

Black fencing members excel in a 'different' sport

By TJ Stancil
Staff Writer

Fencing—the ultimate sport! Well, at least it is to some and surprisingly more people than you would think. The University fencing team is a national power in its sport, and annually has All-Americans and Top 10 finishes.

The surprising thing about fencing is that a significant amount of its top athletes are black, and this is no exception here at UNC. Reggie O'Rourke, a senior from Raleigh; Andre Walker, a sophomore from Jacksonville; Kim Barnes, a junior from Raleigh; Keona Parker, a sophomore from Angier; Delwin Elder, Knoxville; and David Karatz, a native New Yorker comprise the black fencers at the University.

"There has been fencing at UNC for 25 years, all coached by Dr. Ron Miller," said O'Rourke, captain of the team. "The fencing team has the highest grade point average (of a varsity sport) on campus, and we have had many Fencing All-Americans."

"There are three weapons in fencing: the epee, the foil and the saber. Men use all the weapons, while collegiately, women use just the foil. The foil is used for the torso, and the saber is used for the waste up. The epee is a full body weapon."

These three weapons are used in the different fencing competitions called dual meets which are individual bouts to five.

There are some risks in fencing, but so are there in any physical contact sport.

All equipment must pass an extensive safety test before competition.

Fencers use bulletproof under-arm Kevlar, as well as heavy duty masks used to endure lots of pressure.

Most of the protective gear is perhaps overcompensation, which speaks volumes for the safety of the



BLACK INK
Black fencers head up a team which is a perennial national power.

fencing sport.

This year's team is made up of about 55 fencers, around 20 of which are women. There are two ACC schools that field fencing teams, the

Andre Walker stated: "People tell me they didn't know we had one. More people need to come out and see what it (fencing) is all about."

Many of the fencers took different routes to fencing. Kim Barnes stated, "This is a varsity sport. There were open tryouts and the Fencing team here has a great tradition."

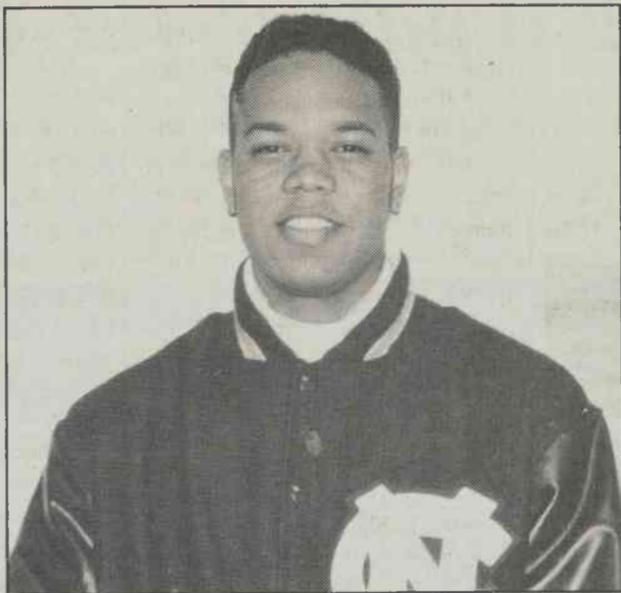
"I needed a P.E., and I couldn't find soccer so a friend convinced me to try fencing," O'Rourke explains.

"I was a spectator and the girlfriend of a fencer," Keona Parker jokes. "I took the class to find out what it was all about. I found out it was lots of fun and very competitive."

They are usually around 120 who try out for fencing, with about 85 to 90 making the final cut.

The fencing team has a national schedule including stops at Temple, New York University, Chicago, Penn State and Boston. Their first team competition is Nov. 7-8 in Philadelphia at the Temple Open. Their first home event is Jan. 9-10, and I know they would be glad to

other being Duke. The majority of fencing teams are in the Northeast and Midwest, with a few out West. When asked how people reacted when they found out about the black fencers. O'Rourke said, "People were surprised and made a lot of jokes. Someone even asked me, 'Do you steal stuff?'"



BLACK INK/COREY BROWN
Senior captain Reggie O'Rourke

see any supporters—especially some black faces.

"One of the best sabermen is 5-time Olympian and Bronze medalist Pete Westbrook. He was black," O'Rourke noted.

"At NYU, Peter Lewison is a former top (black) foilist who teaches fencing to underprivileged kids." And so there could start the next generation of black fencers.

It seems that any sport, no matter how disciplined, African Americans have found a way to excel in it.

Fencing is no different.

As Kim Barnes explains, "Fencing is not hard to understand. There is always someone there to explain."

Coach Miller added, "We have tryouts at the beginning of every year, a fencing class (a P.E. elective), and a Fencing Club every Tuesday and Thursday nights from 7:30 to midnight."

So for all you undiscovered potential fencing superstars, Coach Miller has a foil for you.



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