

Fencing News Roundup for January 6

Contributed by Anthony Moore
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Local fencing news from around the United States. Stories include catching up with Mariel Zagunis and Sada Jacobson, the opening of new fencing clubs, and \$10,000 fencing grants offered to students in Luisville, KY.

Ward Melville Girls Win Streak

Local - Melville, New York

After 101 consecutive wins, the Ward Melville girls' team looks to continue their streak. Despite a growing level of talent in the Suffolk County area, the Ward Melville girls have not lost since 2001. They have started the season strong, but they have yet to fence their toughest three opponents: Newfield, Centereach and Huntington. Newfield coach Don Bahr says the Melville matches provide extra motivation to his team, and Huntington assistant coach Alan Kuver says it's important not to go in thinking like you'll be another notch in triple digit win streak. The team to come closest to dethroning the Melville girls' squad is Centereach which tied the Melville team for the 2005 championship. Centereach Coach Glenn Schnabel says "Really, if you want to be competitive, you have to fence year round. You need nine girls who are willing to do it in the offseason, and then you need nine girls who are going to be together for a few years."

Setting New Goals Post Olympics

Local - Livonia, Michigan

Sheila Taormina is the first woman to qualify for the Olympics in three different sports: Swimming, Triathlon, and Pentathlon. Sheila retired after the 2008 Olympics and started a business called EST Events. EST Events is a planning agency for multi-sport and endurance events. EST is in charge of planning an all-women's triathlon called She Rocks on June 28 which will include many Olympic athletes.

Taormina's other endeavor, FriendSport (friendsport.com, still under construction), is a nonprofit that promotes female Olympic role models and gives exposure to lesser known sports to encourage fitness for children and adults. For example, in November Taormina brought the gold and silver medalists in women's sabre fencing to Livonia to teach a fencing clinic.

"I'm the only person on the planet that can stand on the fencing strip and tell you it's just as difficult as winning the Olympic marathon," she said. "None of them are easy." In Beijing, the pentathlon was turning into a disaster early on. Fencing, the second event, was going so poorly, Taormina summoned her sister, Sudee, in the audience and said, "I wish I could leave right now." Her older sister replied, "You will do what you've always done as an athlete. You're not going to give up." Taormina won the next two events, and the lesson stuck.

Columbia HS Wins 5th Consecutive Fencing Title

Local - New Jersey

Columbia high school won its fifth straight title, and tied Ramapo for the most crowns in state history with its ninth. Colombia didn't win a single event, but still took the overall title, with a total placement of 14, three ahead of its nearest competitor. Faizah Muhammad says most schools underestimated Colombia, because they had many fencers graduate.

Northeast Arkansas Fencing Academy Opens

Local - Jonesboro, Arkansas

A new fencing club called the Northeast Arkansas Fencing Academy is opening in Jonesboro. Deborah Schmidt, who has been a competitive fencer at the national level, is teaching the new fencing classes and is the director of the new academy. Schmidt also previously coached and instructed foil classes in California. The first set of classes are scheduled to start on January 6. Schmidt says she missed the fun and fitness she gained from fencing, so she decided to start a club herself.

\$10,000 Fencing Scholarships offered by Louisville Metro Fencing

Local - Louisville, Kentucky

The nonprofit Louisville Metro Fencing Concord Inc. is offering \$10,000 in fencing scholarships to 10 elementary students in and around the Lyndon area in cooperation with the Mayor's Healthy Hometown initiative. Scholarships will provide for equipment, classes and lessons for up to a year and are renewable contingent on class participation, attendance and attitude. Scholarships are available through Jan. 31 and are for boys and girls from Jefferson County Public Schools who qualify for fee waivers, free and reduced-price lunch and similar programs

Zagunis Visits Valley Catholic

Local - Beaverton, Oregon

Double gold medalist, Mariel Zagunis gave the Valley Catholic kids a surprise when she came back to her alma mater. Zagunis attended Valley Catholic from Kindergarten to 12th grade and graduated in 2003. Zagunis brought the fencing gear she used in Beijing and her two gold medals from the 2004 and 2008 Olympics. She went to see the preschoolers, gave a talk to the K-6, and fenced a bout with Valley's head football coach, John Perrigo. At the end of the assembly, several teachers from Zagunis's time at Valley Catholic gathered around her to present her with the school's first Distinguished Alumni Award, given by the school and the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon Foundation to graduates who excel in their life's work, demonstrate a high standard of personal integrity, and strive for excellence to live a valiant life. Zagunis admitted that she gets "really nervous" when preparing to compete at the Olympics, but that it helps her to concentrate, focus and get "pumped up."

Zagunis plans to compete again at the 2012 games in London. She will begin training after she graduates from Notre Dame sometime in 2010.

Sada Jacobson Inspires America's Youth

American athletes had unprecedented success in fencing at the Beijing Olympics. Among them was Sada Jacobson, who took silver in the women's individual saber event, and earned bronze in the women's team saber event. Now she's back in America, and telling kids that they can do it too. Sada says fencing is very lower body specific, and is unlike any other sport due to its unnatural body position. "The beauty of this sport is that anyone can really do it. It's such a mental game that you can use any kind of physical attribute that you have to your advantage,"

Fencing: 2008 In Review

Local - Abingdon, Maryland

Analyzing the fencing year of 2008 is more like a halfway review, because it bisects the fencing season. The biggest news is the Beijing Olympics where the Americans won an unexpected six medals in four different events. Locally, The Executive Committee embraced modernization by requiring all tournaments to be listed on askfred.net, and 2008 saw the birth of a new fencing club: Greg Paye's own Maryland Fencing Club in Abingdon. After teaching non-credit classes at Harford Community College for a year, Greg gathered enough students and momentum and lucked into a reasonably priced retail space.