

Fencing coach trying to foster growth in his sport

CORNER BROOK

In 1997 a fencing club was established in Corner Brook in an effort to develop youth interested in volunteering for the '99 Canada Winter Games, and to possibly get a few athletes to represent our province in those Games.

All went according to plan. The question that lingers is Can the sport of Fencing develop in Newfoundland and Labrador?. This is what coach Aubrey Sanders has been trying to answer ever since the 1999 Games.

Fencing is a great way to get fit, develop a new skill and enjoy intense fun while defeating a friend. Fencing is a sport where you are trying to combine athletic dexterity with lightning quick tactics. Fencing has been called

"Chess at 100 miles an hour". Brains usually win over brawn.

There are three disciplines: Foil - lightest, scored with the point on torso only; Epée - heavier, scored with the point anywhere on the body; and Sabre - scored with the side of the weapon above the waist. In all disciplines an electronic scoring box helps tell a referee who got hit, and where. It is the referee who decides who has earned the point.

"You've gotta try it to believe it. This sport is so much fun and it's a lot more demanding than you might think," said an enthusiastic Sanders.

At a recent tournament in St. John's, all three weapons were fenced. Competitors Daniel Lewis, Abigail van Gelder, and Isaac Hughes competed

with their coach, Aubrey Sanders, against much older and experienced Memorial University competitors. This squad definitely held their own. Van Gelder walked away with the silver medal in the Women's Foil after a close 10-5 loss in the final. Meanwhile, Sanders won the Epee final 10-7, the Sabre in a thrilling 10-9 final against the coach of the MUN team, and the Foil 10-8.

When asked what the highlight of the tournament was, coach Sanders replied, "I was really impressed with how well our fencers fought each point. They didn't give an inch. They even asked to fence the others for recreation between rounds. As the president of the provincial fencing association, I am also pleased to have

our first East - West meeting, and hope to have Labrador represented next year."

Sanders believes more competitions is a key to development of the sport.

"To be part of the Atlantic Circuit would be a big step. The distance to travel to other provinces can be a bit of a challenge, but this is experienced by every sport," he said.

Sanders explains that for many fencers, club practices are used to develop skills to a certain level. The club's weekly practices at Herdman Collegiate have witnessed exactly this for the last seven years, he noted, this year attracting 24 youth in the fall. The group at Memorial University has had tremendous success the last two years. Having 60 students enter their doors.

"There is also a group in Goose Bay that practice when their coach is able to be in town. This would bring our total provincial enrollment this past year close to 100. This proves our sport is growing.

"I think the challenge of any coach is to keep athletes motivated, and wanting to learn something new. The best motivator is competition," he said.

Over the years the Corner Brook Fencing Club has taken in Atlantic and National level competitions. Athletes from Corner Brook represented the province at the '99, and '03 Canada Winter Games.

He is in the process of upgrading his coaching certifications with hopes of fielding a more competitive squad in 2007.

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