

## **Crossing swords**

A tragic tale is told of one Evariste Galois, a young mathematician who in 1832 spent the entire night before a duel writing down the contents of his brilliant mind, before being killed the next day in combat.

Duelling to the death has been decreasing in popularity since the mid-19th century. Presumably people began to realise the legal implications, as well as the unfortunate health risks that were inextricably linked with such a practice.

Nonetheless, duelling to defeat and humiliate thrives, as the Edinburgh University Fencing Club will verify. This Saturday saw the first clash in a prospectively annual fencing face-off between Edinburgh University and University College London. The teams were battling for possession of the Jungle-Izzard Cup, a trophy conceived by friends 'Jungle' George Foley of UCL and Eddie 'Izzard' Manning of Edinburgh who met on a fencing trip to Germany.

## **Elegance**

Fencing is a fiercely competitive sport, even though the stakes are not as high as they used to be, and one that requires physical strength combined with poise and elegance.

There are three disciplines, each using a different type of sword: foil, epee and sabre. Although essentially similar to each other, each requires dexterity in slightly different aspects of the game. As Edinburgh armourer Owen Pape described to me: "a good fencer should be able to use all three, but will always have one sword they excel with."

The day of fencing at St. Leonard's Hall consisted of nine different categories, each fought by teams of three per side.

Things began on a fairly even keel as the home side took three of the first five events. Edinburgh was short on male beginners and UCL were lacking in senior women, so some cross fencing had to be done. Three female Edinburgh beginners were happy to represent the men's team, only to be beaten by actual men. Gemma Campbell, EUFC Beginner's Representative, was not wholly disheartened by her team's performance: "It's a very physical game and the men were just stronger than us," she explained afterwards.

## **Annihilated**

Due to the aforementioned gender crisis, Kathryn Baillie was forced to lead her Edinburgh ladies out in the sabre competition against UCL's Men's Sabre first team. Her expectations were low, especially as two of her team had never competed in this event before: "I'm sure we'll be annihilated," she commented before the match.

Sabre is the most exciting and aggressive of the three events, in which points can be scored if any part of the sword lands anywhere on the upper body or head of the opponent. Consequently, it requires vicious, thrusting movements and rapid turns of pace. UCL triumphed 45-23, a respectable score-line for the home underdogs, and Baillie paid tribute to Anna Dalsgaard and Angela Lucas-Herald for bravery, despite their lack of experience.

It was up to the Edinburgh men to exact revenge on the same team. Tom Agius, the Edinburgh team captain, inspired his men to a 45-38 triumph after some shaky moments during an intense battle. Agius was happy to have delivered on what he said had been "a lot of hype" before the game.

## **Comfortable**

At 4-3 in events with two to play, Edinburgh were looking good for the first ever Jungle-Izzard trophy. The Foil and Epee events followed in which Edinburgh was never really pushed for the title. UCL fought hard but were kept at bay by the solid fencers of the Edinburgh team. Raph Troitzsch rounded off the day with a comfortable final leg to seal a victory, which, by the end, was highly convincing.

And so, amidst all the revelry of a day of fun and fencing, our minds cast back to the sad saga of Galois the mathematician - not just a young man brought down in his prime, but a genius felled without a chance to shine. The fencers of today cross swords in his memory; a lone figure staring death in the face, scribbling down every thought he could recall before facing his doom. One wonders if an hour or two of sleep may have improved his swordsmanship.

By Matthew Robinson