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THE FOLD OLYMPIC FENCING

En garde

More than half of the U.S. team has NY connections

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On the 15th floor of a non-descript building in the midst of Manhattan's Garment District is situated a veritable (if unlikely) hotbed of American fencing. Seven of the 13 members of this phenomenon, including Gotham's century-long history of significant fencing clubs and collegiate powers (Columbia, NYU and St. John's all have won NCAA titles); the Fencers Club's ability to attract the world's top European-born coaches for decades; and the influence of the Peter Westbrook Foundation.

Westbrook, a 1984 Olympic fencing bronze medalist (and NYC sports Hall of Famer) has been introducing the sport to inner-city kids, and covering expenses for their club dues and lessons, since his foundation was formed in 1991.

The local fencing Olympians

(and their weapons):

Jed Dupree, 24

Manhattan resident and Columbia University grad (foil). Though he grew up in Bethlehem, Pa., Dupree began commuting to the Fencers Club when he was 7; his parents had New York City friends who suggested it. "I noticed other kids who fenced hadn't played soccer or basketball like I had, and I could move a little better," he said.

Kamara James, 19

Jamaica, Queens resident and Princeton University sophomore (épée). Born on the island of Jamaica, she moved to New York when she was 9 and was introduced by a teacher to the Peter Westbrook Foundation when she was 10. She intends to study law.

Dan Kellner, 28

Warren, N.J., resident and Columbia grad (foil). He discovered the sport on a video game "and couldn't make it work," but his mother steered him instead to real fencing at the Pingry School when he was a seventh grader. He is a veteran of six U.S. teams that competed in

world championship tournaments.

Ivan Lee, 23

Brooklyn-raised and a St. John's University grad (sabre). Another Westbrook Foundation product. His father is an auto mechanic who emigrated from Trinidad and has made himself a fencing expert. The younger Lee compares fencing to chess: "I know what you're going to do because I set it up a couple of minutes ago," he said of his strategy.

Erinn Smart, 24

Brooklyn-raised, **Barnard College** grad (foil). She and older brother Keeth were steered to the Westbrook Foundation by their father when she was 13. "I was running track and playing tennis, but I liked fencing immediately."

Keeth Smart, 26

Brooklyn-raised, St. John's University grad (sabre), the first American to be ranked No. 1 in the world in his sport (in spring 2003). "I started with foil but I couldn't beat

anybody. I couldn't beat Erinn. I had to switch course."

John Tiomkin, 25

Hewlett High School and St. John's University graduate (foil). "A few friends joined the high school fencing team," he said. "It was the goofiest thing I ever saw, but I saw how much fun they were having, so I tried it and fell in love with it."

THE WEAPONS

The foil

The épée

The saber

Of the five "combat sports" in the Olympic program, only fencing and wrestling made their debuts in the first Modern Games of 1896. Boxing wasn't introduced until 1904 (in St. Louis), judo in 1964 (Tokyo), tae kwon do, first included as a "demonstration sport" in 1988 and an official sport in 2000 (Sydney).

Though swordfighting traces back to warring duels in many cultures - Roman, Japanese, Turkish, Spanish, Egyptian and others - the modern sport has its roots in 19th century France. Thus, its French

vocabulary: Balestra is a short jump toward the opponent. En garde is the position taken before combat begins.

Flèche is a short run toward the opponent.

Lunge is an attack that includes extension of the front leg, parry a block of the opponent's thrust, riposte the offensive action following a parry, piste the dueling surface.

Three weapons are used in modern fencing - foil, épée and sabre. Scoring touches in foil and epee are made with the tip only. In sabre, thrusting, cutting and slicing all count, so touches can be made with the tip, edge or back of the blade.

Fencers wear masks and gloves for protection, and their weapons are attached to a wire so that touches are recorded electronically. The first to 15 points (legal touches) wins.

THE TECHNIQUES

The basic stance is the 'en garde' position, with knees bent, back arm bent upward and armed hand held toward the opponent. The mis-en-garde is the starting position

for offense, defense and counterattack.

ATTACK

A continuous offensive motion toward the opponent, attacks can be direct or compound with the arm extended, and are often accompanied by a lunge or flèche.

PARRY

Essentially a defensive movement, it consists of detecting the opponent's weapon with one's own. This includes blocking a thrust and retreating.

RIPOSTE

The counterattack after the parry, it is immediate or delayed, simple or compound and can be executed from a standing or moving position.

SOURCE: SPORTS-THE COMPLETE VISUAL REFERENCE/FIREFLY BOOKS

GRAPHIC: NEWSDAY / ROD EYER - En garde (see text); Illustrations: THE WEAPONS - 1) The foil; 2) The épée; 3) The saber; PHOTOS - 4) Jed Dupree; 5) Kamara James; 6) Dan Kellner; 7) Ivan Lee; 8) Erinn Smart; 9) Keeth Smart; 10) John Tiomkin