

My Recollections of Bob Foxcroft by Steve Talos

I was on the University of Western Ontario fencing team from 1965-71. During those very formative years “fencing” was not respected as a legitimate sport. The team was provided with nominal funding from the athletic budget to purchase fencing equipment, warm up suits, travel or to hire a full-time coach. We practised in a small smelly old unused classroom in the basement of Thames Hall since the gym was out of bounds, reserved for the real athletes of Western – basketball and gymnastics.

Over my six years of fencing, I was fortunate enough to be the Southwestern Champion of epee on a number of occasions as well as in sabre. I also became the “supposed coach” of the fencing team for a period of time since John Metris, Director of Athletics was not prepared to fund a full-time fencing coach, who really knew what they were doing!

While captain of the fencing team I visited with Mr. Metis (if you could get past his secretary, which I had to use my limited charm) in order to get some funding for warm-up suits and travel expenses to compete at different universities. After considerable discussion he finally relented just to get rid of me!. Victorious I thought. When I went to pick up our warm-up sweats he had donated to our team the old warm-up sweats of the basketball team, which I still proudly own today We were also able to purchase a trophy in honour of Peter King who served as a “rookie” coach for our team for a number of years before graduating. My name proudly appears on it as a consequence of my fencing prowess. **My only real claim to fame -thanks Bob!**

You may be asking yourself by now what does all of this information have to do with Bob Foxcroft?? **Everything**. Bob was our first **real coach** who came every Saturday morning to Thames Hall to instruct the handful of enthusiastic rag-tag fencers which comprised our team in basic fundamentals of epee, foil and sabre fencing

Bob **inspired** us to think and act like a team and most important to be proud to be “fencers” – just as much as the football team was proud of their achievement in being the annual winners of the *Yates Cup*.

Bob expected perfection. He would diligently work with you until you got it right -do it over and over and over again. I can still hear his voice barking at me, sometime to the point of frustration and exhaustion to the point wherein I wanted to quit. Nonetheless he was never mean or angry, but instead ridiculously patient with us as he attempted to refine our fencing skills and shape us into a “team”.

During those years we were not exceedingly successful competing as a team against other Universities although we had our individual successes despite being the “bad news bears” of the fencing circuit. Despite this, Bob never gave up us. He encouraged us to get involved in other fencing tournament in order to improve our skills, and of course he would be involved himself - to my chagrin! We watched him demonstrate his fencing prowess just as the swachbuckling Errol Flynn duelled in the film **The Count of**

Monte Cristo, We all wanted to model ourselves after Bob. His kindness, his patience, his sincerity and above all his radiant smile profoundly touched and influenced all of us.

I was , and still am, extremely proud to have been a UWO Fencer. Bob instilled this pride in each of us as a TEAM members. Bob was the foundation stone for putting fencing on the map at Western and for achieving the recognition we rightfully deserved as fencers at the UWO Athletic Banquets.

It is with profound sadness I learned of his passing. Nonetheless he finally received the recognition he truly deserved from the *University of Western Ontario* for his accomplishments and the sense of pride he left in his wake for future generations of fencers.

