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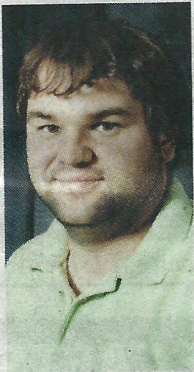
The Villages Daily Sun

SPORTS



HITS & MISSES

KEEPING SCORE



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En Garde! Fencing Turns Out to Be a Tougher Sport to Conquer Than Most



When I was a kid I would always play around as a swashbuckler. I loved getting into fake sword fights with friends and family. Who doesn't love swinging a plastic sword around saying, "My name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die"? On Monday I got to experience what it was like to hold a metal sword. And found out that the only one dying was me. I was just too slow to score points against the fencers in The Villages.

See COTE, B2



Bill Mitchell / Daily Sun

Elliott Smith, of the Village of Chatham, gives advice to Daily Sun sports writer Matt Cote during Monday's fencing class at Odell Recreation Center.

I will start by saying that even though I wasn't great, I did prove my coworkers wrong by coming to work the next day without an eye patch. But that was mostly because I had a mask on the whole time.

When I first arrived at The Villages Fencing Club's practice, I tried to watch some of the more experienced fencers fight a few rounds. I tried to see if I could pick up a few pointers.

It didn't look that hard. An attack here, a feint there, and with my age I should have superior speed. I was wrong.

John Hanosek was nice enough to lend me his gear, so I got suited up and ready to learn. Everyone said I should start with Laszlo Lipovics, since he was the most experienced and could teach me.

Lipovics came over and started with the basics. I needed to put my feet perpendicular at a 90-degree angle and squat. Later, Elliott Smith would explain the technique with grace and poise.

"Just act like you are sitting on a stool," he said.

Lipovics then began to teach me how to fence the sabre. The sabre is one of three fencing classes, and to score a point you have to hit your opponent anywhere above the waist. You can use any part of the blade to hit your opponent.

He started with parrying. He had names for a few of them and for the life of me I can't remember them. I tried, but all I know is they are basically left, right, up and down.

He attacked me a few times so I could get used to parrying, something I was awful at. I was supposed to move my arm from the left to the right, but kept just twisting my wrist. That was a mistake, as Lipovics would then just move his sword in a quick circular



Bill Mitchell / Daily Sun
Elliott Smith, of the Village of Chatham, helps Daily Sun sports writer Matt Cote during Monday's fencing class at Odell Recreation Center.

motion around mine and get the strike on me anyway.

Once I finally got the motion down to block, he told me that once I block I needed to immediately strike my opponent. Ten minutes later he was still hitting me after I forgot to strike after a successful parry.

"If you're not going to strike, then I am," he said. "I can't just stand here."

My time with Lipovics came to an end; he was needed elsewhere. The final tally was 100 points for him, six or seven sympathy points for me.

It was time for a new partner, though, and knowing that Lipovics was the best in the room, I still had hope.

That is when Smith came over to teach me a little more about the basics. He started me with the foil. The foil is another of the three forms of fencing. In foil, only the torso from the neck to the waist is open for points. The arms are off limits, and you only score points by striking with the tip of the sword.

Smith got started on my footwork again, because apparently feet are all that matter when it comes to sword fighting. I had to stay low, keep my

feet at the proper angle and distance. This is when I found out I had another problem – I leaned too much.

When I would reach for a strike, instead of moving my entire body forward into the motion, I would just lean my top half forward. This put me off balance and allowed my opponent an easy parry and riposte.

Smith told me to act like I had strings tied to my shoulders and to keep them square. It didn't work; I still leaned and he still scored points. But I was

getting better. I would parry one or two blows before finally relenting. My offense was just as bad as always, however.

So, Smith decided to teach me another offensive move – the lunge. The lunge is exactly what it sounds like: You lunge forward toward the opponent.

I still had trouble with leaning and falling off balance, but was able to pull off a couple of successful lunges during my time with Smith. But right as I was starting to turn the tide and score points – not really – Hanosek needed his equipment back, it was time for him to leave. It had been two hours.

I hadn't even noticed the time. As bad as I was, I was still enjoying every minute. Fencing was the most fun I have had in a long time doing something I had never done before.

These men and women that I practiced with will be holding the club's first-ever Club Championships on March 31 during the Senior Games at La Hacienda Recreation Center. I strongly recommend anyone who is interested in the sport go and watch.

So as I practice sitting on a stool and lunging in the privacy of my own home – or in the office much to the chagrin of my editor – I just have one last thing to say: En garde!

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is filling up fast!*

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