

# STANLEY BERGIN



THE COLUMNIST WHO ALWAYS GETS THE STORY BEHIND THE SPORTS HEADLINES

## Final chapter in fencing 'serial'

This is the final chapter in the fencing 'serial story' which began last week in this column with comment on the term of suspension imposed on 18-year-old Laurence Gough.

As I mentioned yesterday, I was anticipating a visit from the president of the Irish Fencing Federation, Kevin Byrne. He duly arrived, accompanied by another Federation representative, and there followed a most interesting discussion.

I was aware that the suspension had stemmed from matters associated with the schoolboys' and schoolgirls' championship, in which Gough was declared ineligible to compete. There was a question of whether entry was confined to people still at school, or whether, as in the case of Gough, a university student was qualified.

The President has explained to me that he gave a definition on qualifications, in order to clear up an ambiguous situation which had arisen. On the other side, it appears, it was being suggested that a rule was being changed by one individual member of the Federation. Having heard both sides of the story, I am accepting the official viewpoint.

### Now a little wiser

When the federation representatives came to see me they were not aware that yesterday's column contained chapter two in this story. They did agree, however, that they had erred in permitting young Gough to compete while under suspension.

They are now a little wiser and I cannot imagine a similar situation arising in the future. Indeed, I hope that the federation are not called upon to suspend one of their members again.

For reasons which should be obvious, I am not going to enter into the complete background of this suspension in question but I am perturbed at one very important "aside" to this unfortunate issue.

I mentioned in this column last week that the proposed match between U.C.D. and Dublin University might not take place. Unfortunately, it was inferred by Trinity members that they could be accused of being scared of meeting a U.C.D. which included Gough.

The inference was that Trinity would be defeated. This was never meant to be conveyed. In any event the match is off. The fixture, I understand, was to have been used by U.C.D. as a "colours" affair and they insisted that they were quite entitled to include young Gough in their side.

Trinity . . . quite rightly, in my opinion . . . decided that they would be leaving themselves open to reprimand, if not suspension, if they competed against a suspended fencer.

It is part of the U.C.D. case, I understand, that not all student fencers are affiliated to the Irish Federation but I cannot go along with them in their view that a suspended fencer could figure in this colours match.

And just as I have criticised some other sporting associations for wasting time in debating comparatively trivial matters and in almost constant "hair splitting," I feel that there can be no justification whatever for the U.C.D. attitude in this fencing issue.

Incidentally, Irish fencing officials are looking ahead to the junior open championships this week-end and also to the Irish Open in Trinity College on June 3, 4 and 5. Detailed information was sent to Britain and America in the hope of enticing outside challengers for the Open and the response has been quite good.

Indeed, home officials were caught napping insofar as a letter arrived from Mr Gerard

Cushing in New York . . . and it was written in Irish!

Letters in plain English have been passing to and from Dublin to London and Australia for the past while back. The reason for all this correspondence is the visit of the Australian touring cricket team in 1968. On the itinerary as it stands, the Australians are due to play Ireland OR Scotland and, the I.C.U. honorary secretary, Jimmy Boucher, is making a strong bid to entice the Australians to this country.

"We have been negotiating with them for a long time and also with the M.C.C. and we should know where we stand quite soon. I have made it known that the Australians have only come our way once since the last war but they have been to Scotland on each trip in the meantime.

"I believe that the Australians are leaning towards alternate visits to Ireland and Scotland and, while they have not fully committed themselves, it should follow that we would be included in their 1968 arrangements."