

IRVINE COMPANY APARTMENT COMMUNITIES

# AVENUES

January/February 2009

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South Coast Fencing Center

Photo courtesy South Coast Fencing Center

# almost faster than a bullet

## Fencing's allure is its speed and daring

Fencing is as old as ancient Egypt and yet as modern as any action sport that requires discipline and courage. It is Errol Flynn in the classic 1938 movie, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, as well as the athletes at busy South Coast Fencing Center in Santa Ana, Orange County's largest with more than 150 members ages 10 to mid-70s. Enthusiasts learn with one of the three fencing weapons, foil, épée, or saber; many compete nationally and internationally.

Fencing is one of the few sports—ping pong is the other—in which replays are shown in slow motion. The swish of a weapon is the second-fastest moving object in sport after a speeding bullet, according to the U.S. Fencing Association (USFA), and a defensive move to avoid a touch can be as strategic as it is quick.

Dylan Kanner, 12, of North Tustin, became a member of South Coast Fencing Center some two years ago after being dissatisfied with the usual athletic activities. "I always liked *Star Wars* and light sabers and Zorro stuff," says the sixth-grader. Co-founder and vice president Missag Parseghian became interested in the sport because it evokes "the well-rounded Renaissance man, where swordsmanship is part of his training in life." Don't be fooled, though; about as many females as males take up fencing.

The center, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in October, grew out of the UC Irvine Fencing Club. Three of the four co-founders were teammates. During a recent night, more than a dozen youth were being trained in the foil. Personal choice usually dictates weapon choice. However, "the saber favors the

aggressive person, épée the patient person, and foil a blend of the two," says head coach and president Brenden Richard. While the weapons are similar, the tactics for each are different.

Foil, like épée, is a thrusting game. "You are going to take the tip and run somebody through," Parseghian says, giving a historical view. Today, few injuries occur as layers of clothing and a distinctive mask protect the body.

The saber is more a slashing game, designed after the cavalry sword and battles in and among horses.

"Fencing is a physical form of chess," he says. "You are making various moves to see how your opponent is going to react. You evaluate, and re-evaluate."

America is on the upswing in this sport. In Beijing this past summer, our athletes won a U.S. record six Olympic medals in fencing. Some 25,000 Americans belong to USFA, and a reported 200,000 are involved. Beginning this month, the South Coast Fencing Center offers a youth developmental program for 6- to 10-year-olds. And Irvine Company Apartment Communities residents can receive \$25 off an introductory class to learn more about the sport. ○

By Craig Reem

**Information:** The U.S. Fencing Association: 719.866.4511 or visit [usfencing.org](http://usfencing.org), South Coast Fencing Center: 714.549.2946 or visit [southcoastfencing.com](http://southcoastfencing.com) (See insert for resident discount)