

H. W. F (BILL) HOSKYNs MBE (1931-2013)

British, Commonwealth and World Champion and Double Olympic Silver medal winner.

It is with great sadness that British Fencing announces the death of Bill Hoskyns on Sunday 4th August. British Fencing has lost one of the “greats” of the sport.

Bill started fencing at Eton and continued at Oxford University. He burst on to the international scene at the 1955 World Championships, where he played a major part in Britain's foil team bronze medal, beating all four members of the French team. As a foilist, he won Bologna (1959), was runner-up in the Duval and in Ghent (1960), came third in the Paris Martini (1959) and in Warsaw (1960), won the Paris Martini in 1963 and came 7th at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.

At the 1958 world championships in Philadelphia he reached the epee final after a quadruple barrage and then faced two Russians and five Italians, among them Olympic and double world champion Eduardo Mangiarotti. Hoskyns fenced brilliantly to become World Champion. He is, to date, only one of two British Fencers to have been senior World Champion.

It was at epee that he had the greatest success. As well as becoming world epee champion in 1958, over the next seven years he won tournaments in Luxemburg (1958), Paris (1958 & 1961), Brussels (1959 & 1960), London (Martini, 1962) and New York (1962 & 1963), and collected individual and team silver medals at the 1965 world championships in Paris to establish himself as one of the world's leading epeeists

Bill fenced at the Olympics Games six times from 1956 to 1976 – a record for a British fencer. He won team silver in Rome (1960) and individual silver in Tokyo (1964). He also fenced in seven world championships from 1955 to 1967, winning individual gold and silver medals and team silver at epee and a team bronze at foil during 13 successive appearances in the British team.

In the Commonwealth Games, he won three individual gold medals at epee and one at sabre, as well as a silver at foil.

In the British Championships he was the most successful fencer ever, with 21 medals. Winner of the British epee title four times (also runner-up four times and third twice), he won the foil title three times (also runner-up three times and third twice) and the sabre title once (also runner-up and third once) to become only the second man to win all three championships. This is an achievement unlikely to be equalled.

Bill often flew to European events in his single-engine plane. In 1959 he, Allan Jay and Gillian Sheen created a sensation by becoming the first civilians to fly into Budapest since the war and across the Iron Curtain. He was a very popular figure in international fencing and his generation of fencers still ask after him at major FIE events.

He had extraordinary timing and could put his opponents under continuous pressure so as to induce them to attack at the moment of his choosing, when he displayed an uncanny ability to pick up his opponent's blade at the very last moment. His nonchalantly elegant style gave him a gentleman-amateur image that was much admired. Watching him in action, one American opponent said simply, "Suave – so suave, it's painful."

Bill was always the perfect gentleman on the piste and known for his spirit of FairPlay.

Bill was appointed MBE and a Vice President of British Fencing and was recently elected to the FIE Centennial Hall of Fame. He continued to support fencing and nothing would have given him more pleasure than another British Olympic fencing medal winner.

Bill is survived by Georgina, whom he married in 1960 and his five children; Karina, Jonathan, Celia, Sophie and Dominic and ten grandchildren. Bill put the same passion into his family as his fencing and was a devoted husband, father and grandfather and encouraged all his children to fence and had recently been taking one of his grandsons to learn fencing too.

I am sure we would all like to extend our heartfelt condolences to Georgina and all his family at this sad time.

Keith Smith MBE
British Fencing
Vice President