

## **Youth Development Program**

Dr Darren Marks

### **Overview**

A new program in 2019-20, with 66 participants (32 women, 34 men; pretty much 1/3 of which each weapon).

Consultant: Ralf Bissdorf (creator of Singapore national program).

Consulting Coaches: Ralf Bissdorf, Maitre Guilio Tomassini, Maitre Michael Marx, Victor Gantsevich, Vincent Brazeau, Maitre Cedric Deloison and Vilmos Szabo.

Consulting Athlete: Max Hartung.

Coaches (Ontario): Darren Marks, Maxime Brinck-Croteau, Alice Lu, Alecs Tudor, Samuel Harwick-Browne, Vincent Brazeau.

### **Goals**

1. To create a training cadre of age appropriate experience across clubs
2. To encourage fencing within and outside of Ontario in the context of competition
3. To stimulate clubs, and promote youth fencing

Secondary Goals (in years two and following)

1. To work with CFF HPP program to make a seamless program.
2. To work with coaching development as much as its committee wishes
3. To work with referee development as much as its committee wishes
4. To work with other OFA stakeholders

### **Historic Means**

1. Delivery of 4 events, two of which are 'in-house' fencing and two of which are traditional events. These are hosted by either member clubs or the OFA (Toronto International Youth Challenge).
2. Delivery of one camp, lead by Ralf Bissdorf, and in which high level athletes are present.
3. Incentives for member clubs to host youth tournament (e.g., membership of YDP already registered by program).
4. Incentives to participate in out of province tournaments and one international camp (funds reimbursed back). Camps were Germany and Italy.

### **Feedback and Evaluation**

1. The program is a living program and will be evaluated as to its effectiveness at regular intervals by coaching staff.
2. Teamsnap, survey monkey has been used to allow immediate communication with leadership from parents
3. Open listening from member clubs by leadership

## **Obstacles**

1. Most membership comes from less than 6 clubs
2. GTA-centric despite offering to other clubs.
3. Lack of buy in.
4. Lack of other OFA stakeholders.

## **Report**

The primary goals were well supported with successful camps, participation of the one competition (UTO) and general feedback from parents and athletes/coaches. The leadership has engaged in active listening to members and participants and addressed concerns accordingly. Of course, a full program was not possible. Likewise, it is not possible to actualize on many of the concerns given our new reality within the global world.

Highlights, aside from the achieved youth participation, was bringing international fencing to our young athletes with the masterclasses. These were well attended (15-20 per class) for each weapon, and the athletes would have garnered much. The program also received a 5000 grant from the CAO that was used to bring in younger coaches and to help offset the Ontario Winter Games.

We do, however, need to integrate the program with other OFA programs if they wish.

The lockdown of March 2020 impacted the YDP substantially in two modes. First was the cancellation of the Toronto Youth Challenge, of which one fee (50\$ per athlete for a total of 3,300\$) was not reimbursed. The second was the loss of the large camp, but this was replaced by the Zoom Masterclasses with Peter Joppich, Gerek Meinhardt, Lee Kiefer, Jason Pryor, Max Hartung, Max Heinzer and Mariel Zagunis. The continued impact of no fencing pretty much globally and travel restrictions meant that to reimburse some international camps (Bonn for sabre, Italy for foil/epée) could not occur which would have used up the remainder of the funds as the program is designed to zero out. The Masterclasses had three persons of colour or mixed race, and 2/6 representation across male and female competitors.

We did, however, honour incentives for achievement in US programs and paid out 1500 to athletes as bursaries to the point of the pandemic.

Marks has submitted a program plan for the pandemic/post pandemic world to the OFA entitled YDP Beyond which arranges regional events. This plan has been given to the OFA Board in August of 2020.

It is recommended that the Toronto Youth Challenge be re-established as soon as possible and the credit, in part, garnered at the CNE for the OFA devote one day to this event as planned in 2019-20.

It is clear, however, that USFA fencing will not give us a Superyouth event for national points given internal issues (e.g., replacement of staff) and the pandemic impact on large scale events. The CFF HPP Director has agreed that the Toronto Youth Event be central event for its developing Y14 program and is the centre pole event of that program. We have also shared our vision of Youth Development with the HPP and have agreement on the connections, skill development and other development that flows into the HPP and YPDP programs.

At the time of writing, it is not clear what to do with the proposed Team Ontario gear (it would have been part of the costs of the international camps) and the balance of money in the program.

Returning to the above obstacles:

1. The new YDP Beyond program addresses the regional problems, and lack of buy in by placing events as direct benefits financially to clubs who host them.
2. Leadership is open to working with other OFA committees as much as they wish.
3. Leadership is open to helping design gender and BOPAC representation as much as possible and to work to make this policy.