

Fencing harder than Hollywood films portray

By **EAMONN MAHER**

Staff Writer

Set to mark its second anniversary with an X in September, the Escarpment Fencing Club in Acton has attracted some curious beginners who aren't really familiar with the sport's origins.

Practising twice a week on the second floor in the newly renovated Acton Town Hall on Willow St., the EFC has about a dozen regulars training at varying skill levels in each of fencing's three disciplines— foil, sabre and epee.

Those aforementioned neophytes usually find out fairly quickly that it's a physically demanding activity that is actually a lot harder than it looks in Hollywood films.

"We've had a bunch of people in and out. Sometimes they stay, and sometimes they realize that it's an actual sport and not *Pirates of the Caribbean* or *Star Wars* or that kind of dramatic twirl," mused club founder Mike Kasunic.

"But we do try to cater to the recreational people. We're also getting a few more who want to be competitive, from Guelph and Orangeville, and we're hoping it keeps growing."

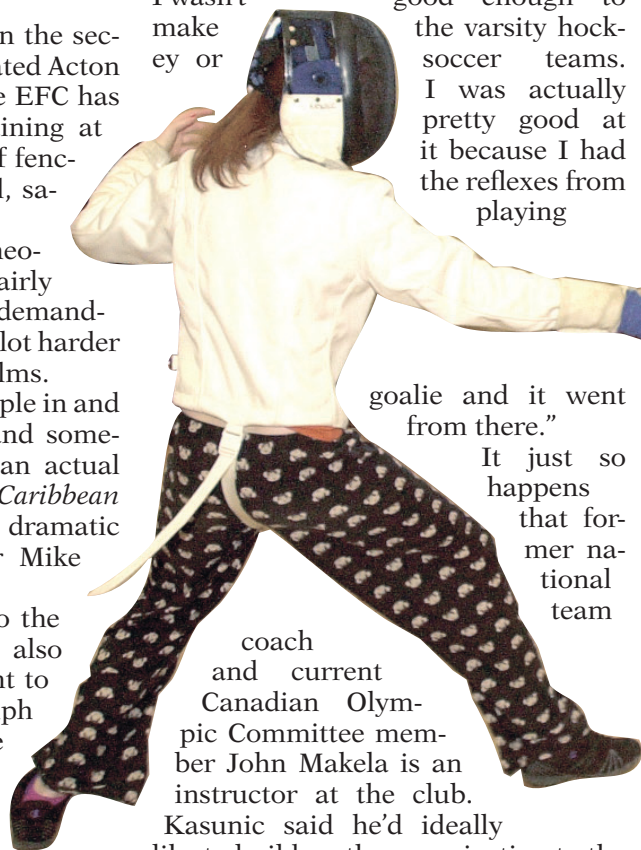
Fencing has long been perceived as being an elitist sport, but Kasunic acknowledges, although the Mississauga high school teacher points out that the cost of the required equipment, which includes about \$200 for a decent sword, is much less than youth hockey expenses.

He also scoffed at the violent stigma attached to fencing, as the Kevlar suits and easily bending swords are designed with safety in mind, adding that he saw an Insurance Bureau of Canada document stating that fencing had approximately the same number

of injuries per year as lawn bowling.

"I call it playing chess at 200 kilometres an hour," said Kasunic, referring to the speed of an Olympic-level sabre fencer's sword tip.

"People think that fencing is something that rich kids or snooty adults do, but I did it in university because I wasn't good enough to make the varsity hockey or soccer teams. I was actually pretty good at it because I had the reflexes from playing



goalie and it went from there."

It just so happens that former national team

coach and current Canadian Olympic Committee member John Makela is an instructor at the club. Kasunic said he'd ideally like to build up the organization to the point where the coaches are paid for their work, but at this stage, recruiting new members is the priority.

Members of the Escarpment club were in Gatineau, Que. this past weekend for the Canadian Fencing Federation Championships, where Kasunic upset the number-two-ranked competitor in the men's over-40 sabre in the quarterfinals on the way to earning a bronze medal.

Chris Rudolph placed 26th in the men's cadet (under-17) epee, while Kasunic's 14-year-old daughter Natasha

finished sixth in the women's under-15 sabre.

Fencing at the Canadian Interuniversity Sport level has been popular for a long time, but it has undergone a revival amongst high schoolers as the first OFSAA-sanctioned provincial championship in over two decades was recently held in Stratford.

Three junior members of the EFC— Natasha Kasunic, Kira Oliver and Landon McPhee— representing Georgetown's Christ the King Secondary School, participated in the Arc Angels Fencing Invitational and earned silver medals in

the team category after being edged out by St. Andrew's College of Aurora for the overall title.

Finding a coach at the school is the biggest obstacle at this point as the teacher who oversaw this year's team, Megan Woods, will be away on maternity leave.

"We finally got a team going at CTK the year that I graduated," lamented 17-year-old Oliver.

"I like the speed and finesse involved. I've seen movies like *The Princess Bride* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* and thought that would be so cool to do. I guess that's what attracted me to it. But when you get into it, you realize it's a lot of hard work."

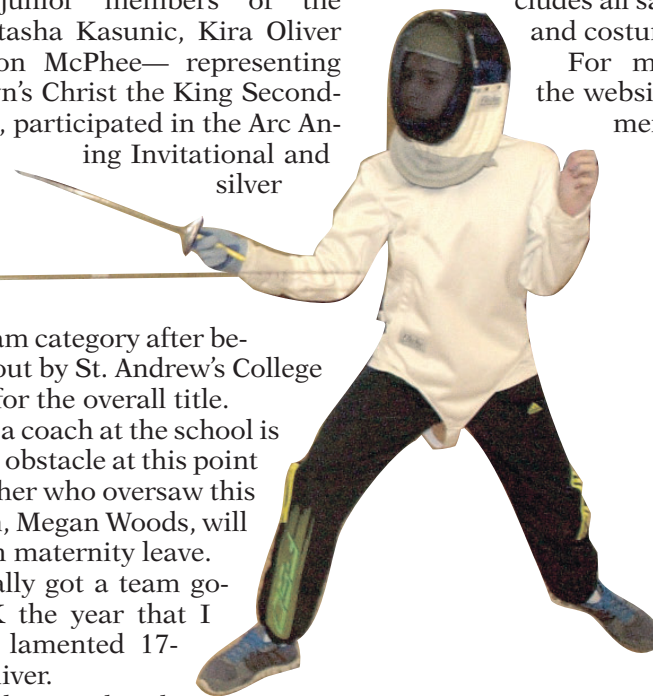
The club will show its theatrical side again this summer by teaming up with Guelph-based To Be Determined Theatre to present the second-annual Swords & Stage summer camp July 8-12

at Total Dance Innovations Studio in Acton.

The camp is open to youths age 6-16 and will consist of a half day of basic fencing skill development by a certified instructor and the other half learning about acting techniques on a theatre stage.

Cost is \$250 for the week and includes all safety equipment and costumes.

For more info, visit the website <http://escarpmentfencing.com>



Escarpment Fencing Club members (from left) Landon McPhee, Kira Oliver and Natasha Kasunic wear the silver medals they earned recently at the provincial high school championships in Stratford for Christ the King. Pictured above, Kasunic (left) fences with Tristan Toste in Acton. Photos by Eamonn Maher

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