

Swordplay runs deep in Piantadosi family

BY BRANDON COWARD
STAFF WRITER

Thirty-five years ago, Steve Piantadosi joined the North Carolina fencing team and picked up a sabre for the first time.

Last year, when his son of the same name decided to attend UNC, the sword was passed to a new generation.

"I knew UNC had a good program and that he would fit in well there," the elder Piantadosi said. "Steve had contacted most of the other coaches nationally, and I think he recognized Coach (Ron) Miller's positive attributes."

Unlike his dad, Piantadosi — whose Tar Heels went 3-2 at this weekend's Brandeis Invitational — had been fencing for ten years before he set foot on the campus.

He first picked up a sword at age eight and was soon a member of the Chesapeake Fencing Club.

"Steve was regularly beating collegiate-level fencers when he was still in high school," the elder Piantadosi said. "By the time he hit the door here, he was a much better, more experienced fencer than I ever was."

The younger Piantadosi started out fencing against older fencers, something that his dad says helped him improve.

"As a young fencer he was decent, but it seems like he was always at the bottom of the age bracket," Piantadosi's father said. "Starting young allowed him to develop a lot of skill and character and an ability to think on the strip."

As a youngster, Piantadosi's father instilled in him a certain reverence for UNC fencing.

"I grew up with the understanding that Carolina fencing is holy," Piantadosi said. "Dad would always say stuff like, 'If Ron Miller

were here, he wouldn't let you do that.'"

All fathers and sons have their similarities and differences.

The father believes that he and his son share a basic way of looking at the world.

"We're both basically cerebral kinds of people," Piantadosi's father said. "We tend to approach things logically, rationally."

Though they share the same blood and a similar outlook, the elder Piantadosi said he and his son are still very different people.

He said that the differences can be characterized by the stereotypical personality traits of the weapons they chose to fence.

"I think one of Coach Miller's skills is assigning people to weapons that suit them both physically and emotionally," the elder Piantadosi said. "I think his temperament is suited to foil and mine was more suited to sabre."

Sabre fencers have generally been seen as the "wild-child" personality type, mischievous and aggressive. Foil fencers are generally more detail-oriented and reserved.

Piantadosi says his father influenced his training by steering him toward a style more like that of a sabre fencer.

"Dad has tried to make me a more intense fencer — more bent on demolishing my opponent, psychologically and physically," Piantadosi said. "I'm pretty passive and my dad has always tried to make me more comfortable with wrecking someone's day."

Piantadosi gave the example of a meet at Johns Hopkins six years ago.

His opponent kept spinning completely around, frustrating his attempts to score.

The elder Piantadosi told his son to hit the opponent in the

unprotected area behind his mask next time he spun around.

The younger Piantadosi never did take his father's advice, but he got the message: don't be afraid to do what's necessary to defeat your opponent.

Of all the things that the father and son share, perhaps the most curious is their tradition of accidents involving Miller's possessions.

Coming home from a meet, the elder Piantadosi was riding Miller's motorcycle. As he reached back to adjust his sword, he lost control

and slammed the vehicle into a tree, totaling it.

The younger Piantadosi, in a somewhat less destructive incident, carelessly flung a fencing shoe through the glass window of Miller's trophy case.

And though the game may have changed over the years, UNC fencing hasn't. Ron Miller is still coaching Steve Piantadosi, and Steve Piantadosi still is breaking his stuff.

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@unc.edu.

CORRECTION

A page 3 photo caption in Monday's paper incorrectly identified Heather Stevens as a UNC cheerleader. She is actually a member of the UNC dance team.

To report an error, contact Managing Editor Daniel Thigpen at dthigpen@email.unc.edu.

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