretary, Gillian Kennelly in 1993. For two years they were the only two full-time members of staff. Thereafter, the workforce did not expand; in fact, it went down to just Kim, who held the fort solo for a full seven years. In all, her working life at the NGB has spanned the tenure of four Presidents - Nick Halsted, James Chambers, Keith Smith and Hilary Philbin.

She must have seen so much. Though if she has, she doesn't let on. Rather it's those who have worked alongside her who elucidate further.

FIE Member of Honour and BF Vice-President, Peter Jacobs sums up most of our experiences when he says he can't remember a time without Kim. "Somehow her calm and steady influence seems to have been there forever. She has been a permanently warm and friendly presence at headquarters, the point of contact for our sport in the UK and internationally, taking on more and more responsibilities and tasks as the years have gone by. To my mind she has become the linchpin, the repository of knowledge of the Association."

Kim says she is pretty exhausted after her twenty-nine-year stint at the helm at headquarters. She diplomatically declines to reveal what might have been the funniest call she's ever taken or, even, the strangest encounter. However, Sword stalwart and Vice-President of the Epee Club, Lawrence Burr OBE gives us a taste of the nature of her workload. "Our Kim has probably been one of the staunchest and longest-serving supporters of British Fencing as the "Gatekeeper" at Head Office.

She knows the sport inside out and has always had an answer to every query. Over the years, she has had to deal with members, outside agencies, committee chairs, parents, the ever-changing Board members, new office appointments, international Olympic and FIE dignitaries together with an assortment of extraneous jobs that seem to have found their way to her desk. In my role as Secretary to the Honours Committee, I have always been so grateful for her keen eye and calm manner with comments like "Do you really mean that, Lawrence ...?" which really brings me up short - and she is always right! In many ways, she exemplifies the true Office Manager - knowing where to go for answering any question and also keeping calm when the phone lines are burning red hot!"

Current president, Hilary Philbin can attest to those words. She credits Kim with helping her in every way in her own fencing career, during the London 2012 Games and for the past nine years of her Presidency. "Kim has been truly invaluable. She has beavered away on my behalf and has on so many occasions gone above and beyond the call of duty. I view her as a 'right-hand' to whom I can (and do) always turn for assistance, and I know that hers will be a very difficult pair of shoes to fill."

The question on everyone's lips is 'Has Kim ever been a fencer?'. Believe it or not, she did try it - once! Back in 2013, British



Kim and Jen (centre) enjoying their fencing taster



Kim Perfecting Her Lunge with Neil Brown

Fencing ran a staff taster-session led by then Head Foil Coach, Andry Klyushin. Kim laughs, "Yes. Let's call it a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I am a member though and have been a long-time supporter of fencing in Great Britain."

Kim says it has been gratifying to work at BF over the years, having enjoyed the office atmosphere and its personalities as well as now feeling as though she leaves the NGB in a great place. "We truly are a forward-thinking modern organisation with twenty-four full time members of staff achieving things now that we could only ever dreamed of in the past."

CEO Georgina Usher MBE praises Kim for having been the 'backbone' of British Fencing, and also highlights her fun side. "She has supported and helped me immeasurably. Working with Kim has been one of the exceptional pleasures of my time at the NGB ... We don't need to mention the prosecco-drinking at Christmas, hula-hooping in the office and the steadfast refusal to engage in any team-building activity that involves her actually fencing!"

The final word is with Kim. She simply offers "Thank you".

Her - thanking us. Someone who has dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to their work for so long, for the good of everyone involved in British Fencing. That says a lot.

THE VOICE OF OUR ATHLETES

Meet the BF Athlete Representation Panel 2022

Sophie DeVooght, Head of Communications

In 2018 BF collaborated with the British Athletes Commission to create the BF Athlete Representation Panel (ARP). Its purpose is to provide a representative voice for GBR athletes on the GBR international performance pathway to Olympic success ('Athletes') and those involved with the BF Athlete Development Programme ('ADP').

The ARP is intended to provide a group for athletes on the performance pathway to share their feedback on all aspects of the GBR system and structure (as delivered by the BF Athlete Development Programme, excluding the elements delivered by the EIS Para Fencing World Class Programme). It also provides athletes with a mechanism for ensuring their views on important matters are heard and communicated to the BF Senior Leadership Team and Board and ensures a two-way communication link between the athletes and the BF Senior Leadership Team and BF Board.

Will Deary, newly appointed Men's Sabre representative says, "From my years of experience being an athlete, I always felt the athletes should have a way of communicating with the NGB and share their thoughts on how they feel things are being run and why certain decisions are made."

"I'm sure communication is key for the athletes, and I feel that being a part of the athlete representative panel gives me and my fellow athletes a way to open this channel of communication. It allows a more transparent vision of the workings of British Fencing to create a clear picture for all the athletes."

Kat Smith Taylor, Women's Epee representative, shared how important it is for athletes to have a voice, and is particularly keen to represent people who may otherwise go unheard. "As an athlete who has been fencing for 18 years and competed on the senior international stage for over a decade, I recognise that women's voices can be lost when it comes to sports. I am prepared to be that voice that will not get lost in the crowd. Having been around the circuit for as long as I have, I have



Will Deary @denpollitt

built relationships with many members of BF and I am not afraid to be the voice for someone who feels something needs to be said."

Recently, the role of the ARP has evolved and there have been several changes that reflect current needs and ensure the panel is fit for purpose. The ARP replaces the previously separate Senior Athlete Panel and the Youth Athlete Panel. This extended remit covers the whole of the ADP. The ADP is the part of BF that delivers the GBR system and structure and covers **all** GBR international pathway activity from U17 through to Senior (excluding Veteran,) so the panel reflects that and now also includes para fencing in relation to the elements of the GBR structure delivered by BF. (WCP athletes are still welcome to stand for election.)

Piers Gilliver recently joined the ARP after the nomination process in 2022 as Men's Para representative and brings his experience to the panel. "I've been competing internationally since 2012 and medalled at two Paralympic Games. I have been the wheelchair fencing athlete representative since 2018, during which time I've been World Class Program Lead, British Disability Fencing Board Member (until the transfer of responsibilities to BF in April 2022), and been a member of a number of council groups for the British Paralympic Association, Bath University, Paralympic Heritage Trust. I've also been on several athlete representative training courses, which I continue to attend."

As part of the role of a representative, ARP athletes are given full training and

induction. Along with a full training day all Athlete Reps are encouraged to join the British Athlete Commission's online Athlete Rep (AR) Network. The AR Network is a private group for all Athlete Reps, which provides an opportunity for shared learning across sports and for the collective Athlete Voice to be fed into the BAC's Athlete Advisory Group. The AR Network is also used to update AR's on upcoming Training and CPD days.

The process of electing the ARP is based on athlete involvement, with a nomination and election procedure overseen by the British Athlete Commission.

Three-time Paralympian and Women's Para representative, Gemma Collis, is no stranger to voicing her opinions when they matter. "Aside from fencing, I work for the BBC as a sports journalist, am the Vice-Chair of the International Wheelchair Fencing Athlete Council and a member of the International Wheelchair Fencing Gender Equity Commission.

"Having been the vice-chair of the International Wheelchair Fencing Athlete Council for the past four years, I feel passionately about the importance of strong athlete representation and the power of the athlete voice. I strongly believe that including athletes within every step of the decision-making process is



Kat Smith Taylor #TeamBizzi



Piers Gilliver (Photo: IWAS)

key to ensuring athlete interests are best served – which is why I applied to be part of the British Fencing Athlete Representative Panel.

I hope to be a friendly face and listening ear that fencers of all age groups, and from all disciplines feel comfortable speaking to and raising issues with. I won't pretend I know every problem or difficulty athletes will face or are already facing – but I will always be there to listen, to understand and to advocate on behalf of athletes on any issues they bring to us, or we as a panel identify.

I feel strongly that sports federations should be athlete-centred from top to bottom – which is why I think meaningful and effective athlete representation is key, and something I wanted to be involved in.

First and foremost, I want to gain an understanding of what my fellow athletes think. What's working really well? What could be improved? And anything that perhaps concerns you? That should be the driving force behind our Panel's work.

However, on a personal level – I hope to aid in the successful and meaningful integration of Para Fencing under British Fencing in order to ensure that fencing in the UK is fully inclusive and available to all.

Most of all, I hope to provide a platform and mechanism by which every athlete within the pathway is able to have and use their voice.”

The Men's Epee representative, Billy Shepherd also comes with valuable experience. “Having previously worked as an athlete representative for the TASS Athlete Advisory Group (TAAG) for three years, I understand how important it is to represent the rights of athletes by providing them with a safe space to share their feedback on any issues they have during their time in sport. During my time at TAAG I gathered and collated feedback from TASS athletes and used this information to suggest improvements for the TASS scheme during meetings with other athletes and representatives from TASS.



Billy Shepherd

Furthermore, I have represented athletes in meetings with British Fencing and The University of Nottingham and served as a wellbeing officer at The University of Nottingham's Fencing Club, where I learnt how to provide confidential support for fencers and how to appropriately signpost them where necessary.



Gemma Collis (Photo: IWAS)

From my experiences, I'm able to provide athletes with a confidential, supportive space to provide feedback and effectively communicate this during meetings and through written reports to British Fencing. I want to improve and help continuously develop the ADP to continue to create a high-performing sporting environment.”

The ARP is a representative voice for athletes on BF's Athlete Development Programme. Any athlete who has been selected for a World Cup or Grand Prix can request to join the ADP.

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FOR THE LOVE OF FENCING

What makes someone stand in a fencing room all day when they are not even fencing? Elizabeth Fraser gives us the volunteer download.

"I am twenty years old and I do fence. I fence foil. I started fencing in 2013/2014, beginning at my local club - Mallard in Kent, and I'm now fencing at Newham Swords where I fence competitively.

Fencing is appealing as I like meeting loads of different new people; while it's an individual sport, it still feels team-based, as you get to train with the same people at the same club.

As for the volunteering, it was because I fence at Newham and when a call was put out for volunteers for the Commonwealth Federation Fencing Championships it made sense to me because it was being held at our club venue in Sportsdock, East London.



Thumbs Up from Volunteer Ellie

I ended up in the call room on the first day. It really was all new to me. I had never been in the call room as a competitor plus it felt strange being on the other side organising fencers and referees. After the first

few days I got used to it. There were no problems. I had the task of sending down the sheets of who was fencing in the last 8 and getting the referees assigned. One of the armourers, Ed, would test the weapons and we would check kit. Then they lined up and I sent them to the right places.



The work is not that familiar as I have only worked at Waitrose and the Zoo. I enjoyed it, developing the ability to be confident in making my own decisions.

While I was volunteering at the Commonwealths, I did get the confidence to leave my university course which I felt had been the wrong thing for me to pursue right now. It helped to be able to speak to the referees. One of them had been to the same university as me but had left before I started. We had a bit of a chat. Although I was wanting to leave, I hadn't pushed myself to make the final decision. It was good to hear of all their life experiences. One referee was very against the idea of me leaving, and told me that I should finish and then move on. It was nice to have someone make me think about the consequences. They were also so helpful with the job in hand at the event. They'd done call rooms before and were very considerate to me.

But the thing that made me press send on the email to leave university was that I had enjoyed volunteering so much. I felt that I needed a job where I could interact, do different kinds of things and have different kinds of interactions every day.

Now I am working at Howletts Zoo in Canterbury. I am stationed with the lemurs. My job is to explain to people why we do conservation. There is a brood of ten lemurs in our enclosure. There are five crowned lemurs who are all one family and are the hardest to spot in the day. They camouflage with the greenery and wood and like to hide away and sleep. There are also three ringtail lemurs who are bigger and cheekier. In the middle of the Commonwealths I went back to work one day in the enclosure and I was naming the lemurs after some of the referees. I can't - I won't - tell you the names I was using; these people know who I am and see me on the circuit!

It certainly helped my personal development. I went in on the first day really, really nervous, asking myself why I had agreed to do this for two weeks but I came out the other side knowing better where I was going with my career and my life choices. It allowed me a great opportunity to reset and introduce some fluidity to how I was thinking.

I know now what I am better suited to. I met some people from the RAF which has got me thinking about working in the Forces one day. I also decided to do my Level 2 refereeing qualification in Foil and Epee.

I had been inspired to volunteer at the Commonwealths by the achievements of my coaches at Newham, Linda Strachan and Pierre Harper. They've achieved everything! One day I went in with my kit because I was doing a Barbarian's Team Event - playing in teams where they didn't have enough fencers. In the afternoon, I did an exhibition match with para fencers. I found that quite scary. I had never been on the final's piste before. There were tons of people watching with Rob Cawdron commentating on YouTube. It felt as though it mattered hugely to be showing that combining the fencing worked and would work in the future."

WE ARE FORGING FUTURES

Primary, Secondary; Pupils and Staff. A New Initiative From British Fencing Ignites a Passion for Fencing in Everyone.



It is, in a sense, a dream come true and a utopia achieved if fencing were to become a core sport in daily school life. British Fencing has long been working in the education space, successfully developing a popular Primary Schools Resources Pack and a growing Official Training Partner Programme. In the past, the natural pathway has been to continue fencing, having completed a taster session or beginners course by joining a local fencing club.

'We Are Forging Futures' takes a completely different approach to the traditional model based on the feedback received and digested from trusted partners and stakeholders. With much of this work unknown by the wider fencing community, Commercial Director James Craig explains:

"In our work with schools, we will always encourage 'attending a fencing club' as the next step. However our experience - coupled with the feedback from the partners we worked with - was providing more evidence that the services and products we were offering could have thus far untapped transformational effects on the individuals taking part.

In fencing you can introduce the concept of resilience in session one; you get hit with the sword or lose a point and you come back 'On Guard'. Fencing is innately playful and engaging, it is akin to playing tag with a sword. So implicitly, the rehearsal of bouncing back, regulating how you feel and therefore applying meaning to the concept



of resilience can happen all within thirty minutes of a session, and many times over.

Fencing is unlike other activities as it has a knack of stirring up the imagination of those doing it and those teaching it and will challenge a self-perception of not being sporty very quickly or that those involved cannot do something sporty."

This fresh offering from British Fencing opens up a pathway for people who want to continue fencing for exercise, enjoyment and personal development.

James continues, "The transformational feeling when you put on a mask and hold your sword transports you to whoever you want to be. That in itself is helping many people view themselves differently.

"A recent Youth Sports Trust statement featured the shocking line that, 'Fewer than half of all children and young people in England (44.6%) are meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines which advise that children aged between 5 and 18 do an average of at least sixty minutes of sport and physical activity a day.' It wasn't hard for me to seek out how BF and fencing can help address this.

The 'golden nugget' that 'We Are Forging Futures' looks to utilise and explore is that the activity is an equaliser, which is where we see the connections with physical literacy.

"'We Are Forging Futures' also engages staff the same way as we do with the session delivery for pupils - through swordplay and a thematic learning approach. That is even more powerful with adults as they have already had a lifetime of reference points to make them engage in the fun interactive style of delivery we provide."

Take Nyall - a Sports Coach at Manchester-based multi-sport company

Kickstart (who recently signed a 5-year partnership with BF). He was equally enthusiastic about the success of layering in personal development themes and intents of the programme such as resilience. Speaking about the programme, he said, "The children really understand because they're using words like foil and things like that because they can see it as a little bit dangerous. They are then that bit more respectful with the equipment and more careful with it, and are more resilient if they lose because they know they can't just react because they've got equipment in their hands, so therefore can't just hit. So they have got to calm themselves down."

British Fencing's Head of Communications, Sophie DeVooght, sums it up. "The idea behind 'We Are Forging Futures' is that we have a name and an identity that is focused on educational outcomes, staff and pupil personal development, all whilst doing it in an active learning manner. The additional benefits to a partner are that the training and resources can be used to provide a new offer for a school's PE, School Sport and Physical Activity plans. The first programme we have to offer is focused on the personal development themes of resilience and self-efficacy. The concept is that fencing and swordplay activity can positively challenge the way staff and students view themselves."

Read the full article about 'We Are Forging Futures' [here](#).



THE LAST WORD

Kristjan Archer was selected to represent Senior Men's Foil at the 2022 European and World Championships in Antalya and Cairo. Once a stalwart in the ranks of Newham Swords, he now resides in Washington DC. Kristjan completed a successful US college fencing career at the University of Notre Dame where he won a national championship and earned "All-American" status that recognised him as one of the top collegiate fencers in the country. He also won multiple 'monograms' and can therefore count himself amongst a society of student-athletes who "promote spirit, unity, leadership and sportsmanship" at Notre Dame.



Kristjan Archer @denpollitt

"It gets harder to figure out exactly when I started fencing, but I think I was eight years old and it was a taster class at a school gym in Cambridge - my home town. Immediately I was hooked, training as much as I could to get better. My ambitions quickly made me realise that I couldn't expect to be the best by just training twice a week so I began training at Newham Swords also, which was a sister club to my club, Cambridge Sword. This switch really helped my fencing development and brought me domestic and international success.

I have a close family. I am from a family of three brothers. At 28, I am the eldest, Ciaran is 24 and Mihkel is 16. What is great about having brothers in the same sport is that, despite the disparity in age, nobody wants to lose to one another. One of my fondest memories is from when I was a Junior, Ciaran was just starting cadet competitions and Mihkel was still learning what the right end of a foil was. Despite his level of experience, at the end of Friday night training, Mihkel would always demand to fence me - I have never seen a kid of that age attack so aggressively!

My understanding of team dynamics comes from my family. My parents are absolutely fantastic and afforded my brothers and me the opportunity to do what we wanted - which was usually just more fencing. This freedom instilled a sense of independence in me - if I wanted to do something, I often had to do it myself. At 16, I was regularly taking my fencing bag into my sixth-form, usually hiding it away in the cafeteria to avoid pulling it from class-to-class. After school I would then sprint to Cambridge station in order to make my train to practise in London, spending the two hour journey doing my homework. I would make this trip three times a week and would usually end up getting home past midnight each night.

I try not to make excuses or take the day off. My mantra is if you want to be the best, then you stick with it through thick and thin. Today I balance training with my full-time job in political consultancy. Fencing has helped me shape an attitude of staying motivated and focussing on the target in front of me. This helps me to create a culture of excellence on the piste, and in the office.

My job is to help policymakers and the media at Federal and International level understand data. My career has helped improve me as a fencer because it highlighted how important it is to not focus too hard on a single data point. Whether it be a single competition result or single hit within a fight, it's crucial to look at everything in its aggregate and recognize the trend of performance. That being said, while I leverage data to influence how I set myself up in a match, it has to be complemented by the confidence to execute the data informed plan.

On the piste, I'm very determined and single-minded regardless of competition or training. Unashamedly, I am a bit of a showboat - I like to show my mettle game in front of everyone. Fencing in a team is unique. Everyone is an individual contributor and you have to all be single-minded. I like to be a top scorer and never want to just sit there watching. I find that going at a goal together as a team - competing together, sharing success - makes everything really sweet and really enjoyable.

I have a motto - it comes from my fiancée, Kieran; I apply it to both my work and my fencing. It's, "I am not a heart surgeon" - in other words I am not a miracle worker. If something cannot be done - that's ok, there is always time to try again and refine your craft. Nothing needs to be perfect every time, just keep pushing to be better than you were yesterday.

I give a lot of credit to my fiancée. She's my North Star and always knocks me back on course. I am very high-emotion when I fence. Whenever I go away to a competition, she will leave me five or so voice messages that I will listen to multiple times; they remind me of what is important.

My result at the World's in Cairo was the floor, and not the ceiling of my potential. But, after a long time off, it was the chance for everyone to see where we can improve and come back stronger. That is what I am going to continue to do."



Enjoying the Fencing Life @denpollitt

RICHARD OLDCORN (1938-2022)



Born in Iver, Buckinghamshire in 1938, Richard's long and illustrious fencing career began in the early 1950s. He represented Great Britain at three Olympic Games - Tokyo 1964, Mexico City 1968 and Munich 1972 as well as being a member of the English Men's Sabre team to collect gold at the 1966 British Empire and Commonwealth Games.

Injury prevented him from competing at the 1976 Games in Montreal but he attended the event as a member of the jury. Richard became the British team captain in 1978 leading the team to the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. Most notably, he was entered into the individual sabre event but stepped aside to assist debutant Mark Slade in his competition.

He underwent a spinal fusion operation in 1980 before emigrating to Australia in 1983. The success of his operation allowed Richard to return to the piste where he claimed silver at the 1990 Commonwealth Championships representing the Wallabies.

He took part in a remarkable fifteen Senior World Championships and claimed gold in the 60+ category at the 2002 World Veterans Championships. Having moved to Sydney Richard competed in the New South Wales and Australian Championships as recently as 2016.

Known as a true gentleman of the sport Richard died on 1 June aged 84. Our thoughts are with his family and friends across the globe some of whom celebrated his life at a service held in NSW on 10 June.

A Tribute from Jim Philbin:

Richard Oldcorn was a good friend who had a major influence on my fencing career, and indeed my personal life. In 1973 I was selected for the British Sabre Team to compete at the Senior World Championships in Gothenburg. However, my elevation to the team was short lived when I was relegated to reserve for the World Championships the following year.

Richard, who had recently taken over as the Sabre Team Captain, took me to one side and explained that if I was to fulfil my potential and, in particular, my ambition to represent Great Britain at the Olympic Games I should consider moving from Manchester to London. He pointed out that I needed to train regularly with other team and squad members, all of whom were London-based. I really didn't want to move to London but after thinking it over for some months I decided Richard was probably right and if I didn't take his advice I may never represent Great Britain again.

Having made the momentous decision to move, I arranged with my employer for a transfer to the London office, but there was one major problem. I needed to find somewhere to live in the big city, something that was practically impossible to organise from Manchester. When I informed Richard of the situation, he generously invited me to stay at his beautiful house on the Thames whilst I searched for a place of my own.

I am sure that when Richard made his very kind gesture both he and I anticipated that my stay would be for just a few weeks rather than the eight months it actually took to find a place to live. Despite my unexpectedly long stay with Richard he never once indicated that I had overstayed my welcome or made me feel anything other than welcome. I will be forever grateful to Richard for his guidance, encouragement and generosity without which I would never have moved to London and how different my fencing career and personal life would have turned out.

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

Submit your stories to the editor:

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RESULTS



The latest results are now listed online and can be **accessed here**.

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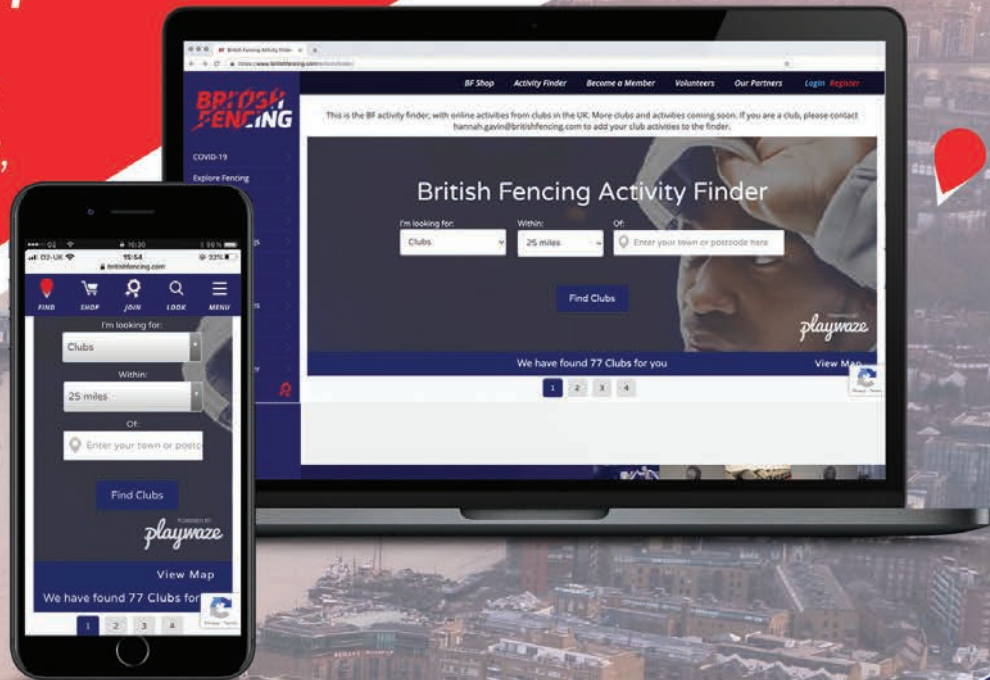
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