

Don't fence me in

Larry Gough has given up fencing. He's won nine Irish titles and been placed something like thirty-six times and now he's retiring. At nineteen years of age. And if that seems odd, wait until you hear why.

Back in April, 1964, Larry took up fencing and joined the **Salle Duffy** Fencing Club. He turned out to be pretty good and after a couple of years was actually selected to go to Vienna for the Junior World championships. Then in autumn, 1966, he went to U.C.D. and found he hadn't time for study and club activities, so he left the Salle Duffy Club.

Next February, the trouble started.

For those who don't know fencing, the National Schoolboy Championships are run annually by the Irish Amateur Fencing Federation. Until '67, the organisation of the championships had been in the hands of the British Legion Fencing Club. Larry wrote to this club to see if, as a university student, he was eligible to enter.

As it happened, from '67, the organisation of the event had been taken over by Salle Duffy, but Larry got a letter back from the Legion which, though it could not give him absolute confirmation, gave him reasonable indication that he should be eligible. Next thing was he heard the Council of the Irish Federation had met to formulate a new rule which would debar him. He was suspicious about his information and after taking advice on the matter, presented himself at the championships, ready to fence.

Brother **Tony** takes up the story in a statement which he later saw fit to draw up and sign:

"On February 18th last, at 2.45 I went to Salle Duffy with Laurence. We went inside and upstairs. Laurence was set upon by all the entrants for the competition who informed him that he could not fence in that particular event"

The statement goes on at some length, but the conclusion was that Larry could not fence that day. Ten days later he received a letter from the Irish Amateur Fencing Federation suspending his membership and withdrawing his licence until August 31, 1967 "as a result of your conduct in connection with the recent Schoolboys' Championships."

Well, he appealed. Today, Larry, who has become a little cynical, claims that of the five members on the appeal committee, four were from Salle Duffy. In any case, the suspension was enforced, although Larry was allowed to fence in the forthcoming Coupe d'Europe team event.

During the time he was in Germany for this event, Larry tells us he was invited to fence in Turkey in November. It was an invitation that was to cause some controversy.

In the meantime, still under suspension until August 31, Larry paid a call on sports

columnist **Stanley Bergin**, who aired the whole affair in the **Evening Herald**.

Apparently Bergin's article of May 4 annoyed somebody. On May 8 Bergin reported an anonymous telephone call on the subject and a call from **Professor Paddy Duffy** (of Salle Duffy) giving his version of the affair.

Next day, in a column headed 'Final Chapter in Fencing Serial', Bergin reported **Kevin Byrne**, president of the Irish

Fencing Federation had called to see him, again about Gough.

Whatever else was said in that particular column, the Herald sportswriter was premature with his heading. On May 17, Bergin was writing more about the young fencer's suspension.

It is unlikely that the series did much to improve relations between Larry Gough and the fencing hierarchy. Larry himself obviously didn't think so,

for he kept news of his Turkish invitation to himself until September when he reluctantly notified the Federation . . . and promptly found himself in the middle of another controversy.

It seems at this stage there was considerable mistrust between Larry Gough and the I.A.F.F. According to Larry, the Federation doubted he had received a personal invitation and claimed that an invitation had been received from Turkey to the Federation. Both requested photostat copies of the other's invitation. Neither apparently received such photostats.

It took a letter from **Nefi Guven**, president of the Turkish Fencing Federation, to sort that one out. After some further correspondence, Larry got permission to fence in Ankara "provided that it is understood that the financial outlay of the Turkish Federation does not include the travelling expenses."

Larry is no Paul Getty and he could not help wondering if this stipulation was aimed at stopping him from going, but his blood was up and expense no object. He went to Ankara and came sixth in the Istanbul Foil International Contest.

Since then there was trouble between the Federation and the U.C.D. Fencing Club to which Larry belonged. Presumably this was sorted out. Certainly Larry has been sorted out. Not so very long ago he received notification that he had been suspended for life from the Federation.

When Larry Gough called to see us with his story and his file of correspondence, he was not in the best of humour. Put bluntly, he was a bitter man. He feels he had been victimised all along the line by the people who head the fencing movement in this country.

Outsiders are hard put to sort out the complexities of a situation such as this — and space in this department allows nothing more than a skeleton report like that outlined above — but it seems obvious that something is badly wrong somewhere.

And it seems catastrophic that a young man with proven ability in any sport should find himself unable to fence ever again for his country in amateur competitions simply because people can't get together and settle their differences amicably.

