



BRITISH VETERANS FENCING

NEWS LETTER

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WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to our third Newsletter of the year. A year in which we have only just started getting back to normal after the longest period without fencing that many of us have experienced. As you will be aware our first event will be Guildford (31st -1st Aug). It's happening! And I must give thanks to Kola, Graham, and Lindsay for the incredible work they have done in putting it altogether. Covid has presented us with issues we've never had to face before. Should we hold it or not? Will people attend? What will the Covid rules be on the day? Will we have enough referees? Will people be vaccinated? How do we make it as safe as possible? Etc. etc. Many problems but we've got here, and it looks like it's going to be a great first event.

Next thanks to Nicola in putting this Olympic Special together, getting us into the mood for Tokyo. Some great articles. I especially enjoyed reading about the exploits, experiences, and shenanigans of our past Olympians. It is great to see that they are still BVF members and as competitive as ever.

Hope to see old friends at Guildford.

Enjoy the read,

Carl

CELEBRATING OUR BVF OLYMPIANS

Several of our members have fenced at the Olympics, including Tony Bartlett, Rob Bruniges, Richard Cohen, Peter Jacobs, Allan Jay, Ralph Johnson, Hugh Kernohan, Neal Mallett, Jonathan Stanbury, Hilary Philbin, Jim Philbin, Clare Halsted, Janet Cooksey, Amanda Baxendale, Rob Phelps & Rick Phelps. Special thanks to those who have shared their memories with us.

Amanda Baxendale

I attended the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 as part of the ladies' foil team.

I was 25 years old and so excited to be part of the British team. We had secured a place for the Olympics at the World championships in Budapest



the year before, where I had helped beat the Canadians in the last bout. My fellow teammates were some of British Fencing's best; Fiona Macintosh and Linda Strachan were my fencing heroes and here I was on their team!

It was amazing receiving the official letter to say I had qualified; I still have it to this day! My family were so proud of me and Les Jones, my coach at the time, made a special trip to be with me

in Barcelona. The opening and closing ceremonies were amazing and seeing so many famous athletes up close was very humbling. I was spotted on TV waving enthusiastically, much to my family's delight. I enjoyed every single moment I spent in Barcelona and made the most of the beach and the social life after the competition. I was strangely proud that my fencing jacket made it to the last 8 of the individuals, even though I didn't, as Fiona Macintosh needed a clean jacket.

I retired after the Olympics in 1992 and went to live in Canada for a few years. On return to England, I took up other sports and only returned to fencing when I was 48 years old. My competitive spirit and the love of being part of a team quickly returned. I cannot wait to get back to competitive fencing and be with the friends I have so dearly missed due to the Pandemic.



Robert Bruniges

I am proud and privileged to have competed in three Olympics. Montreal 1976 at team and individual foil, Moscow 1980 at team and individual foil and epee, Los Angeles 1984 team foil.

Having now been involved in fencing for the last 53 years, some memories have greatly faded but then some are engrained forever.

The Montreal memory for me was the opening ceremony. Being on a field surrounded by all the top athletes in the world, standing there thinking is this real, am I really standing shoulder to shoulder with these titans of sport. Pinch, pinch yes it was. With all the sacrifices my parents had made, all the faith they and my coaches had in me, it had all paid off.

In Moscow, my intolerance to insect bites rose its ugly head. The Olympic village had been built on a boggy area of land outside the city. It was inundated with midges and other nasty flying things, and they all seemed to feast on me. Some turning septic, making fencing extremely uncomfortable

Los Angeles. Wow. What an experience. Food 24hrs a day, entertainment laid on for the athletes to include Martha Reeves, the original Beach Boys plus various other global stars. There was a party thrown by actress Susan

Hampshire whose swimming pool Pierre Harper threw my false hand into - it was ruined, but a few phone calls later and a new one was made and flown out courtesy of British Airways, in only 3 days. They usually took a few months to replace!

There is so much more to tell, maybe one day. But my love of fencing, the people in it, what it has given me, and the places I have seen, all need to be paid back. My coaching role now allows me to do so and pass the experiences and opportunities onto others.

It's a great sport as are the people in it.

Richard Cohen

I attended several games to include Munich 1972 and Montreal 1976 individual and team sabre. I was selected for Moscow 1980 but elected not to go and my final Games as a participant were Los Angeles in 1984.

I have all sorts of memories, but one that stands out is the opening ceremony in Munich in 1972. My parents had come to watch and were up in the stands. My father had a camera and as the British team marched into the main stadium he took a shot—at the precise moment that I turned round and looked in their direction. I have the photo somewhere!

Another memory was at the athlete's village giant outdoor chess set. One day I and another GB sabreur, John Deanfield, started to play. After about fifteen minutes a USSR coach came by and studied the board. To make conversation (difficult when you have no Russian) I pointed to John. 'Him Spassky, me Fischer,' I said lamely. The Russian took another look at the board and shook his head. 'Him no Spassky; you no Fisher.' And with that he went on his way.

I wrote a long article for the Guardian about the 1984 Games—it was their Review Front for 18 August that year. Here's an excerpt: "...after her visit to the fencers, Princess Anne arrived to watch a foil team match in which the British were leading the US 3-1. Immediately she had sat down we lost six bouts on the trot, to trail 3-7. The Princess looked most put out, as if she might be held personally to blame."

I keep wondering what makes me continue to fence - I am seeing a therapist to answer this very question, but he has yet to come up with an answer!





Richard and the British Team 1976

Clare Halsted



In 1972 I was a 24 yr old biochemistry PhD student and had moved to London to get better quality training. It worked. I made the British team and off we all went to Munich, full of excitement and energy. Alongside the stress of competing (individual and team) we had fun dowsing the track and field athletes on their balconies in water from high above them and other such childish pursuits. I was fascinated by the huge range of shapes, sizes, and physiques. Then horror struck and the sad memories will remain forever [11 Israeli athletes were killed after being taken hostage by five Palestinian terrorists, who also died, as did one West German policeman].

By Montreal in 1976 I was a second-year medical student with a supportive fencing husband. As a much more confident, proficient fencer and a well-established member of the British team this was an entirely different experience. Everything was positive, enjoyable and inspiring, from the camaraderie of my teammates, the roar of the crowd as we marched into the stadium for the Opening Ceremony and the amazing variety of food in the athletes' village, to the competition days and then the joyous Closing Ceremony. Husband Nick was one of the GB fencing officials, (then we had full teams) which was an added bonus – separate quarters of course.

My individual result of 19th was disappointing as after three rounds of poules (the old system with no direct elimination so opportunities for cabals – hence its demise,) I missed the semifinals by one hit (or was it 2?). But I fenced well in the team event where we ended up 7th out of 13 countries – beating the USA and Iranian teams (last Iranian women's team in the Olympics) along the way, so my Olympic career finished on a relative high. I knew then that medical training and children would mean fencing taking a back seat for quite a while.



The scandal in Montreal was Boris Dis-Onishenko cheating in the Modern Pentathlon with a clever switch in his epee handle. Not clever enough to fool the eagle-eyed Mary Glen Haig during a Russia-GBR fight and to our delight the GBR team then won gold.

Ralph Johnson

Mexico City was my first Olympics in 1968. I was the current British epee champion and still have my selection letter, in fact I have all of them.

We had to go out for a month to acclimatise due to the altitude. What a hardship for a young student not long out of school. It was a time of world unrest and when I returned home after a wonderful few weeks away, I learned that 10 days before the Games there had been a massacre in Mexico City of university students by the military and police.

My particular recollection of Mexico City – apart from being placed 13th equal – was that a Polish sabreur, an army officer by the name of Jerzy Pawloski, and one of the best fencers I have ever seen for technique and footwork and the gold medal winner was exposed a few years later as having a darker side. He was a spy in the pay of the CIA and was in fact a double agent. He was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment. You never know who you are mixing with in the fencing world!

Munich in 1972 was next. I do not need to remind you of another massacre this time in the Olympic Village. 11 members of the Israeli team including Andre Spitzer the fencing coach died.

The Israelis occupied accommodation some distance from ours, but I remember seeing terrorist flags hanging from their block and the endless whirr of helicopters. It was a grenade thrown into one of the helicopters holding the hostages that killed the fencing coach. The event left a pall over the rest of the Games.

A further tragedy was a German fencer by the name of Rudi Mayer who I had fenced against in many competitions. He collapsed on the piste mid fight and was taken to hospital and given an epidural injection into his back which went wrong, and he was paralysed from the waist down. One day an Olympic athlete, the next a paraplegic.

Montreal in 1976 and another disgraced fencer but this time a pentathlete by the name of Boris Onichenko in the Russian team. In Pentathlon fencers only need to score one hit on their opponent. I am sure you know about his disguised cross wires when he triggered a hit against GB's Jim Fox. Boris however was nowhere near Jim at the time! Boris had his epee confiscated, the wires were exposed, and he was disqualified and was on the next plane back to Moscow. As a result of these shenanigans the Fencing team went and cheered the pentathletes in their final event, the running. They won the gold medal. Pentathlon is a team of three but there was only one medal between them!

As with previous Olympics the team members are given freebies apart from the uniform. All I can remember from Montreal is a dressing gown, a suitcase and three pairs of underpants in red, white, and blue. Very patriotic.





Moscow in 1980 and I was fortunate to be selected again for the team, but many will recall a small matter of the Russians invading Afghanistan the previous Christmas. The hypocrisy of the Soviet government was too much for me and many others and we boycotted. I had a small moment of fame as I appeared on the front page of the tabloids with Tim Belson another epeeist who had been selected. I felt very strongly and still do about our own government's feeble sanctions against the Soviets.

Los Angeles in 1984 was my last Olympics and here my memories are much happier. The Beach Boys entertained us in the village and how can I put this so did the Californian girls. I not only competed but was team

captain. The extracurricular activities of my teammates of which I became aware led me to insist that for the three nights before their events they slept in their own beds- alone!

Hugh Kernohan

The Seoul Games in 1988 were a magnificent spectacle, especially the Opening Ceremony. Like Tokyo in 1966 and Beijing in 2008 they showed a booming Asian nation declaring in a stunning outburst of national pride that they had arrived on the international stage.

There was no FIE qualification and each nation was allowed to send three individuals and a team of five per weapon. Each set its own qualification standard. Our rule was that if three individuals made the standard set by the AFA and the BOA, a team of five would be selected. Sadly, only John Llewellyn (comfortably) and I (by a margin of 0.2%) made it so we had no epee team for the first time since 1932.

The individual epee final was a classic: Philippe Riboud against Arnd Schmitt, a true clash of generations and of styles. Riboud was the best epeeist I ever saw, able to do things with a French grip that ordinary mortals could only do with a pistol grip, and pommel with the best of them. It was his last

competition and he had won everything in his career except the individual Olympic gold. Schmitt was the new German Wunderkind with a psyche of steel who had burst onto the scene as a junior in 1985, a star to succeed Pusch and Fischer, but who had bucked the German system by snubbing Emil Beck and leaving Tauber. I so wanted Riboud to win but it was Schmitt who took it on the last hit, leaving Riboud desolate.



There are so many other memories, many about rubbing shoulders with great athletes: a steely silence in the restaurant when John Llewellyn asked gold medallist Adrian Moorhouse whether the enormous watch, he was wearing was a knock-off from Itae-Won in downtown Seoul, before Andy Jamieson explained it had been presented to Adrian when he broke the European record for 100m breaststroke. Going through a security gate and realising Saïd Aouita was behind you in the queue or passing Steffi Graf in the village. (Seoul saw the return of tennis to the Games after 64 years as the IOC gave up its resistance to the professionalism in elite sport).

I still have the MPAGB tie which Ron Bright presented to me for racing down to the fencing venue to rescue the pentathletes when 14 out of their 16 epees failed weapon control. I spent a merry couple of hours straightening bashed guards, adding insulation to bare wires, and resetting handles to go through the gauge. The only thing I had no chance of fixing were the blades that were too long. Then four days later we cheered Rick Phelps, Graham Brookhouse and Dominic Mahony round the 4000m cross-country course to take the team bronze.

Neal Mallett

I have had the good fortune of competing at two Olympics: Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984. These were quite different experiences.

In 1980 I was the new boy, having first made the team at the 1979 Worlds. Due to Russian involvement in Afghanistan, there were boycotts from some Western teams, but selected British athletes could make a personal decision as to whether to attend. Two of the Men's Epee Team and two of the Men's Foil Team were among those who decided not to go. So it happened that Steve Paul and I, both epeeists, found ourselves fencing foil against the Russian Silver Medal winning team on a very high raised piste in front of Russian TV cameras. Team events were run as poules with each fight being a five-hit bout. My lasting memory was leading the Russian World U20 champion 4-2 with crazy fleches that I aborted by diving off the piste to evade his ripostes. A black card now, but I regarded it then as a tactical innovation. Sadly, I still lost!

The British Team boycotted the opening and closing events and the Russians did not want Western athletes to meet their people, so it was a very restricted, largely Olympic village-based experience. My best memories from Moscow were meeting other British Team athletes and some athletes from other teams.

In contrast, the LA Olympics were an exuberant, larger than life experience. As a small example the Beach Boys (who were still big at the time) came and played for the athletes at the UCLA village. I had some family and friends supporting me at the fencing venue and, after the US team was eliminated, they were joined by all the Americans which was a terrific thrill and boost. Despite this, we failed to overcome the Germans in the last eight; they went on to win the Gold.

My most extraordinary moment from LA was taking an "open eyes" lesson in one of the training days pre my event. I had always found "open eyes" lessons difficult, but this time I was reacting fluidly to whatever the coach threw at me. My inner voice was asking how am I doing this? Then I left my body and found myself looking down at myself fencing perfectly!! I don't know how long it lasted, and it has never happened again, but it was an unbelievably wonderful experience.

Graham Paul

My first Olympics was Mexico 1968 where I fenced foil in both team and individual. I used to think I came 14th, but recently found that I was placed 12th. This was my best Olympics in both results and enjoyment. We went out a month early to acclimatise to the altitude and had great fun training and sightseeing. I had just finished my first degree, so had no commitments after the Games and spent three months hitching around Mexico with an American interpreter I had met in the press centre. Security in the village was

quite relaxed, and one day I met Alf Ramsay trying to get in at the main gate. I had a tracksuit and pass and just told the security that he was with me and Alf was accepted.

The next Games was Munich in 1972, which was notable for the terrorist incident, a number of the Israeli team were murdered, and the games halted for 24hrs. I made the L24 of the foil individual and fenced in the epee. In my foil poule my last fight was against a Russian. I was already eliminated, and before the fight he came up to me and said "Paul gimmee need fight". I explained that I did not throw fights, but I fear the message was lost in translation. I was very tired and despite my best efforts lost 5-0 in about 30 seconds. He thanked me profusely – I was unable to explain that I had been trying. The following season we were in a first round poule together and were the last fight. He came up before the poule started and said something to me in Russian. I came to the last fight expecting an easy victory, even though I was already through. He beat me 5-0 in about 30 seconds. Later I learnt that what he had said was that he would throw the fight if I needed it!

Montreal in 1976 was marred by boycotts and security was very tight, with armed escorts everywhere we went. We had a great time racing golf buggies through bunkers on a golf course that the athletes were allowed to use. In the foil team we reached the L8 by beating Romania, with me scoring the last hit at 4-all in the deciding fight. I was in the L24 again in the individual. We were eventually placed 6th and am still waiting for the FIE certificate we were promised.

Los Angeles was my next Games in which I only fenced in the foil and epee teams.

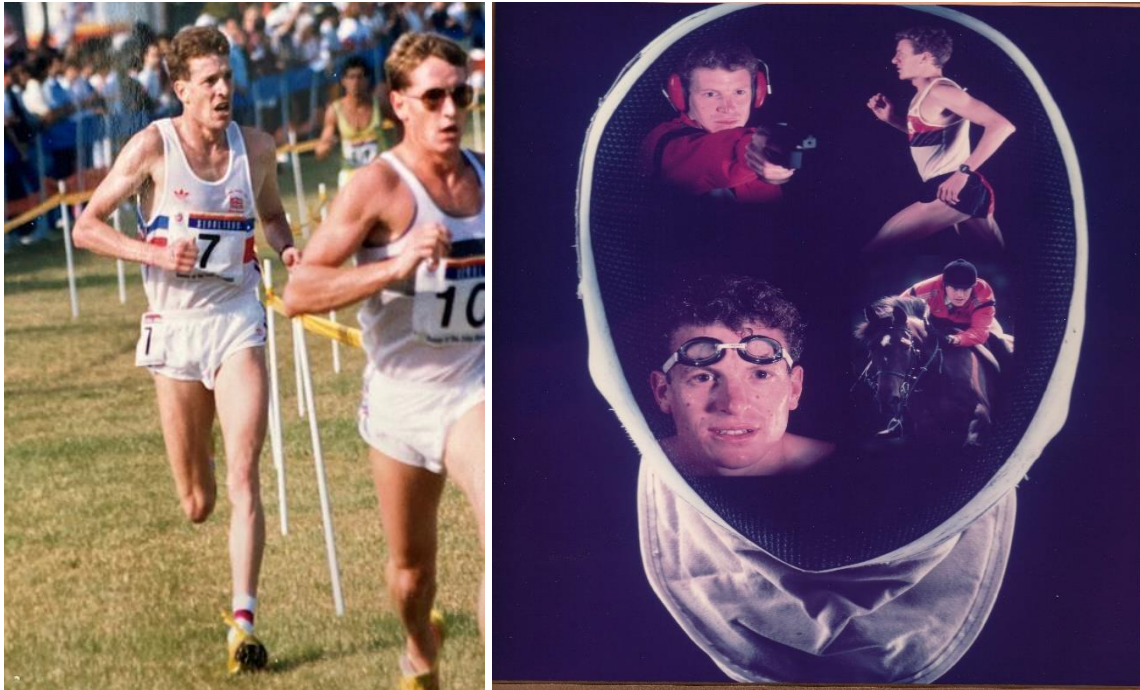
Richard (Rick) Phelps & Rob Phelps

Two of our members have been Olympic Pentathletes. Rob competed at the 1964, 1968 and 1972 Summer Olympics. Richard took part in the 1984, 1988, 1992 and the 1996 Games.

Rob started his Pentathlon career in the sixties having met a Hungarian refugee who was a Pentathlete and arrived in the UK having fled his country when Russia invaded. They set up the Spartan Modern Pentathlon Club which was the first civilian Pentathlon club in the UK. Inspired by his Uncle, Richard took up the sport.

Whilst Richard's strongest disciplines were running and swimming he enjoyed competing in the fencing. He liked the pressure and the fact that even as an underdog he could on the day pull out some special victories.

This is a photo of him running for his Bronze medal in the 1988 Games. He also won the World Championships in 93.



Hilary Philbin

My first Olympic experience was in Montreal 1976, when I competed in the women's foil team. My best memory of those Games was marching into the stadium for the Opening Ceremony. Even now, whenever I hear the opening bars of Emerson Lake & Palmer's March of the Common Man, it makes my heart beat faster.



In Moscow 1980 I competed again in the Women's Foil team where I had a dual role, doubling up as women's team captain/manager. One of the most memorable moments that year took place before the team had even left home. There was considerable political upheaval internationally, and several UK protest groups felt strongly that we shouldn't be sending a team. Once the selections were announced

all athletes were given strict instructions not to open any unexpected

parcels. Shortly before the Games I received such a parcel and, after a quick phone-around, discovered that my team-mates had all received the same. As instructed, we all phoned the police, who immediately sent the bomb squad round to our homes. They opened my parcel at the bottom of my parents' garden – to reveal two large jars containing free samples of a new powdered sports drink!



Having hung up my foils after Moscow, I became women's team captain/manager for the following eight years – going to Los Angeles 1984 and Seoul 1988 in that role. Los Angeles was memorable for the high level of 'razzmatazz'. They were also the first Olympic organisers to really harness the power of the volunteer workforce. In Seoul I had the great honour to be presented with a beautiful South Korean bridal outfit made by the equivalent of the Seoul Women's Institute. I was televised in a 'ceremony' in the Olympic Village, marrying a local young man who I'd never seen before. I just hoped Jim wasn't watching.

After a long break from fencing to allow normal life to creep in, I took on the Fencing Manager role for London 2012. This started with a period of secondment to the Beijing 2008 staff in the run-up to, and during, the 2008 Games

For the next four years I worked as Fencing Manager for London 2012 where I was responsible for both fencing and wheelchair fencing – my first Paralympic Games experience. I could fill an entire book with London 2012 stories! Suffice it to say that I look back on that time with huge satisfaction and enjoyment – despite its many trials and tribulations – and I consider myself really fortunate to have had that opportunity.





As a result of London 2012 I was drawn back into the fencing world, becoming President of British Fencing, and taking on the role of Chief of Protocol with the FIE. At Rio 2016 – my seventh Games – I was an International Technical Official, being on the DT of both the Olympics and the Paralympics.

Once again I'll be on the DT at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, although sadly I've recently decided, with great reluctance, to withdraw from my Tokyo 2020 staff role for the Olympics. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for Tokyo 2020 that all now goes as well as it can – I'll be thinking of them every day.

I'm hoping to go to my ninth and tenth Games – Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028 – but perhaps as a spectator!



OLYMPIC FENCING FACTS & FIGURES

1900 Paris – These were unique as they took place over five months in conjunction with the Exposition Universelle (World Fair). Many of the athletes who took part did so unaware that they were in fact competing in the Olympic Games. Fencing attracted the biggest international field, with three epee events (amateurs, professionals and the top four from each) and two events at foil and sabre (amateurs and professionals). Winner of the 102strong individual epee, and the youngest fencer ever to win an Olympic medal, was 16-year-old Ramon Fonst of Cuba. Trained in France, he also fought in the competition made up of the best amateurs and professionals, coming second behind his fencing master, [Albert Ayat](#) of France.

Because foil was considered to be an artistic weapon, rounds up to the semi-finals were not decided by wins and losses but were judged subjectively on skill and artistry. Those considered to be the most skilful were advanced to the later rounds, whether they won or lost. In several bouts, both fencers were advanced and there were a few bouts in which neither fencer was promoted. Then in the two semi-finals of eight the top four from each qualified for the final, which was won by France's [Émile Coste](#).

1904 St Louis – Because of the cost of travelling to the USA, fewer fencers entered these Games than ever before or since. Only one European fencer made the trip, Gustav Casmir of Germany; joining two Cubans and eight Americans. Individual events were held at foil (nine fencers), epee and sabre (five fencers each) and single stick (three fencers). Fonst retained his epee title and added the foil.

1906 Athens – Until 1949, these Intermediate Olympic Games (intended to become another series of Olympics always to be held in Athens halfway through the normal cycle, but only held once because of cost) were recognised by the IOC as full Olympics. A veteran British epee team (aged 39, 43, 50 & 52) arrived on the private yacht of its youngest member, Lord Howard de Walden, having visited sites of classical antiquity on the way. They proceeded to tie with France for the gold medal, after what was said to be clearly biased presiding against them, and in the play-off were beaten 9-6. After these Games, King Edward VII announced that he would become patron of the Amateur Fencing Association (now BF), a position the monarch has held ever since.

1908 London – London stepped in at short notice to host the games instead of Rome because Vesuvius erupted. Foil was dropped because the organisers considered the weapon to be unsuitable for scoring hits in a competition. "It is the instrument of perhaps the most graceful and courteous form of athletic exercise in the world," said team captain Theodore Cook, "and its whole spirit is destroyed by mere combativeness."

1912 Stockholm – The fencing events were marked by boycotts: the French team walked out in protest when the upper arm was not recognised as part of the foil target, and the Italians withdrew from the epee when their proposal to allow longer blades was rejected. This allowed Belgium to win the epee team gold and Great Britain to collect silver, having won just one match out of three in the final poule.

1920 Antwerp – The Italian Nedo Nadi created the record for the most fencing gold medals in one Olympics. He won the individual titles at foil and sabre, but withdrew from the epee to rest himself for the team event. Italy then won all three team gold medals, giving Nadi a total of five to add to the two he had won eight years earlier in Stockholm.

1924 Paris – These Games produced two off-piste duelling incidents. In the Italy-France foil team final, the president, Gyorgy Kovacs of Hungary, awarded a controversial deciding hit against Aldo Bono in his bout with Lucien Gaudin. Bono swore at Kovacs, who complained to the Jury d'Appel, whereupon Bono denied everything. But Kovacs produced a witness, the Italian-born Hungarian fencing master Italo Santelli and the Italian team withdrew in protest. Back in Italy, the team issued a statement accusing Santelli of testifying against them because he feared the Italians would defeat the Hungarian team he had coached. The 60-year-old Santelli promptly challenged the Italian captain, Adolfo Contronei, to a duel. But Santelli's 27-year-old son, Giorgio, invoked the *code duello* that allowed him to fight in his father's place. The two men duly met, fighting with heavy sabres, and after 2 minutes Santelli slashed Contronei deeply on the side of the head to end the duel.

In the final poule of the individual sabre event, four Italians and three Hungarians were among the 12 qualifiers. After the Italians had fought off, with Puliti beating his compatriots easily, the Hungarians, led by Kovacs (believed to have been the same man involved in the foil incident), accused the Italians of throwing their fights to help Puliti's chances of winning the gold medal. Outraged, Puliti threatened to cane Kovacs and was disqualified. Two days later the two men ran into each other and Puliti hit the Hungarian in

the face. A formal duel was arranged and four months later they met with sabres in hand, fighting for an hour and both receiving minor wounds before the duel was stopped.

These were the first Games to include women's foil and Britain's Gladys Davis won the silver medal. She was followed by Muriel Freeman in 1928 and Judy Guinness in 1932. Guinness sacrificed the gold medal by twice acknowledging hits in one of the greatest acts of sporting behaviour in Olympic history.

1936 Berlin – Electric epee was introduced. The champion, Franco Riccardi of Italy, had fewer victories than the silver and bronze medallists, but more double defeats, which counted as half-victories, and so scored more points to secure the title.

1948 London – Ilona Elek of Hungary defended the women's foil title she won 12 years earlier, going on to collect silver four years later in a remarkable 16 year career that would have been even more successful had the Second World War not intervened.

1956 Melbourne – Electric foil was introduced. By winning the women's foil event, Gillian Sheen, who died earlier this month, became Britain's first and, so far, only Olympic fencing gold medallist. Christian D'Oriola of France defended the men's foil title he had won four years earlier in Helsinki using a non-electric weapon.

1976 Montreal – One of the world's best pentathletes, Boris Onishenko of USSR, was caught cheating by pressing wires in the handle of his epee to trigger a light on the scoring apparatus. Quickly dubbed dis-Onishenko by the press, he was disqualified and sent back to Moscow in disgrace.

1988 Seoul – Electric sabre (still men only) was introduced. It was won by Jean-Francois Lamour (FRA) who defended the title he won in 1984 using a non-electric weapon. He later became French Minister of Sport.

1996 Atlanta – Women's epee was introduced, France winning both the individual (Laura Flessel-Colovic) and team events.

2004 Athens – Women's sabre was introduced, bringing the potential number of fencing events up to the maximum of 12. However, the IOC did not allow more than ten sets of medals, forcing the FIE to drop two team events –

women's foil and women's sabre. Thereafter, the weapons dropped team events by rotation. Mariel Zagunis of the USA won the inaugural individual women's sabre event.

2012 London – The Egyptain Alaaeldin Abouelkassem won Africa's first fencing medal – silver at foil. Lea Melissa Moutoussamy of Algeria became the youngest fencer to compete at an Olympics when she took part in the women's sabre individual at the age of 14.

Valentina Vezzali won individual bronze and team gold to become the most successful single-weapon fencer in Olympic history – 6 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze – and the only fencer to win individual gold medals at three consecutive Olympic Games: 2000, 2004 and 2008.

2016 Rio – Aron Szilagyi of Hungary defended the individual men's sabre title he won in London. Piers Gilliver won Britain's first Paralympic Cat A epee silver medal.

2021 Tokyo – For the first time a full set of 12 medals will be awarded in fencing.

Malcolm Fare

BEHIND THE SCENES PETER & JANET HUGGINS

Back in the late '80's, Peter Huggins was asked to put together a team of armourers to run the Weapon Control at the four FIE "A" Grades that took place in the UK. This led to the formation of the Guild of Armourers.

Over thirty years later as the British Armourer he was asked by Hilary Philbin to become a member of the team for London 2012 with the role of putting together the weapon control teams for all the fencing events – the Olympic Fencing, the Modern Pentathlon Olympic Fencing and the Paralympic Wheelchair Fencing.

The first job was to set up a team for the Olympic test event which was held in November 2011. Janet had been appointed as the FIE SEMI Commission delegate for this and I put together the Weapon Control team. This tournament went off well with little criticism from the FIE and, even better, the British Men's Foil team won the event with Janet as a member of the Honour party presenting the trophies.

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For the summer competitions I had to put together three teams, one for each event though in the main the same armourers staffed the teams. Janet was now a member of the group and acted as my deputy. Weapon Control at the Olympics proved to be interesting as a couple of teams objected to being required to use weapons that complied with the rules and several frank discussions occurred. We were also using the Courant de Foucault (eddy current) testing machines for the first time and this added an extra interest to the blade testing. The Modern Pentathlon fencing required a smaller team and the testing for this went off without problems though the activity on the field of play proved interesting as weapons, if found faulty, were being passed directly to coaches to fix. They would then return them directly to the athletes without them having been rechecked until I intervened and a system was put in place to ensure that weapons were rechecked officially.



The London 2012 Armoury team

The Wheelchair tournament at the Paralympics a month later had the added interest of wheelchair checks with the innovation of rules for the designs on the spoke protectors.

In April 2016, Janet and I were invited to Brazil to run an FIE training course at the test event for the Rio 2016 Olympics. This course went well and after Janet reverted to her role as an FIE SEMI delegate and I officiated at the event where there was some interesting activity in the epee which has resulted in the rule that now requires epees to be wired through two separate holes in the inside guard socket.



Janet was also an official delegate at the Olympic tournament and I was the head SEMI delegate at the Paralympic wheelchair fencing event. Janet found the experience hard work as the weapon control area was remote from the venue and official transport was not available. This led to some interesting journeys by taxi or public transport, one of which

was a taxi ride through a favela. She had no free time and found that the food consisted mainly of packed lunches and packed dinners on most days, although one of her highlights was watching piste side as Richard Kruse fenced in the 3rd/4th place play off.

I had a better experience at the Paralympics as we were based in the



Village and had secure transport to the venue each day. The Brazilian team did an excellent job and there were few problems in the weapon control, the Call Room or the field of play.

Now we are moving on to Tokyo where neither of us is involved in the Olympics but we are both involved with the Paralympics. I am part of the working group for the tournament and have to date visited Tokyo on three occasions for meetings. Again, I am to be the head SEMI delegate and Janet has been appointed as Head Armourer.



WHO WANTS TO BE A VOLUNTEER?

They say it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes any army to deliver an Olympic Games!



The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics was supported by some 440 old and young members of the fencing family who volunteered their time, energy, enthusiasm and love of our sport to deliver what was one of the best ever Olympic Fencing spectacles.

I was the Fencing Services Manager and had the privilege of managing our volunteers and officials. How did I get there? I was living in Australia at the time but the minute I saw positions advertised for London 2012 I knew I wanted to be part of the team. Online job interview at an internet café in France; job offer on the morning of my World Championships event; a six week window to return to Melbourne and pack up 30 years of Aussie life to be back in the UK on 10 December, 2010!

Suddenly I was on the inside of the biggest and most important sporting event in the world.

The purple army is, without doubt, the first image that comes to my mind when I think about the Olympics. The pleasure of friendly greetings every day as I walked around the venue, the willingness to do whatever was needed and the joy of being able to snaffle extra treats for them by schmoozing the catering department!

Olympics are expensive and the money is spent on that which is going to be seen by spectators and TV audiences around the World. Getting the equipment and things we needed for the volunteers was not so easy. This is a real conversation about a £5 coat stand:

Me: *We need a coat stand in that room for the volunteers.*

Clipboard carrier: *No you don't, they can leave their coats on the floor in the corner there.*

Me: *Suppose it is raining? Will they just pile up their wet coats on the floor? What will they be like when they go home?*

Clipboard carrier: *It won't rain – the Games are in August!*

Sound of me bashing head against wall.....

My fellow Service Managers and I colluded on some things and boasted about how we had won some small advantage on others but at the end of the day, we were all incredibly sensitive as to the value of what our volunteers were giving so generously.

What did they get out of it? Being up close to the Olympic stars; being on the 'inside' of the Olympic Games; being spotted on TV by friends and family; wearing the smart purple uniform? Perhaps a little bit of all that but my understanding from our volunteers was that their love of our sport drove them to wanting to be a part of delivering the best event in the greatest show on earth!



It was a long and relentless two years but I claim that I was a good Services Manager for Fencing because my purple army of volunteers did everything that made me look good.

You know who you are and I thank each of you!

*Caryl Oliver
Fencing Services Manager
London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics*



CARON HALE'S FUNDRAISER

Our fellow BVF member Caron Hale is reaching out for our support. Her son is seriously ill with leukaemia and her family are endeavouring to raise money for Bristol Marrow who work alongside the Anthony Nolan Trust to help others with this terrible illness.

A Just Giving page, called Running4Robert has been set up and her husband and daughter propose to raise funds by running the Nottingham halfmarathon. If you can support Caron and her family at this devastating time it would be appreciated. The link is:

<https://www.justgiving.com/search?q=running4robert>



'Bristol Marrow is a part of the network of lifesaving students who work with the blood cancer charity, Anthony Nolan. There are over 50 Marrow groups, with hundreds of student volunteers (like us!) in universities across the country, who are all working towards one thing - saving the lives of people with blood cancer. Every 14 minutes someone in the UK is diagnosed with blood cancer. For someone with blood cancer, a

stem cell transplant could be their last chance of survival. At Anthony Nolan, we match incredible people willing to donate their stem cells, to people with blood cancer who are in desperate need of a lifesaving transplant. Marrow now recruit one in four people who go on to donate stem cells, which means hundreds of lives are potentially saved by Marrow's incredible work. It costs £40 to add each potential lifesaver to the stem cell register. Every penny and every pound that Bristol Marrow raises will help to continue saving the lives of people with blood cancer.'



BRITISH VETERANS
FENCING

If you have a submission for the BVF Newsletter or any comments,
please email nicola.broadbartlett@gmail.com

