

Scottish Fencing

Talent Squad Bulletin 2/08

Introduction

Everyone who has so far been invited onto the Talent Squad has responded and so I am now in a position to announce the names of current squad members:



Lisa McKenzie
Mhairi De St Croix
Natasha Thomson
Ruth Clarke



callum O'Donnell
Jamie Fitzgerald



Ali Evans
Amy Duffus
Emma Byatt
Kirsty Thomson



Chris Harding
Jamie Firth
Scott Chalmers



Harriet Stilley



Matt D'Agostino
Michael Clarke
Neil McGibbon

Although there are no age restrictions for the squad, everyone in the squad is under 20 - in fact for the coming season, the squad comprises 10 juniors and 7 cadets (or 6 foilists, 7 epeeists and 4 sabreurs or 9 girls and 8 boys). The dates of birth run from 1989 to 1993 - a span of only 5 years and I believe that this excellent vintage will ensure fencing success for Scotland for many seasons to come - happy hunting!

Squad members' results of note

It's great to see that Talent Squad members have already racked up some great results and I'm pleased to report the following since the squad was formed:

April 2008 - Scottish Cadet Championships

Women's Foil; 1st **Natasha**, 2nd **Ruth**.

Women's Epee; 1st **Emma**, 2nd **Ali**, 3rd= **Amy**.

Men's Sabre; 1st **Michael**.

April 2008 - Scottish Junior Championships

Women's Foil; 1st **Lisa**, 2nd **Natasha**, 3rd= **Ruth**.

Women's Epee; 1st **Kirsty**, 2nd **Emma**, 3rd= **Ali**.

Men's Epee; 1st **Jamie**, 2nd **Chris**.

Men's Sabre; 2nd **Michael**.

June 2008 - Inverclyde Open

Women's Foil; 1st **Lisa**.

Women's Epee; 3rd= **Emma & Ali**

Men's Sabre; 2nd **Michael**.

June 2008 - Gateshead International

Women's Foil; 3rd= **Natasha**.

June 2008 - Scottish Championships

Men's Foil; 2nd **Callum**.

Men's Epee; 1st **Chris**, 3rd= **Scott**.

Men's Sabre; 2nd **Michael**.

To report squad successes I intend to scan the Scottish Fencing and British Fencing websites, however it's entirely possible that I might miss a good result - feel free to keep me informed and ensure you get a mention. Space and time conspire to deny me from providing a comprehensive result reporting service and so I will limit the reports to a very blunt top 4 in Scotland, last 8 over the border and last 16s abroad.

Squad Training

I am pleased to announce the first two Squad Training Weekends:

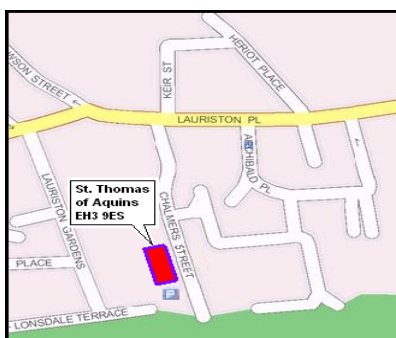
When? - Saturday & Sunday 26th & 27th July and Saturday & Sunday 23rd & 24th August

Where? - Saint Thomas of Aquins High School, 2-20 Chalmers Street, Edinburgh EH3 9ES

Times? - 09:00 to 17:00 each day

Joining me will be **Ken Rose** (coach), **Jen Neil-MacLachlan** (Junior Team Manager) and **Val Cramb** (Senior Team Manager), and of course for those of you coached by someone other than Ken or I, your coach would be more than welcome to join us. There is no charge for attendance.

Bring full fencing kit. There are the hall, but best to bring your some cafes fairly nearby but more convenient. Parking on Lauriston Gardens and is free on Sundays. Access to The training is being run along



a couple of water fountains near own supply of drink. There are bringing a packed lunch might be Chalmers Street is metered the school car-park is from available for the event. with UK School Games from a training point of view as

this makes it more likely that we will have sufficient numbers at all weapons. Of course, there is an overlap between the two squads anyway. Running compatible squads together is also financially sensible. Jen is particularly keen that UKSG Team members attend the August weekend as she will have important information for you about the games, and will pass it on at this event.

Remember, if you haven't already done so, let Alan Loveland at the Scottish Fencing office know which training days you intend to come to. You can do this by posting back the slip he sent you or you can e-mail him at admin@scottish-fencing.com or 'phone him on 0131 453 9074.

Sparring

In the first bulletin I discussed the individual lesson and how it fits into your preparation. This time we are going to look at sparring - the bouts that you have at club or at training events, and we will discuss **how often**, **with whom** and **how**.

I am writing this only days after returning from a training trip to Italy. One of the striking differences between Scotland (and Great Britain in general) and the very successful countries in fencing, is the amount of work done by aspiring competitors. Nobody in Italy would expect even modest success without putting in the hours, and most fencers (and not just their top competitors) regularly fence for 3 hours, 4 or 5 nights each week! Nobody in Scotland does this much, so although 'overtraining' is an established phenomenon, it's highly unlikely that anyone reading this is suffering from it (of course, your fencing year should nevertheless be periodised to include both a rest phase, and variety of training to ensure that you don't become jaded).

The choice of who you spar with is significant although in Scotland it's likely that you don't have the luxury of a vast array of opponents to choose from. Ideally, most of your sparring should be with partners who are of roughly the same standard as you. This exerts a 'selective pressure' on your development; when you execute tactics or a stroke well, you are rewarded with a hit, but when you perform badly you are 'punished' by your failure to score and possibly a hit against you. Too many opponents who are much better than you are results in little reward even when you perform at your best (in fact you are more likely to get hits against a superior fencer by simply being awkward and unpredictable, rather than attempting good technique and sound tactics). Conversely, mostly inferior partners allow you to experience success without performing well, and this is not conducive to rapid improvement. When I fenced at O. F. C. Bonn in the 1980's, fencers were organised into single sex 'A' pool or 'B' pool by standard, and in the big Italian clubs, which can have hundreds of serious fencers, bouts are nearly always same sex. Of course there are benefits to sparring with much superior or inferior opponents. Occasionally and simply watching them in action regularly, allows you to pick up their cadence and style, and hints at the direction that your fencing should be taking.



Sparring

It's also inspirational to watch good fencing, and knowing that your club can produce champions allows you to be ambitious. There is also benefit in easy opponents because you can limit yourself to perfecting specific moves or tactics in an easy environment before trying them out on tougher opposition.

At this stage I want to highlight the difference between 'controlled bouts' and the all too frequent practise of 'free fencing'. Controlled bouts play a transitional role between lessons and competition, increasing the effective learning of the techniques and tactics necessary for success. I suspect that most of the bouts fought in Scottish clubs are characterised by the fencers doing what they normally do with no clear task in mind other than to try to win. Most fencers would benefit from the discipline of controlled bouts and these can take various forms - aiming to improve technical skills or tactical skills, either general or in specific situations. Fencers can undertake tasks

such as to hit with a certain stroke (perhaps unknown to the opponent but known to the referee) or playing roles - for example fencer 'A' can only score from attack, fencer 'B' by defence. Scenarios are particularly effective when the fencers swap roles allowing them to explore from both sides - and the fencers should be encouraged to discuss their insights with each other. Training for specific circumstances is also useful, such as one fencer having to fence from their back line or setting the task of redressing a 2-hit deficit with only 30 seconds on the clock (in this exercise, one fencer learns how to take risks to make a come-back and the other learns how to hold a lead under pressure). Nobody who claims to be a serious competitor should ever find themselves in one of the recurring tactical situations such as the examples above without having at least some experience and insight on how to handle the situation (think about national football teams who often mess up when it comes to penalties because they haven't trained for this eventuality). Controlled bouts can also be useful in developing areas known to be weak - if a fencer always and predictably finishes their attacks in quarte, for example, only scoring a hit when the attack was into a different line from the last hit will develop a better range of finishes.

Role-playing is very important. Most fencers have their default style that may work well against many of their competitors but will not be appropriate against everyone. Sadly, in many cases Scottish fencers have only their usual game so that when fencing someone who has the measure of their game, the last part of the fight looks depressingly similar to the start, as the fight proceeds towards the inevitable defeat. If you practise alternative games, you will have something to fall back on if your attempts to impose your default game onto a difficult adversary fail. Understanding various styles also helps you to identify what opponents are up to so that you can come up with a sound strategy in time to win your bout. These exercises are also a lot of fun and make training more enjoyable. Matches with some of the atmosphere of a 'real' competition are good preparation for the real thing, and of course team matches in training help teams to 'gell' for the big event.

In summary, make sure that you are sparring regularly and frequently, that where possible you spar mostly with opponents of roughly your own standard - whilst understanding the benefits of bouts with opponents much better or much worse than you are, and almost always have some technical or tactical task for the bout.

Don McKenzie (Talent Squad Manager), 278 Colinton Mains Road, Edinburgh EH13 9BS
Tel (h): 0131 441 2677, don.a.mckenzie@btinternet.com