

Daniel Summerbell for Men's Captain

The 2014 to 2015 season has been a hugely successful year for Cambridge University Fencing Club, culminating in a Varsity whitewash and double BUCS championship.

Next year we face a new challenge. The men's firsts will lose a third of their starting fencers. Oxford's largely rookie team will have had a year to bed in, and will be desperate for revenge after the repeated thrashings that they have received this year. They will be fencing Varsity at home, and in recent history two thirds of Varsity matches have been won by the home team. Before the BUCS finals this year some of us, only half joking, dismissed Oxford as "not a challenge." Yet, despite our hugely superior team, the match was far closer than it should have been. We simply cannot afford to be complacent next year.



To meet this new challenge we need a captain who is committed, experienced, and a leader.

We need a captain who is committed to Cambridge, to CUFC, and to the team. The blood in my veins is Light Blue. I have lived and worked in 19 different cities in 5 different countries, and yet Cambridge is without doubt the one I love most. If Oxford had been the ones to offer me a PhD then I would have spent this morning chipping ice off a pickup truck in Williston, ND. When I took over the club accounts this year, the system was the same mess it had been in 2006. Today the job is done at the touch of a button. Even though I have no formal qualifications as a coach, Novice teams coached by me have never been defeated, and many Novices have gone on to smash Oxford in the Varsity as members of the seconds' teams. Why? Because I inspire my fencers with the determination and passion I have for this club. Throughout my six year CUFC career, the only victory that's mattered is the team's. Last year in the Varsity, having demolished the Oxford captain 8-4, it was my call to bring myself off, and be rewarded by the sight of Derrick thrashing Justin Bewsher 5-1. You can ask Harry if that attitude has changed this year. When it became clear I would not be needed this year, I switched weapons and began training to fill the impending gap in our sabre team in 2016. Indeed, one of the few consolations of our bitter defeat in Varsity last year came when one of the team said to me: "This year I wanted to win it for me. Next year, Dan, I'm going to win it for you." He did.

We need a captain who is experienced. Come October I will have been fencing 20 years, longer than some of the squad have been alive. I have fenced U20 A-grades both at home and abroad, captained a student Five Nations team, and have eight years' experience of University team fencing. I have fenced for six very different Cambridge captains and learned from their strengths and weaknesses. I have won three gold medals and one silver in the BUCS championship, and I'm still bitter about the silver. I know the three weapon format inside and out, have seen every tactical play in the book, and filled every role: finisher, holder and sacrificial lamb. I have fenced Oxford 17 times, winning 12 of them, but only one of those wins was a Varsity match. I know the pain of losing four Varsities; three of them were away matches like the one we face next year. To me that's a shameful record, it hurts to write it down, but the question you have to ask yourselves is: Do you want a captain who has only known a single, straightforward victory, or one who has not only that, but also knows the traps, the pitfalls and the pain of losing, and is determined to save you from them?

We need a captain who is a leader. He must listen to the advice and expertise of his teammates who may have more insight into the performance of their colleagues and opponents in their specialist

weapon, and he has no official sanction except to drop a team member, a move which hurts the team as much as the individual. This informal style of leadership is one I have had to develop over the years, leading teams of roughneck Texan frackers, a jury as its foreman (and youngest member), French chemical workers contemptuous of "Les Anglais," officer cadets through the smoke and confusion of a platoon attack, hikers during a medical evacuation from the Scottish Highlands, or teams of Canadian oil executives running multi-million dollar projects. Never have I needed to 'pull rank' in these situations, but instead worked alongside my team to pull through. That is the style of leadership I promise to bring to you this year as CUFC men's captain.

Additionally, I firmly believe that a strong second team creates a strong first team, putting pressure on places, and providing good quality training. It is no coincidence that firsts' and seconds' Varsity victories tend to go hand in hand. The second team often have a more punishing travel schedule and more difficult selection, and their efforts have in the past been under recognised. I have already begun the process of extending club colours to the second team, and will complete this whether or not I am elected captain. As men's captain the second team can count on my support. I hope I can count on yours.

As captain I have promised to provide the required commitment, leadership and experience to build on the solid foundations laid down this year, take our team to Oxford next year and win. Those of you who know me well know that I can do this. I understand that it is harder for those new team members, who have not shared a piste with me at a Varsity match, to take this on trust. They may also be tempted to pick a star fencer over an experienced leader, particularly when Harry has done such a great job of leading the team from the front. I don't pretend to be another Harry; I won't be one of the best fencers when I compete for my place in the starting line up next year. However, next year's captain will have a different job. In the pressure cooker of the Oxford Exam Schools it will be better to allow our top fencers to concentrate on performing, and the captain on leading.

I have no delusions of grandeur. Out of the famous quartet I can only offer you toil and sweat. So, as a team, we shall have to ensure that Oxford provide the other two.

GDBO