

Devon County Fencing Union
Competitions Secretary's Report 2019-2020

As ever, my thanks go to all those who have helped, in whatever capacity, to make sure that our competitions run well. Whether as coaches, referees, supporters, or simply as fencers, you are the ones who make the whole show feasible.

Our events calendar has obviously been completely derailed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We were lucky in being able to complete most of our County Championships early in the year, before the virus was strongly established in Britain. I had hoped that its spread would progress slowly enough that the Junior Epée and Sabre could also sneak in before everything shut down, but it wasn't to be. So much for the comment in last year's Report that "I hope things will be more stable in the coming year"!

When things will be able to restart is obviously beyond our knowledge or control at the moment. We will continue to monitor the guidance from British Fencing, which in turn is based on developing scientific advice. Rest assured that as soon as it is considered safe to encourage large numbers of people to travel across the county to engage in strenuous activity in an enclosed airspace, we will be looking to get things back up and running – but not before. In the meantime, the best thing we can all do to bring that day closer is to play our part in reducing transmission of the virus: to limit the number of people with whom we are in close contact, especially where this could provide a 'short cut' between groups otherwise poorly connected.

While attendance at most of our Senior competitions held stable or increased from last season, Junior numbers were consistently and markedly lower. Some of that will be due to older fencers 'graduating' out of the relevant age groups, but these would normally be replaced by new recruits. Has Devon really lost 40-50% of its Junior fencers in just one year? Or are we missing something, that we can address, that's discouraging Juniors from gaining the experience of fencing their peers from further afield?

The BF membership structure is a known issue, but there's only so much we can do directly on that count. Last year it was suggested that holding the Junior County Championships after the Christmas break would allow the fencers to be better prepared, but that evidently hasn't translated to increased numbers.

It was particularly gratifying to see a marked increase in attendance for the Devon Open Foil at Okehampton, given its dual role as a fundraiser for Cancer Research UK. Sue Westley asked me to pass on her thanks, on behalf of their whole family. I believe Ralph has the final details for how much was raised, but I'm assured it was again well into the hundreds of pounds.

The Epée County Championships saw good numbers and a high standard of entries, but conflict of dates meant we weren't able to secure our usual venue – and we found out the hard way just how little time was available on a Saturday in Totnes Leisure Centre! Although the upper room did eventually prove well suited for a single showcase piste, it's not a proper solution and we will be avoiding any further Saturdays there.

The 2019-2020 season is my fourth in this post, and while it remains an exhilarating and rewarding one I believe it's important that the experience be spread around. If anyone else would be interested in taking on the role, or even just trying a competition to get the feel for it, I would be happy to help them.

Stay safe, stay active as best you can, and I hope to see you all in person when times improve.

Alex Scott
28/06/2020