

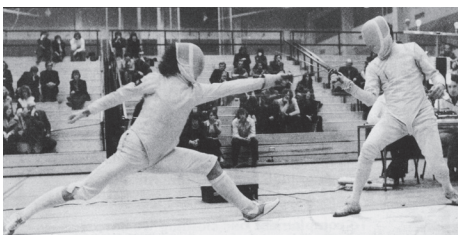
ROBERT JOHN BRUNIGES (3 AUGUST 1956 - 6 FEBRUARY 2023)

Malcolm Fare

Rob Bruniges, who died from heart failure at the age of 66, started fencing at Catford School in south-east London where, from the age of 11, he was taught by John Fairhall. He came to prominence as a 15-year-old, when he won his first international junior foil tournament at Gelsenkirchen, followed a few months later by another victory at Basle. In 1973 he reached the L16 in the strong Paris Martini and came third in the World Youth Championships, becoming a member of the British Foil Team for the first time at the age of 16. He went on to represent Great Britain at a further six World Championships and three Olympic Games (twice as Captain). Equally promising as an epeeist, he won at Budapest in 1974 and Zofingen in 75.

After a year of injuries and now coached by Steve Boston, Rob went to his last World Youth Championships in 1976 fully fit. His extraordinary L16 bout in the foil Championship lasted two hours on four pistes, as electrical problems caused persistent off-target lights. Only at 8-all was it realised that the batteries in the box were running down. He calmly won the last two hits and the next bout to reach the final pool. Despite losing to Fabio Dal Zotto (ITA), who was to become Olympic Champion four months later, Bruniges won all his other fights, including against future Olympic and World silver medallist Pascal Jolyot (FRA), and future World and European Champion Andrea Borella (ITA), to become Junior World Champion.

Over the next few years he displayed fluctuating form, beating the then double



Bruniges wins the 1976 Junior World Foil Championships



Bruniges powers his way through the defence of Kuzma (POL) in the final poule

World Champion Alexander Romankov at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, but scoring only one hit in his following three fights. In 1981 he won the British Foil Championship (he was to be runner-up three times) and capped this performance by beating future World Champion Philippe Omnes in front of his home crowd in Paris to win the Duval.

A fencer of outstanding natural talent, Rob Bruniges could unleash beat-fleche attacks of devastating speed from a perfectly relaxed stance and developed an amazing close-quarters parry-riposte that whipped round the back of his neck and became his trademark hit.

Graham Paul recalls that at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the team was invited to a reception at a house with a swimming pool. Somehow Rob's false hand ended up in the pool. The water dissolved the glue and the hand fell apart. Knowing Rob needed the hand for balance while fencing, team manager Allan Jay persuaded British Airways to fly out a replacement.

Over the 54 years that he knew Rob, teammate Pierre Harper remembers him as extremely competitive on the piste, but a great friend away from fencing, with a similar down-to-earth and wicked sense of humour. Linda Strachan remembers him for

the support and advice he gave her when she first got into the senior squad, as well as his practical jokes at training camps.

Some years after Rob had stopped fencing, Jane Hutchison met him by chance in Bath and he asked if she could sell his fencing kit. Shocked that he was considering giving up the sport he loved, she invited him to visit Bath Sword Club. He brought along his partner Sandra, who joined a beginners' course whilst he watched and encouraged. When a place came up for an epee coach, Jane suggested he should apply and that was it - he was back in the fencing world again. Within no time he had built up a group of keen young epeeists at the club; he was also proud when Sandra did her epee qualification in Hungary and joined him in coaching. They were a great double act.

In 2017 BF's Pathways Director Steve Kemp suggested Rob join a coach developer programme, which involved working with activity providers such as sports and holiday camps, where young people often try fencing for the first time - up to 250,000 a year are introduced to the sport this way. His fun and active approach to sessions made him a popular coach developer and fencing became one of the most asked for sports at activity provider venues. In 2019 he introduced fencing to Saint Lucia by way of a core coach course. He loved the island and its people and they loved him, making him the ultimate ambassador. At the same time, he and Sandra developed their skills at other BF courses and they often ran events as a team. In order to run 3-weapon courses, he completed Level 3 at foil and epee and Level 2 at sabre.

Rob leaves Sandra and four children (from a previous relationship): Abby, Alex, Daniel and Ben.



Bruniges parries a fleche attack from Steven Paul during the 1983 Champions Challenge (photo: Peter Barrett)