

The Great Debate

Chris and I just got back from Europe - Bratislava, Slovakia, to be exact - and from this whole trip I mostly recall one of the American mothers saying, "I guess if you want to beat these guys [the Europeans], you have to train in Europe".

Well, I disagree with this point of view; to me, it even sounds a little defeatist, i.e., we've already surrendered and we might as well join them since we can't beat them.

Sure, training in Europe would mean getting to fence the [supposed] best of the best on a practically weekly basis, and there is no doubt we would gain quite a bit by attending all the tournaments Europe has to offer, but we would have to be ready to fence with those guys, that is, we would be able to comprehend what they're doing that is so special, and learn not only how to do it but how to stop them from doing it. And we would have to possess this knowledge before we even bought our transatlantic tickets and arranged for a place to stay, etc.

I have seen these champions fence; I have studied their game and tried - I think with some success - to penetrate the basis and the core of their strategy, and I can tell you that their game is not based on some magic formula or trick attack or whatever but on timing; and that is something we can learn at home with our clubmates, our coaches and our weekly rivals. When we practice something we've been working on with our coach, let's practice it with different timing scenarios, let's practice it with different distances, at different speeds until we're blue in the mask...

Yea, let us build a game that we can take overseas and show off with pride; after all, we've got better facilities than they do, we've got access to a better dietary regimen, and we can do footwork with the best of them. So...

So, when we go and visit these guys, let's watch them, let's take notes about what they do and we'll find out they're fencing the same way we do, we'll find out they put their knickers on one leg at a time, we'll find out we can beat them if we just prepare and believe. We can beat them in Europe after we take advantage of our resources right here in the USA.

It's the end of an old year, the beginning of a new one and all in all, we think that having 2003 turn out as well as 2002 would not be such a bad thing. At all. We certainly had our ups: Chris earning his A (after less than 2 years of fencing) at the JO's last February, Robert finally winning his first National Championship in Greenville this past summer, Billy earning his B in Epee in Orlando at Disney's World of Sports, and that's not all!

While our big guys were collecting honors and points (these are very important), our kiddies were starting to make a name for themselves: Brian Nathan White ("Beaner") went undefeated in his first tournament ever held in Dallas this past fall; Phillip, at the same stop, collected some Silver and of course the Book Ends Man grabbed some gold for himself and his coach; Kat, on the other side of the gender line is making sure that no one, from Palo Alto or TFA will forget her. All these Epee honors coming to our Salle who was always known to be exclusively foil-oriented ! Go figure...

Also, we were able to welcome Neil back from his self-imposed exile. I know I speak for a lot of people at the Salle when I say, " Not soon enough!" Also, on a more personal note, my son John and grandson Christian have started fencing to the delight of Deena who just loves to work with beginners. And last, but definitely not least in the scheme of things important, our Webgoddess announced that she was expecting a baby, a foil fencer, she says; and I say, "Bring it in!"

So, lots of good tidings for Salle Pouj but also some not so good; Cassidy about whom we bragged for so many years - and with just cause - decided to switch coaches at the beginning of this season. Also, leaving us for hopefully greener pastures at Ohio State was Sherice who had not been feeling so hot of late...

We are starting this competition year in Saratoga Springs, NY, with Bear trying his luck in a new age category in Foil and Epee this weekend, Jan 3-5. We wish him all the luck and good calls that no doubt will come to him. Then, it's the Pouj in San Marcos where the "clans" will gather. Shining there will be Neil and Chris and Robert and Deena and Tammy and and and... Neil has already been told he now has a chance to get his A and nothing would please me more than seeing him do it at my father's tournament...

So, a good year has ended; and a good one will evolve from the old wishes of 2002; wishes for health and wisdom in our lives.

To one and all, then, a fruitful new year. Especially to Meredith,