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THE COLUMNIST WHO ALWAYS GETS THE STORY BEHIND THE SPORTS HEADLINES

Trouble in the fencing world

QUITE a stir was created in Irish fencing circles by my reference last week to young Laurence Gough, whose term of suspension is not due to expire until August 31 next.

Shortly after my report appeared, an anonymous telephone caller was on the point of telling me that the story was incorrect, when I reminded him (quite politely) that I was not given to discussing subjects of this or any other kind with people who did not wish to identify themselves. Sorry to have cut you short, friend, but you should know the score by now.

Soon afterwards, Paddy Duffy, one of the leading personalities in the sport, came through with his version of the Gough case. He filled me in completely with his version of the background details, and where fencing is concerned, I have always respected his opinions. He had hoped that the last had been heard of this suspension, and was sorry to see it referred to in this column.

I was made aware of some interesting aspects of the case but, as there are so many personalities involved, I do not propose to go into detail at this stage. What was confirmed, however, was the FACT that Gough was allowed to compete in several events . . . even though he was and still is under suspension.

Situation is unique

This is an unique situation in my experience of sports coverage. I am told that permission was granted in order to show how far the Irish Fencing Federation could lean over backwards in Gough's direction, in their attempt to resolve what was obviously a tricky situation.

This gesture on the part of the Federation could have led them into all forms of troubled waters. Gough, I knew, competed abroad while under suspension, but no official step

was taken by any official body. If the Irish Fencing Federation . . . as I know they are . . . feel unhappy at the image being created by my column reference of last week, how can they explain away this most extraordinary state of affairs?

Could you imagine the Irish soccer selectors naming a suspended player on the side to meet Czechoslovakia in the Nations' Cup? Even if the Irish Fencing Federation can in time make known a strong case in favour of the long term of suspension imposed on Gough, how can they justify irregularities in their own Council ranks?

Incidentally, official telephone call No. 3 came from a Dublin club captain who was particularly anxious to discuss the matter with me. If the debate does take place, he is to be accompanied by one of the leading officials of the Federation. That talk, should it ever take place, will help to clear the air, I am sure.