

A CLUB WITH LEGACY AT ITS HEART

Newham Swords Fencing Club Embrace Olympic Spirit

Linda Strachan

In this issue, we're taking a deeper look at some of our BF affiliated clubs. Each club has shared their story with us to highlight an area of focus, and we meet some of the people that ensure fencing clubs are a great place to be. Take a look at their Club Focus stories to discover how clubs around the UK celebrate their members, create opportunities and deliver wonderful experiences for their communities.

Newham Swords Fencing Club is a community club of around seventy young people and adult members who are from various age groups, abilities and ethnic backgrounds. The club has been praised by 1984 Olympic Gold Medallist, Tessa Sanderson (Newham's Sports Academy), Sir Robin Wales, Newham's former Mayor, Newham's Education Department, the Metropolitan Police and the local NHS for its efforts in bringing communities together, improving young people's performance in school, reducing crime and tackling health issues in the Borough.

Sir Robin Wales "The club is a shining local example of a sports legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games....The coaches help to develop confidence, a sense of teamwork, fair play, perseverance, leadership skills and empathy."

Despite only running for fifteen years, the club has made remarkable progress and is now one of the top junior foil clubs in the country. It is regularly featured in local and national press and has appeared on programmes such as London Tonight and BBC London.

The club was started by and is still run by two British fencing Olympians, Linda Strachan and Pierre Harper. We believe that it embraces the philosophy and spirit of the Olympic movement. So, we asked Linda to tell us their amazing story.



It's just 15 years since we started Newham Swords Fencing Club which is based at SportsDock situated in the shadow of the London 2012 Olympic Stadium. In 2005 Newham Council ran a sports festival called the "Olympic Summer of Sport" aimed at introducing different Olympic and Paralympic sports to the young people in the community. Pierre and I were amazed by the popularity for fencing. During the summer over five hundred local children had at least one taster session and such was the success funding was provided for us to start a new club. Newham Council's "Estate Based Programme" aimed at diverting young people away from crime and into sport, provided the backing needed and Newham Swords Fencing Club was born.

Clearly founded in the community, our goal was to not only provide an open-door policy to everyone in our incredibly diverse community but also to treat each and every person equally. We believed that whilst teaching fencing was at the core of the club, success would come from helping to develop each club member as a person - to give them self-belief and confidence both in the fencing environment and outside of it.

We are proud to have come a long way in a short space of time and we're regularly asked how we have been able to produce



so many talented fencers over the years. Who better to answer that than some of the parents of our members? They put our success on:

- Ability of the coaches to treat everyone equally and make everyone feel that they are important to the club
- Having a 'team' approach to training and at competitions
- Tremendous support at competitions from both the coaches and parents
- Having good, older role models at the club
- Having structured training sessions
- Giving fencers confidence and belief in themselves
- Building a special relationship with fencers over a long period of time
- Teaching fencers important life skills
- The passion shown by Pierre and Linda

"However hard the training, the fencers always come out smiling and can't wait for the next session. Linda and Pierre have made the club feel like a big family. There is so much support at competitions from all the parents and all the children. It has been amazing for my daughter, Lyla, to experience training at Newham Swords - just being around such fantastic fencers and role models is brilliant. Pierre and Linda put so much time and energy into the training sessions, giving all the young people discipline and confidence and, most importantly, belief in themselves." Carol Waller (Parent)

"Newham Swords is a club where boys and girls train together and fight together. Girls and boys have enjoyed equal success and their successes are equally celebrated. In contrast to the messages that society can sometimes send, this encouraging atmosphere and the role models at Newham Swords have helped our daughter, Isabella, become a confident and capable athlete." Anna Manglangit (Parent)

"Newham Swords provides an important space in my daughter's life, both for her physical and mental health. Thank you for making her feel so welcome from the first day she joined. She has been encouraged to

improve at her own pace and this has given her so much confidence. The support from Linda and Pierre has been amazing. Thank you for all you do.” Anon (Parent)

Whilst maintaining our philosophy of “building the person as well as the fencer”, success on the piste has been a key ingredient for us. We have found that good performances and medals lead to more interest in the club and increases participation. We are proud to have supported thirty-five ‘home grown’ young club fencers to represent England and GB at cadet, junior and senior level, managed to win every single major national title at cadet, junior, U23 and senior level, taken titles at various age groups at the EYCs, BYCs and various LPJS competitions, and medalled on the World stage. Every single person at the club (including our parents) have played their part in these successes.



- 8 times London Youth Games Champions
- Eastern Region Champions (at U12, U14, U16, U18 and Senior level)
- U13 and U15 English Youth Champions
- U14, U16 and U18 British Youth Champions
- Winners of the Newham National Junior Series and Leon Paul Series
- UK School Games Gold medallists
- GB U17, U20 and U23 Champions
- British Senior Women’s Foil Champion (by a fencer aged just 16!)
- Gold at the Paris U15 CEP Marathon (first and only GBR club to achieve this)
- Cadet and Junior Individual and Team Commonwealth Games Gold medallists
- Senior Commonwealth Games Gold medallists (individual and team)
- 2010 Cadet European Silver Team medallists (where two of the club’s fencers were part of the GBR team)
- 2013 Junior European Team Bronze medallists (where Kristjjan Archer and Amol Rattan were part of the GBR team)
- 2017 Junior World Championships Team Bronze medallists (where Jai Birch and Rajan Rai were part of the GBR team)
- 2019 U11 and U13 Individual Bronze medallists at the Paris CEP Marathon
- Produced fencers who have represented GB at U17, U20, U23 and Senior European

and World Championships, as well as at the World Student Games

- Ended the 2018/19 Season with the GB Number 1 and 2 Ranked fencers (at cadet level) and the GB Number 1 Ranked fencer at Junior Women’s Foil
- Finished the 2019/20 season as the number 1 ranked club in the LPJS Ranking List

We are equally proud of the successes our fencers have had off the piste. It is proof that we are not only a club that produces good fencers but well-developed young people who are ready to go out into the World and achieve what they want.

We wanted to finish our article showcasing some of our fantastic members - past and present - as well as providing a Sword exclusive. The Newham Swords Fencing Club “Hall of Fame” is a group of young people who have not only achieved fantastic results in competition, but who have also been able to use the important life skills they learnt during the many years they were at the Club, to help them get to where they are today. We are extremely proud of what all of these fencers (and our younger ones and those not mentioned in this article) have achieved during their time with us, and even more proud of the fact that they have been able to take with them the life skills they have learnt whilst with us. They are all great ambassadors for Newham, the club and British Fencing.

Alex Savin

One of the first Newham Swords fencers to achieve success on the international stage was Alex Savin whose career bests include winning the 2009 Paris U15 CEP Marathon (not yet been equalled by any other GBR fencer) and winning a silver medal as part of the GBR Men’s Foil Team at the 2010 Cadet European Championships. Since leaving Newham Swords, Alex went on to study at Oxford University where he became a lecturer and is now involved



Alex (left) Claimed Cadet Team European Silver in 2010 with teammates, Cheriton, Archer & Tofalides

in the sport as a referee, competition organiser and board member of England Fencing.

“Linda and Pierre introduced me to fencing over fifteen years ago, and their passion and enthusiasm for the sport was truly infectious. Whilst I haven’t lived in London for several years now and am no longer a member of Newham Swords, there’s no doubt that my involvement in the sport today, in all its forms, is down to the passion of the people who set up the club and worked so hard to make it a success - both on the national and international competitive stage as well as at grassroots level.”

Alice Campbell



GB Cadet and Junior International, Alice Campbell, first joined Newham Swords at the tender age of seven, as part of the “Mini Fence” group. During the eleven years that she has been a member of the club, Alice has won several junior age group competitions and cadet and junior BRCs, as well as taken double gold at the UK School Games, bronze at the National Junior Championships and bronze at the Junior Commonwealth Championships. Alice is now studying a Sports Science degree at the University of East London.

Alan Lozovik

Alan Lozovik joined Newham Swords at just six years of age. During his twelve years with the club Alan medalled at several junior age group competitions and competed for GBR at numerous U20 World Cups. At the age of 19, Alan left Newham Swords to train for the Royal Navy where the life skills he developed at the club helped him get to where he is today.



Alan with Pierre, Linda & teammate Kartina Feklistova

"I've been with Newham Swords since its inception and for a long time fencing was a very big part of my life. I was an extremely competitive kid when I was very young. The club was a way for me to channel that competitive nature and help me develop as a person. I learnt skills there such as how to stay calm and collected under pressure, passion, commitment and determination to be the best that I can be. Since then, I have joined the Royal Navy and bring those same skills with me to every task and operation. I may have moved on but Newham Swords will remain a part of me. It all started with Linda and Pierre and for that, I thank them."

Amol Rattan

Amol achieved tremendous success at both home and abroad during his time at Newham Swords. His career bests include



Amol - 2013 Junior Euro Bronze

winning both the National cadet and junior titles, taking double gold at the 2012 Junior Commonwealth Championships, taking seventh place in the individual at the 2013 Junior World Championships and taking a bronze medal as part of the GBR Men's Foil Team at the 2013 Junior European Championships. Amol went on to gain a First Class degree in Business, Mathematics and Statistics at LSE.

"Fencing gave me so much in my life, both on and off the piste and I couldn't have done it without Pierre and Linda. They were with me every step of the way in all the results I achieved. The life skills they taught me I use every day in my life. The discipline, focus and determination they nurtured within me not only proved beneficial on the piste but also in every aspect of my life."

Georgia Silk

Georgia Silk first joined the club at the age of thirteen. In the five years that she has been with us, she has rapidly improved as shown by her selection for GBR at cadet and junior level for numerous competitions, including the Cadet European Championships. Her best achievements to date include taking gold at both the 2019 FCL and Bristol Cadet BRCs, finishing her 2018/19 season as the number two ranked fencer in Great Britain, winning bronze at the 2020 Invicta Senior Open, taking gold at the 2020 Youth Five Nations Championships and winning the Kent Senior individual title for the fourth year in succession. Georgia is now studying Mathematics at Queen Mary College, in London, whilst continuing her training at Newham Swords.



"My years of training with Linda and Pierre at Newham Swords have definitely prepared me for my adult life. They have instilled in me their motivation which in turn has given me the determination to succeed. Some of the many life skills

which they have taught me include social interaction, confidence and independence."

Ife Kubler-Agyemang

Along with Alex Savin (who also lived in Manor Park, Newham, whilst training at Newham Swords), Ife was one of the first of our fencers to gain selection for GBR at a Cadet European and World Championships, at the age of just 14. Ife's best results include winning the U12 British Youth Championships, taking gold at several LPJS competitions, gaining selection for GBR at numerous cadet internationals and taking a team bronze at the Junior Commonwealth Championships. When leaving Newham Swords, Ife went onto Bristol University and gained a degree in law, before being accepted for Harward Law School in 2018.



Ife at Harvard

"Fencing allowed me to develop the skills to work under pressure, outside of my comfort zone and strategically. Being part of Newham Swords meant that I felt armed with a family behind me as I went into the fencing world, which to me was a world dominated by the white, posh and privileged."

Jai Birch



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Jai first joined Newham Swords at the age of eight and remained with us for ten years before leaving to study at university. His best results include winning a number of LPJS competitions, taking gold at the Bristol Junior BRC, being selected to represent GBR and both Cadet and Junior Europeans and Worlds and winning an historic team bronze medal as part of the GB Men's Foil Team at the 2017 Junior World Championships.

Kamal Minott

Kamal joined us at the age of eight and is one of the most successful fencers Newham Swords has ever produced. His best results (of which there are many) over the ten years he was with us include winning the UK School Games, the British Youth Championships, the National U17 Championships, a number of Junior BRCs, gaining tenth place at the Junior Worlds, taking a team gold medal at the Junior Commonwealths, being selected to represent GB at cadet, junior and senior level and winning the London Senior Foil, the Invicta Senior Open, the Birmingham International and National U23 Championships all in one season!



"Newham Swords has been a vital part of my career and development as a fencer. It was where I learnt discipline, focus, resilience and most importantly how to win. The well-designed training sessions showed me how to better structure my days to obtain optimal results. Within Newham Swords, respect was not given; it was earned. Only the most consistent and hardest workers rose to the top, breeding an infectious championship culture and mentality which made winning become commonplace and expected. The skills which Linda and Pierre helped implement (and continue to implement into their

young athletes) are still with me today and will continue to play a vital role in my success as I go forward in life."

Kristijan Archer

Kristijan joined us at the age of eleven and achieved phenomenal success both at home and abroad during his 13 years with the club. As a GBR international at cadet, junior level and senior level, his career bests include winning the National Junior Championships, winning a team gold at the Junior Commonwealths, taking a team silver (with club mate, Alex Savin) for GB at the 2010 Cadet Europeans, gaining fifth place at the 2011 Cadet Worlds, taking a team bronze for GB at the 2017 Junior Europeans (with club-mate, Amol Rattan) and winning individual and team gold for Notre Dame at the ACCs. Kristijan now runs his own construction business in Washington DC.



Kristijan Graduating from Notre Dame with Mum & Dad

"Pierre and Linda not only improved my craft as a fencer but pushed me to be a better competitor and an even better person. They have created a place where boys and girls grow to become young men and women, providing them with the tools to succeed in fencing and later life. I will always be grateful to them for their assistance in not only helping me qualify for numerous World and European Championships, a handful of international medals, and helping me receive a scholarship to the University of Notre Dame, but also for teaching me to fight my hardest fight against life's toughest opponents as well as lose gracefully, but only after putting all that I had on the line. I do not know where I would be right now without the support of Linda and Pierre and the Newham Swords community, but I do know that it wouldn't be as good as where I am now."

Rachel Shaw

Rachel is the longest serving member of Newham Swords, having joined us at the age of 9. In the twelve years that Rachel has been with us, she has competed for GBR at various cadet and junior World Cups. Her best results include winning a number of medals at various LPJS and Premier Series competitions, taking bronze at the Cadet Commonwealth Games, taking bronze at the Invicta Senior Open, winning silver at the Leon Paul Senior Open and gaining ninth place at the National U23 Championships. Rachel is now pursuing a career as a personal trainer whilst training at Newham Swords.



Rachel (centre left) with Pierre, Ciaran Archer, Rachel Shaw, Katrina Feklistova & Kamal Minott

"Fencing at Newham Swords has changed my life in many ways. Newham Swords, along with Linda and Pierre, have given me a family environment where I have been able to gain confidence, work ethic and the passion to reach my goals. I have taken the lessons I have learnt from them and put it into my work outside of fencing."

Rajan Rai

Rajan joined us at the age of nine. In his ten years at Newham Swords he achieved a great deal of success at cadet and junior level and represented GBR at Cadet and Junior European and World Championships. His best achievements include winning the British Youth Championships, taking the National Junior Title, ending his 2015/2016 season as the number 1 ranked fencer in Junior Men's Foil and taking a team bronze medal (along with club-mate, Jai Birch) at the 2013 Junior Worlds. Raj went onto to study for a degree at King College and is now involved with coaching young people.

"Training at Newham Swords under the careful eye of both Pierre and Linda, has been one of the most transformative



Raj Celebrates Junior National Title with Pierre & Linda

experiences in my life. I have come to realise that the sword is just as mighty as the pen; as fencing has taken me to heights inconceivable to my younger self. Fencing at Newham Swords has equipped me with a transferable skill set that I have applied to both academia and business."

Teagan Williams-Stewart

GBR cadet, junior and senior international, Teagan Williams-Stewart started fencing at Newham Swords at the age of ten. In just seven years, she has won the Eastern Region Senior, England U15, British Youth U18, Youth Five Nations, and National Senior Women's Foil titles, as well as gold at several senior domestic opens (including the Welsh, Invicta, Leon Paul and London). Teagan has also won all of the various cadet and junior BRC events and finished her cadet career as the number one ranked women's foilist in Great Britain. Her present ranking at Senior Women's Foil is four. Teagan's best achievement to date is gaining a silver medal at the Rome Cadet International, an achievement



Teagan (centre) with Pierre & Linda - National Champions from the 70s, 90s & 00s

not yet equalled by any other GB cadet women's foilist. Teagan is now studying for her A levels on top of training at Newham Swords.

"My time at Newham Swords has been full of knowledge, not only of the sport but my abilities as an athlete. Learning self-discipline on top of fencing is hard to do when you come from a deprived area with not many opportunities or youth facilities. Newham Sword's belief in me as an athlete, other role models that have competed for Newham Swords before me, and the support of my peers and coaches, has made it easier for me within the sport."

Katrina Feklistova

Katrina Feklistova first joined Newham Swords at the age of eleven, having already had a successful career as an elite gymnast. Katrina's best results include gaining selection for GB for several cadet and junior world cups, representing GB at the Junior Europeans and Worlds, winning the Newcastle Junior BRC, and gaining an Individual Bronze and Team Gold at the 2014 Junior Commonwealth Games. At the age of 18, Katrina left Newham Swords to study law at Warwick University, gained her law degree, and is now pursuing a successful career in law, in London.



Katrina Winning the Newcastle BRC

A remarkable club story - it should come as no surprise that both the club and its coaches have been well decorated. Newham Swords won British Fencing's Club of the Year Award in 2018/19, Linda received a BEM in 2016 for services to Newham Swords Fencing Club and the local community and in January 2017, Pierre received British Fencing's Silver Medal in recognition of his excellent work with Newham Swords Fencing Club and to fencing in general.

And the story is far from over as both coaches look forward to continuing working with England and GBR's talented



Linda & Pierre Ready for the 1988 Olympics (courtesy of the Newham Recorder)



Linda & Pierre Today

young fencers whilst increasing the numbers who want to follow in their footsteps.

A man of few words Pierre's sentiments provide a perfect end to this article.

"It would be nice to go full circle and hang up our coaching plastrons once we have produced an Olympic fencer."

Sadly, we couldn't print all of the profiles provided by Linda and Pierre. Some of those missing include GBR internationals, Ciaran Archer, Amy Home, Ellie Knox, Emilija Lukaite, Sophie Tsang and Benjamin Udrzal.

TEAGAN'S TALE

The Story of a Newham Swords Fencer



Wanting to find out more about what it's like growing up in a London Borough and how influential fencing can be in the hands of dedicated coaches, we spoke to Teagan Williams-Stewart. Here is what she had to say.

Tell us about where you grew up, what was it like and how you first found fencing?

I grew up in the London borough of Newham. It's a diverse area with loads of cultures to embrace and learn from. You get to meet people from all walks of life, learn languages, cultural dishes and traditions. I have learnt how to interact with people who don't necessarily share the same background and beliefs as me. Overall, I enjoy the diversity of Newham which is reflected in all the local schools.

I found fencing when I was looking for secondary schools. I went to a school where my current coach, Linda Strachan, was teaching physical education. We started speaking and she told me to come along to a club she runs in the borough, called Newham Swords. After a couple of months, I attended the club. When I initially walked into the club I did not feel out of place as there were fencers from all backgrounds and abilities and some were beginners like myself. At the time I loved the uniqueness of the sport as well as the discipline needed to be able to fence and become a good fencer. Before I started fencing, I took part in a wide range of sports including basketball, football and rugby.

What attracted you to Newham Swords?

Newham Swords has a welcoming and homely feel as you walk into the club. I personally did not feel out of place when I walked in as it is such a diverse club with an understanding of culture and the youth. I've stayed at Newham due to the relationships formed in the last three years with my peers both inside and outside of fencing and Newham Swords has made the fencing experience enjoyable as I know I have a true support system behind me cheering me on whilst I fence. We all train as hard as we can to not only improve our technique and fitness but to make sure we are reaching the best of our abilities. Both my coaches Linda and Pierre are understanding of my commitments outside of fencing, as I am a full-time student. They understand that there are days when I might not be able to train because I have an exam or for other reasons.

What do Newham do well about attracting and retaining members from all ethnic backgrounds?

Newham Swords does not exactly have to do too much as Linda's work within the community and local school attracts local talent. The news of the club's successes within the UK and overseas is spread by word of mouth to attract others within the borough as well as an intake of fencers travelling hours to get to club. Newham Swords takes into consideration the beliefs and backgrounds of all fencers and respects and learns from them. The club is very inclusive and any sign of prejudice towards someone because of their gender, beliefs, background, race or religion is dealt with immediately. Being able to walk into a space and see people like yourself makes you feel at home.



No Words Necessary

If you had to stop fencing tomorrow, what skills and disciplines have you learned at Newham that will help you in life?

There are so many disciplines to be learnt from fencing; perseverance, commitment, determination, resilience and surprisingly failure and how to bounce back from failure. I have had moments where I have lost an important fight and feel bad afterwards but thankfully, I have learnt to analyse what happened, learn from it and work on doing better the next time. All of these are skills that can be applied to every aspect of life whether that be sport, education, or a work environment.



Ready?

What does the fencing future hold for you?

With Covid-19, there is no telling when fencing will return properly. I am keen to get back to normal training and sparring. I am also exploring gaining a coaching qualification. As a Junior until 2022, this year has been uneventful in terms of achievements with lockdowns and restrictions. I am looking forward to moving into Seniors which will be an exciting but challenging time as well as any possible opportunities for overseas training to gain more knowledge of the sport and fencing styles as well as ways to optimize my training. I suppose every fencer's goal is to get to the Olympics and that is no different for me but for now, I am focusing on my A levels and will hopefully move on to University where I will continue to fence.