

Book Review: Closing the Distance

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"Whether or not I was to follow in his footsteps, I would forever be known in the fencing community as Danny Bukantz's son."

So begins the book "Closing the Distance: Chasing a Father's Olympic Fencing Legacy". Throughout the book, Jeff Bukantz walks us through the highs and lows of his career as a fencer, referee, and professional wrestler.

OK, so he wasn't a professional wrestler, but Jeff Bukantz did some fundraising where he wrestled as the Mighty Maccabee against none other than one of my favorites, the Iron Sheik. [Video Link]

Throughout the book, Bukantz shares stories like the Mighty Maccabee and also more on topic stories about his fencing career, including his stint at the Maccabiah Games, Pan Am Games, and eventually, the Olympic Games as team captain.

During his fencing career, Jeff Bukantz was likened to John McEnroe for his abrasive style and penchant for dragging referees over the coals. Though I never saw him punt a mask or spike his foil, I was witness to some of his classic interrogations of his referees! To his credit, Jeff calls himself on his antics and doesn't airbrush his actions in any way - just like Jeff, what you see is what you get.

Closing the Distance also peels away some of the veneer of the fencing world to show us a bit of the inner workings and relationships at work in the US. Much like Golubitsky's autobiography, these anecdotes provide a great view into how things really work so we can compare the fencing world of today with that of years past.

While the stories and insights were entertaining, the book jumped around a bit in chronology as Bukantz kept more to a subject matter grouping than to a pure chronological timeline of events. This pacing worked fine for me as I read the book over a couple of weeks - taking time to read a chapter or two at a time.

The tone of the book is conversational. If you ever have a chance to sit down with Jeff and hear some stories, you'll find the same tone, pace, and vocabulary in action face to face as you do in this book.

Overall, Closing the Distance is a good read with insights into the fencing world and, more importantly, shows how someone who feels overshadowed by their family or peers can make a name for themselves in whatever they do.

Closing the Distance is available at Amazon.com or via Jeff Bukantz's web site.