3 types of swords

**SWORDS**

There are three types of swords in fencing:

**FOIL:** A light thrusting weapon. Its target is restricted to the torso.

**EPEE:** A heavier thrusting weapon. Its target area covers the entire body.

**SABRE:** A light cutting and thrusting weapon. Its target area includes everything above the waist, but excludes the back of the head and the palms of the hand.

Each sword has its own set of rules for the fencer.

**EQUIPMENT**

**FENCING JACKET:** A form-fitting jacket with straps which go between the legs.

**LAME JACKET:** A conductive jacket, worn on top of the normal fencing jacket, by sabre and foil fencers. This allows the scoring apparatus to differentiate between on-target and off-target hits.

**GLOVES:** Protective gloves, worn especially on the weapon hand.

**PLASTRON:** A partial garment worn under the fencing jacket for padding or safety.

**BREECHES OR KNIFFERS:** A pair of short trousers, with the legs just below the knees.

**SOLES:** The socks are either knee-length or thigh-high.

**MASK:** This includes a bib, which is used to protect the neck.

**PLASTIC CHEST PROTECTORS:** This is a must for fencing. An alternative is breast protectors or "salad bowls".

**SHOES:** Shoes must have flat soles.

**BODY WIRE:** This is worn inside the normal jacket to connect the sword to an electrical box for scoring purposes.

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By Priscilla Chew

They are a happy-go-lucky group of weekend warriors who like to horse around during training.

Throughout the interview with The New Paper, the fencers from the Singapore Management University Fencing Club cracked jokes with each other and shared a lot of banter.

They like to make fun of each other, especially Lu Chan Yao, the livewire in the team.

"In any team, there's always a joker who makes people laugh," said the 24-year-old business and accountancy undergraduate.

"My team-mates know that I can take insults, so they derive a lot of joy out of making fun of me! "I don't really mind, as long as we have a good laugh at the end of the day."

But it's no laughing matter when these weekend warriors put on their fighting gear.

A typical scene from their training session looks like this.

Wearing black face masks, white jacket, breeches, gloves and knee-length socks, two fencers cautiously make their way towards a marked strip on the floor.

They size each other up carefully. They plug their body wires into the spool connected to the electronic scoring apparatus.

"En garde!"

The two fencers salute each other. Within seconds, they are crossing their swords in fierce combat until a winner emerges.

The SMU Fencing Club was formed in 2004. It now has 15 regulars, most of whom are epee fencers.

Fencing is said to have originated in the 14th or 15th Century. Both Italy and Germany claim to have invented it.

So what makes these modern day sports warriors so passionate about fencing?
Elaine Lui, 22, a social science undergraduate, said: "Fencing is both an individual and a team sport. We can show how good we are individually, and on the other hand, we realise the importance of team spirit when we take part in competitions."

For Zhuang Hanwen, it is the adrenaline rush that excites the custom research executive. "I get an adrenaline rush whenever I'm fencing," said the 24-year-old.

DIFFICULT MOVE

"I get this sense of achievement when I score a point or when I perfect a difficult move."

"When I'm able to counter a difficult move by the opponent, it also gives me utmost satisfaction."

To join the SMU Fencing Club, members have to pay a monthly membership fee of $20 and about $550 for a full set of fencing gear. Fencing may appear to be an expensive sport, but the club tries to make it affordable to all its members.

Chua Zi Wen, 22, a business undergraduate and president of the club, said: "We try our best to make it less expensive for our members."

"For the new members, they can try out the sport using the school equipment before deciding whether to buy their personal equipment."

Lui feels that the money she has spent on equipment has been well worth it. Her current fencing gear is about three years old, but she reckons it can be used for another year or two.

It does not cost much to maintain the equipment. Sophie Lim, 22, an undergraduate majoring in business management and economics, who is the founder of the team, said: "The only thing you need to change every year is the sword blade."

And it is not very expensive. Less than $80 to change a new blade.

For the uninitiated, fencing may appear to be a violent sport. But the SMU fencing warriors think otherwise. All of them said that they have not suffered any serious injuries so far. They do sprain their ankles, sometimes, but even that is not common. The common injuries are small cuts and bruises.

Injuries aside, what keeps the team together is the friendship and camaraderie.

Liu Renzhen, an undergraduate in accountancy and business management, said: "Our team spirit is very strong. We put up a united front when we go for competitions."

"Even other teams can feel our team spirit. We usually cheer the loudest in competitions."

Complicated setting the biggest bane

The New Paper talks to Chua Zi Wen, 22, the president of the SMU Fencing Club, and Sophie Lim, 22, the founder of the club, about the fencing scene in Singapore.

Q: Is fencing a popular sport in Singapore?

CHUA: Fencing is one of the lesser known sports in Singapore.

One of the main constraints is the complicated setting that fencing requires. For example, we have to bring in proper equipment, such as the piste (the fencing strip).

It is also difficult to book an air-conditioned place for training. The lack of trained coaches is another reason why the sport has not picked up in Singapore. There are only a few coaches in Singapore.

LIM: Fencing is not as popular as other sports, such as tennis or badminton. But more schools and even companies are getting into the sport. A lot of companies are organising one-off fencing events. They see it as a good sport for team building.

Q: What can be done to encourage Singaporeans to take up fencing?

CHUA: It will be good if there is more media coverage for fencing events such as the annual National Novice and Fencing Singapore International.

More support from the schools will also see more students take up fencing.

LIM: To encourage more Singaporeans to take up fencing, there must be more accessibility and awareness.

In terms of accessibility, the sport has to be made affordable and it can be easily picked up without too much inconvenience. For example, the Singapore Sports Council can tie up with the national team, private or school clubs to conduct clinics at community clubs, fitness clubs and other schools, charging only a nominal fee.

In terms of awareness, a television serial based on fencing, for example, could significantly generate more interest in the sport.