

STANLEY BERGIN

THE COLUMNIST WHO ALWAYS GETS THE STORY BEHIND THE SPORTS HEADLINES



TIDE TURNS AGAINST FENCER GOUGH!

WHEN he was only 16 years of age he won the National Schoolboys' title, Killanin Trophy and National Junior crown, in addition to figuring on a successful senior team in the national series. A sporting world of further success lay ahead of him—and then the tide turned completely against him.

I am referring to young fencing star, 18 years old Laurence Gough, who is now studying Arts at U.C.D., whom he also helped to win the national epee title for the first time this year.

I always imagined that fencing in this country was free from controversy, but there is always the exception. To put it in a nutshell, Gough is under a term of suspension which does not end until August 31.

Plenty of correspondence

Having been asked to look into this case, I found myself reading a staggering amount of correspondence, dating back to February 9 last. Around that time, Laurence Gough had enquired whether or not he was eligible to defend his schoolboy title.

I have not been able to discover where it is stated that a university student is "out of bounds," but I know now that the initial enquiry led to a series of letters.

Cutting a complicated story somewhat short, I come to February 28 when the Irish Fencing Federation ruled that Gough be suspended and his licence withdrawn. Naturally, an appeal was lodged, but this failed.

Space does not allow me to delve in detail into all the matters referred to in the correspondent, but it does seem to me that an injustice has been done to one of the most promising and successful young fencers in this country.

It has been suggested to me that a new rule was introduced somewhat irregularly and that under this Gough was not permitted to defend the title to which I have already referred. This seems

to have sparked off any amount of trouble.

I hear, too, that the coming "Colours" fencing match between Trinity and U.C.D. may not take place, the story being that Trinity will not take part if Gough is included on the U.C.D. side.

Is Irish fencing in such a strong position that it can afford to have these trouble spots? I doubt it very much, although I suppose Paddy Duffy and others will disagree.

From time to time in this column I have referred to the excellent work being done on behalf of fencing by a dedicated group. Irish representatives have done remarkably well in Continental competitions, but a long term of suspension on an 18 years old does not appeal to me in the slightest.