

US Men's Sabre Team 6th in Vegas

Contributed by Cecil Bleiker
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LAS VEGAS, Nev.- The 2008 U.S. Olympic Team for Men's Saber Fencing of Keeth Smart (Brooklyn, N.Y.), Tim Morehouse (Bronx, N.Y./New York, N.Y.), Jason Rogers (Los Angeles, Calif./New York, N.Y.) and James Williams (Sacramento, Calif./New York, N.Y.) produced the top U.S. men's saber team finish at a Grand Prix event in three years with sixth place in Las Vegas, Nev. at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino.

The result produced a combination of relief and optimism among the team as this was their first competition together as a team since January 2008. The team has not been able to compete together in competitions for those five months due to members of the team suffering some tremendous setbacks this spring. Morehouse had to undergo an emergency appendectomy in March forcing him off the competitive circuit for a time. In mid-March Smart contracted a rare blood disorder called ITP while at a fencing tournament in Algiers, Algeria. ITP severely affects platelet levels in the blood making them dangerously low. Doctors think he contracted this from something he ate while in Africa. Smart was hospitalized for two weeks and given medication and now seems to be back to his old self, but he had to take two months away from the sport and has just recently returned.

While battling the blood illness, Keeth also suffered the loss of his mother, Audrey Elizabeth "Liz" Smart who passed away on May 25, 2008 after a two-year battle with stage IV colon cancer. Keeth had already lost his father, Thomas Smart, when he died of a sudden heart attack in August 2005. His mother and father were tremendous supporters of both Keeth and his sister Erinn, especially when it came to their Olympic quests in 2000 in Sydney, Australia, 2004 in Athens, Greece and now in 2008 on the road to Beijing, China.

Today's performances give the U.S. men much needed confidence going into the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China where they will try to better the near miss fourth place finish in the men's saber competition.

"We haven't fenced together as a group since January because of various injuries to both Tim and myself," said Smart. "To collectively get together; it's a good start. Sixth place wasn't great, but it's not bad either. We know what we need to improve on heading into Beijing."

Morehouse added, "It was great for us to finally be out there together. In a team event there are a lot of ebbs and flows; a lot more obviously than an individual bout where it's to 15 (points). So I think we been practicing good for the team event in practice and here we got the chance to fence three teams that are going to be competing in the Olympics. I think we're on the right track. This is our best result in about three years so a good result for us before the Olympics and we got a lot of good experience as well."

The team will now take a few days off before hitting the homestretch of training prior to the 2008 Olympic Games.