

FIE: UNKNOWN HISTORICAL FACTS

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International Fencing Federation (commonly known by the acronym **FIE – Fédération Internationale d'Escrime**) is the international governing body of Olympic fencing. FIE was founded on November 29, 1913, in the conference rooms of the Automobile Club de France in Paris. The nine founding nations were Belgium, Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway. Today, the head office of FIE is in Switzerland and it is composed of 145 national federations. The FIE assists the International Olympic Committee at the organization of fencing events at the Summer Olympics.

Topicality. Being the governing body in fencing field, FIE tries to keep up its good reputation. Sometimes it results in covering up some historical facts. Up to now there are few events about fencing which are known only for minority of people. We will put a light on some of these events.

Aim. To highlight hidden historical facts by FIE to study the history of fencing in depth.

Methods. Theoretical analysis as well as scientific and methodological literature overview.

The first slightly known fact in the fencing history is the accident at Ukrainian-Polish competitions. There was a close call at this competitions. The foil broke Adam Rapka (Polish fencer) and, by inertia, he stuck a piece of the blade into an Ukrainian swordsman Volodymyr Lapitsky. Slipping on the ribs, the piece came out from the side of the abdomen, fortunately not hitting the vital organs.

The second accident which is known by small audience happened with Ukrainian fencer Volodymyr Smirnov.

By 1980, Volodymyr Smirnov was one of the best fencers in the world. The Ukrainian born athlete won three medals in three separate events at the 1980 Summer Olympics, held in Moscow.

At the 1982 championship in Rome Volodymyr Smirnov faced off in an early round against 1976 Olympic gold medalist Matthias Behr of West Germany. While fencing is generally quite safe – competitors wear chest protectors, vests,

gloves, and face masks, among other equipment – this match resulted in a tragic accident. As the two world-class fencers squared off and jabbed at each other, Behr lunged at Smirnov and his sword broke. The broken, jagged, and thin blade penetrated the mesh of Smirnov's face mask, and kept going. It punctured Smirnov's eye socket, and the blade went into his brain.

The match was immediately called off as Smirnov fell in pain. He died nine days later. The death naturally led to sweeping changes in fencing, and fencing gear safety. Carbon steel blades like the one used by Behr and Smirnov were replaced with maraging steel blades, which are much tougher and far less likely to break upon impact. Now, fencers are more likely to wear strong nylon uniforms, as well as masks made with stronger steel alloys. Since the 1982 accident, there have been no deaths in high-level fencing.

The third fact about FIE concerns the introduction of a new mask for fencing. In 2010 the FIE started to work with media and TV channels. The Fencing Federation wanted to cultivate fencing and started to do online broadcasts. In 2012 media asked FIE to make it possible to see the fencers face during the fight. Federation took the offer and effected a three months' deal with Italian manufacturers who introduced new fencing equipment. Thus, the design of masks was upgraded as well as strong glass material was used, which made it possible for cameras to film sportsmen's faces.

However, the Italian masks appeared to be very expensive. For instance, Ukrainian national fencing team had only four of them, and athletes received them only during the competitions at the high level (e. g. World or European championships and Olympic Games). In addition, competitors were complaining about these masks as they were uncomfortable especially because of glass steaming. Later, the glass masks were cancelled as the searchlights dazzled athletes' faces.

The fourth slightly known fact about fencing reveals the fencing style of Eastern European female fencers in the 18th century. Eastern European swordswomen had the reputation of desperate fighters. They liked to find out the relationship between themselves with the help of weapons. Their duels did not carry in themselves any grace that but only blind rage aimed at destroying the rival. At this time, women wore only dresses and skirts. However, in the 20th century with the rise of feminism, the uniform was changed and trousers replaced skirts.

Conclusion. FIE plays a paramount importance in the development of fencing around the world. Despite some unknown and mainly tragic facts in the history of fencing, FIE promotes the introduction of innovations in uniform design, fencers' behaviour and rules of fair play.

References

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