

Come Out Fighting

H&E NORTH TALKS TO NICK PAYNE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SWORD FIGHTING INTERNATIONAL (SFI), ABOUT COMPETING AS AN OLYMPIAN AND THE BENEFITS OF CORPORATE TEAM BUILDING.



What does your role at SFI involve?

As Executive Director I oversee all operations, but over 80 per cent of my role is marketing and business development. One of our biggest challenges is finding new activities for existing clients and the right choice of activity for new ones. We have a fantastic blue chip client list including Google, eBay, Cisco Systems, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, BP, BT, Exxon

Mobile, Microsoft and many more – however once they have tried fencing, the same group are likely to want to try something else.

How did you come into this line of work?

My parents met at the Unilever Fencing Club many years ago, so at the age of 10 I started fencing. I went through the various age groups until I made the British team at the U17 Euro Championships. I was then part of the U20 GB team and then competed at the Senior World Championships. I also went to Barcelona as reserve for the 1992 Olympic Team.

Later, when I was living in Australia I saw a gap in the market for a unique team building activity that involves both men and women equally that could be done both indoors and outdoors. The outdoor lifestyle in Australia got me thinking about how we could set up a corporate activity that was interesting and fun but stimulated the brain as well as the body. The business was set up and is still running throughout Australia, although the main focus is now UK and Europe with plans to expand to the USA and eventually China and the Far East.

How important is corporate team building?

Taking employees out of their normal work environment and giving them a fun activity that stimulates their thinking allows them to do something memorable and will enhance their positive feelings for the company they work for. These days, especially among generation Y, there is a feeling that the company must work a bit harder to keep them from straying to another firm. It is much better to put different employees in a situation where they have to work together outside of their normal comfort zones.

What does fencing involve?

Fencing is one of the four original Olympic Sports that has been in every Games since 1896. It takes five minutes to learn the basics but at least 10 years or 10,000 hours to master. The skills required include fitness, speed, accuracy, strategy,

tactics, quick thinking, determination, concentration, but most of all self-belief that you are the best and that you can beat your opponent.

What effect did London 2012 have on fencing?

The presentation of fencing at the London Olympics showed how exciting and entertaining fencing could be. More people are now trying fencing in the UK and abroad, with many beginners classes at local fencing clubs receiving more participants. The GB team are now competing well at world class competitions helping to boost the awareness of the sport.

What other activities and packages does SFI offer?

We provide Olympic sports such as archery or shooting or Paralympic sports including goalball or boccia. We can also offer more unusual activities such as the Banksy Street Art tour, Ice Sculpting and an Indiana Jones Style Whip Workshop. Also with the new Star Wars film coming out, a movie-based lightsaber-type Jedi training with a choreographed and filmed fight can be arranged which delegates find great fun.

The Competitive Edge package is ideal for 10-50 people and is a two-hour workshop with the first hour covering the basic skills of fencing. The second half involves strategy games which test what delegates have learnt, how well they work as a team and how well they can communicate under pressure. A mini competition can be added with prizes for the most victories and most stylish fencer.

For conferences or meetings when delegates may not know each other very well, we can offer a 30-45 minute ice-breaker training session. This promotes camaraderie and produces lots of laughter. For evening events, we can host fencing displays as part of corporate entertainment.

For companies who have more time or can tap into the Learning and Development budget, we can offer some neuroscience in our Get the Point programme using PRISM Brain Mapping. This would involve delegates completing an online questionnaire in advance and using the resulting profile and behavioural traits to set up the strategy and team building games to best help people understand how their behaviour can be modified to produce the outcome they desire.

For more information, visit Swordfightinginternational.com.