

OLYMPIC GAMES SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT





MTS bronze: Aldo Montano wins team bronze for Italy (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Olympic Games Special Supplement 2012

Malcolm Fare was employed by the Olympic News Service to review every fencing event at the London 2012 Olympic Games and to write news stories about the sport. A team of reporters added 'flash quotes' from many of the competitors. The following special supplement is a distillation of that output, illustrated by the best photographs taken by Serge Timacheff of FencingPhotos, Chris Green of thePhotoman, Aidan Byrne, Carl Borack and Graham Morrison.

'Amazing', 'awesome' and 'fantastic' are heavily overused words, yet time and again people fell back on them to describe the presentation of the London 2012 Olympics in general and the fencing events in particular. Quite simply, as a member of the FIE emailed me afterwards, "*The London Games were the best in history. Not only for perfect organisation of all the competitions and the superb opening ceremony; but for the beauty of the sites of the events and especially the road races in the centre of the city.*"

Fencing took place in one of five arenas in the vast ExCeL centre – 10 events over nine days with 212 participants in the individual competitions, plus 34 team reserves, from 44 countries. A lobby area with large screen replays of the previous days' events and six display cases showing weapons and equipment from the past, courtesy of the National Fencing Museum, gave spectators somewhere to pass the time before taking their seats. When people did settle down, they were treated to a series of superbly presented competitions that took everyone's breath away.

By winning three gold, two silver and two bronze medals, Italy came top of the medal table and in so doing leapfrogged over France to become the most successful fencing nation in Olympic history with a total of 121 medals, 48 of them gold.

Italy's women foilists dominated to an extent not seen since the Germans at Seoul in 1988, sweeping the board in the individual event and winning the team gold. In the process, Valentina Vezzali became the only woman fencer in Olympic history to win six gold medals.

Korea announced their arrival as a major force in the sport by being the only country to win a medal at every weapon; they had won only two medals in fencing in all previous Games. For Shin A Lam, there were tears of grief as well as joy, when a disputed last hit in the women's epee semi-final robbed her of the chance to fence for gold, but five days later she took silver in the team event. Her compatriot Kim Jiyeon became only the second fencer in Olympic history, after Mariel Zagunis (USA), to win the women's sabre title.

Ruben Limbardo Gascon won Venezuela's first gold medal in fencing by defeating Bartosz Piasecki (NOR) in the men's epee final, while the Polish-born Piasecki became the first Norwegian to win an Olympic fencing medal. Also winning his country's first medal was Alaaeldin Abouelkassem of Egypt, who took silver in men's foil.

For the first time since 1960, France failed to take home a medal.

“The London Games were the best in history”



MF gold: Lei wins (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Men's foil individual

Lei becomes China's first male foil gold medallist

Lei Sheng (CHN) narrowly beat Alaaeldin Abouelkassem (EGY) 15-13 for the gold medal after a match that brought the crowd to their feet in appreciation of the dazzling display of foil fencing put on by these two athletes. Lei (in China and Korea, it is traditional to put the family name first) is the first Chinese man to win an Olympic foil gold.



MF gold: Lei counters into Abouelkassem's attack (thePhotoman.co.uk)

Abouelkassem became the first Egyptian and the first African fencer to win an Olympic medal. He said: "I really can't believe what I've done. The whole day I've been up against very strong fencers, including four-time world champion Peter Joppich (GER) and current world champion Andrea Cassara (ITA). So it was very hard for me, but I did it. To be the first African fencer to win an Olympic medal makes me proud. And especially because this year my dad died and this Olympic medal was also his dream."

The bronze went to Choi Byungchul (KOR), who beat Andrea Baldini (ITA) 15-14. At 14-all, both fencers appeared to attack simultaneously, but the video replay showed that the Korean had started marginally before the Italian and so won the medal.



MF gold: Abouelkassem stops Lei in mid-preparation (thePhotoman.co.uk)

Baldini said: "I paid the price of being at my first Olympic Games. You can't prepare yourself to fence under such pressure. The Olympics are totally different from any other fencing tournament, even international, and I felt it. I think I fenced well, but it was just

not my day. And in fencing when it's not your day, there's nothing you can do about it."

After the first hit of the Lei v Baldini semi-final, the much taller Chinese (1.92m/6' 4" to 1.75m/5' 9") was always ahead, using his reach to get through the Italian's defence and throwing in some neat ripostes to win 15-11.

In the other semi, Abouelkassem defeated Choi 15-12. This fight was the most spectacular of the day with explosive action from both fencers. Ultimately, Choi overdid the acrobatics and received three red cards for crashing into his opponent or covering target.



MF gold: Abouelkassem misses the chance to equalise by hitting off-target (thePhotoman.co.uk)

The Egyptian had caused a major upset in the quarter-finals by beating the hot favourite Cassara 15-10. The Italian had not long recovered from a desperately close L16 match with Beijing 2008 silver medallist Yuki Ota (JPN) in which they traded hits to 14-all at time before the Italian managed to score in extra time. Also in the quarters, Lei beat world No. 2 Valerio Aspromonte (ITA) 15-8, Choi overcame Ma Jianfei (CHN) 15-13 and Baldini destroyed Alexey Cheremisinov (RUS) 15-5.

The hopes of Germany, France and the USA were crushed in the L16. Abouelkassem beat Joppich 15-10, Aspromonte took out Sebastien Bachmann (GER) 15-11, Lei overwhelmed Victor Sintès (FRA) 15-6 and Erwan Le Pechoux (FRA) squandered a healthy 8-3 lead against Choi as the Korean fought back to win 15-13. Baldini accounted for Race Imboden (USA) 15-9 and the experienced Cheremisinov beat the youngest competitor, 18-year-old Alexander Massialas (USA), 15-6.

In the second round, 2008 Olympic champion Benjamin Kleibrink (GER) met Ota in a rematch of their Beijing final. This time the result was reversed as the Japanese triumphed 15-5.

Men's foil individual



MF semis: Baldini feel the pain as he loses to Lei (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



MF semis: Choi launches an attack against Abouelkassem (thePhotoman.co.uk)



MF semis: Choi at full stretch (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

It was a miserable day for the British contingent – all three lost their first fights. James Davis did best, staying in touch with Joppich up to 10–9 before the German moved up a gear to win 15–10. An out-of-form Richard Kruse lost badly to Akhmatkuzin (RUS) 5–15 and British champion Husayn Rosowsky went down to Mohamed Samandi (TUN) 8–15.

Kruse said: “I just couldn't get going and it didn't feel good – it just happens like that sometimes. My sharpness was just not there like usually. I'm just getting too old now I think (he turned 29 the day before the event). Fencing has been very good to me but I can't fence like when I was 21. I will probably give it another year and then wind down.”

“ In fencing when it's not your day, there's nothing you can do about it. ”

Andrea Baldini



MF bronze: Baldini and Choi fight for third place (Carl Borack)

MF gold: Lei ripostes but receives a red card for covering (thePhotoman.co.uk)



MTF GB v France: Kruse ripostes against Le Pechoux (Aidan Byrne)



Italy fulfil their destiny



MTF gold: Italy win (Aidan Byrne)

After the toughest of matches, Italy's three musketeers, Andrea Cassara, Andrea Baldini and Giorgio Avola (Aspromonte was dropped), prevailed against Japan to win the final of the men's foil team event 45–39.

Key facts

- Italy became the first country to win back-to-back men's team foil Olympic gold medals since the Soviet Union in 1964
- Italy equalled France's record of seven gold medals in this event
- Japan claimed its first ever medal in men's team foil and its second in fencing
- Germany won its third men's team foil medal and the first since 1992

“We can hold our heads up high. We really went for it and we can be proud of our performance.”

James Davis

It was a war of attrition in which Japan pushed the No. 1 seeds to the limit, scoring their own lowly seventh seeding by answering every dazzling touch with one of equal virtuosity. Three times the Japanese drew level and only in the last two bouts did the Italians impose themselves.

Cassara did not watch Baldini's last bout, saying: *“I didn't watch not because I couldn't rely on him (laughs), but because I'm pretty superstitious. I did it when we beat Great Britain after another close match. It brought us luck and so I went on doing it.”*

Japan coach Oleg Matseichuk (UKR) said: *“I told them they needed to go for gold because the difference between gold and silver is like the distance between London and Tokyo. I'm obviously dissatisfied not to get the gold medal, but our team fought well and looked like the seven samurai.”*

In the bronze medal match, Germany raced to a 20–5 lead over USA after four bouts and powered on to win 45–27.

Japan defeated third seeds Germany in the semi-finals. Ota equalised in the dying seconds against last-fight specialist Joppich to make it 40–all. In extra time, both fencers attacked and appeared to hit simultaneously, but the video review showed that Ota had made the first move, giving Japan victory. In the other semi, Italy dominated USA from the start – in one bout Cassara scored five hits on Gerek Meinhardt in 17 seconds – and coasted to a 45–24 victory. However, the US team was the youngest at the Games and should become a force in men's foil for many years to come.

Men's foil team



MTF GB v Russia: Davis is parried by Akhmatkhuzin (Graham Morrison)



MTF gold: Baldini protests to referee Juan-Carlos Rios Rivera (MEX) that Ota's hit arrived on his sweat-soaked arm yet registered valid; the video replay confirmed this, but the hit stood and Baldini changed his jacket (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

The quarter-finals were the most exciting of all the team events, each producing a dramatic confrontation. Great Britain came within five hits of a sensational victory over Italy, but fell just short. Aspromonte was Italy's weak link, Kruse, Davis and Laurence Halsted (replacing Rosowsky) collectively scoring 23 hits against him to pull Great Britain into a slender lead at one stage. But Baldini and Cassara repaired the damage to give Italy a 45–40 victory.



MTF gold: Awaji scores against Cassara (Carl Borack)

Germany staged an extraordinary recovery against Russia. They were 22–30 down but Kleibrink and Joppich each scored 11 hits in their last bouts against Renal Ganeev and Cheremisinov respectively to win 44–40.

France were comfortably ahead against USA until Meinhardt annihilated Sintes 11–1 and Imboden beat Enzo Lefort 5–1 to give USA a 40–32 lead going into the last bout. Although Le Pechoux clawed back seven hits, Massialas saw his team home 45–39.

Japan knocked out the No. 2 seeds China 45–30. The turning point came in the fourth bout when, with the score at 10–all, Kenta Chida crushed Ma Jianfei 13–3.

In the fight-offs for the minor places, GB beat France 45–29, while Russia overcame China 45–40, leaving the No. 2 and No. 4 seeds scrapping for a single victory. It went to China.

In the match to decide fifth place, the Russians beat Britain 45–35, although in the penultimate bout Davis outscored Alexey Khovansky 9–4.

Davis said: "We can hold our heads up high. We really went for it and we can be proud of our performance, although it's not what we really wanted. The crowd were really amazing. They were the fifth man in our team and were truly inspirational."

Richard Kruse added: "We always find the Russian style quite difficult whereas we find it much easier to fence the French. We've never fenced in front of 8000 people all cheering for us. The crowd were great."

On Davis: "He fenced brilliantly. There is no doubt that he is the next star of British fencing. He is totally fearless."

Laurence Halsted, after beating France: "That was a spanking victory. Exactly what we wanted to do, after pushing the Italians so close. Beating a top eight team shows everybody what we're capable of."

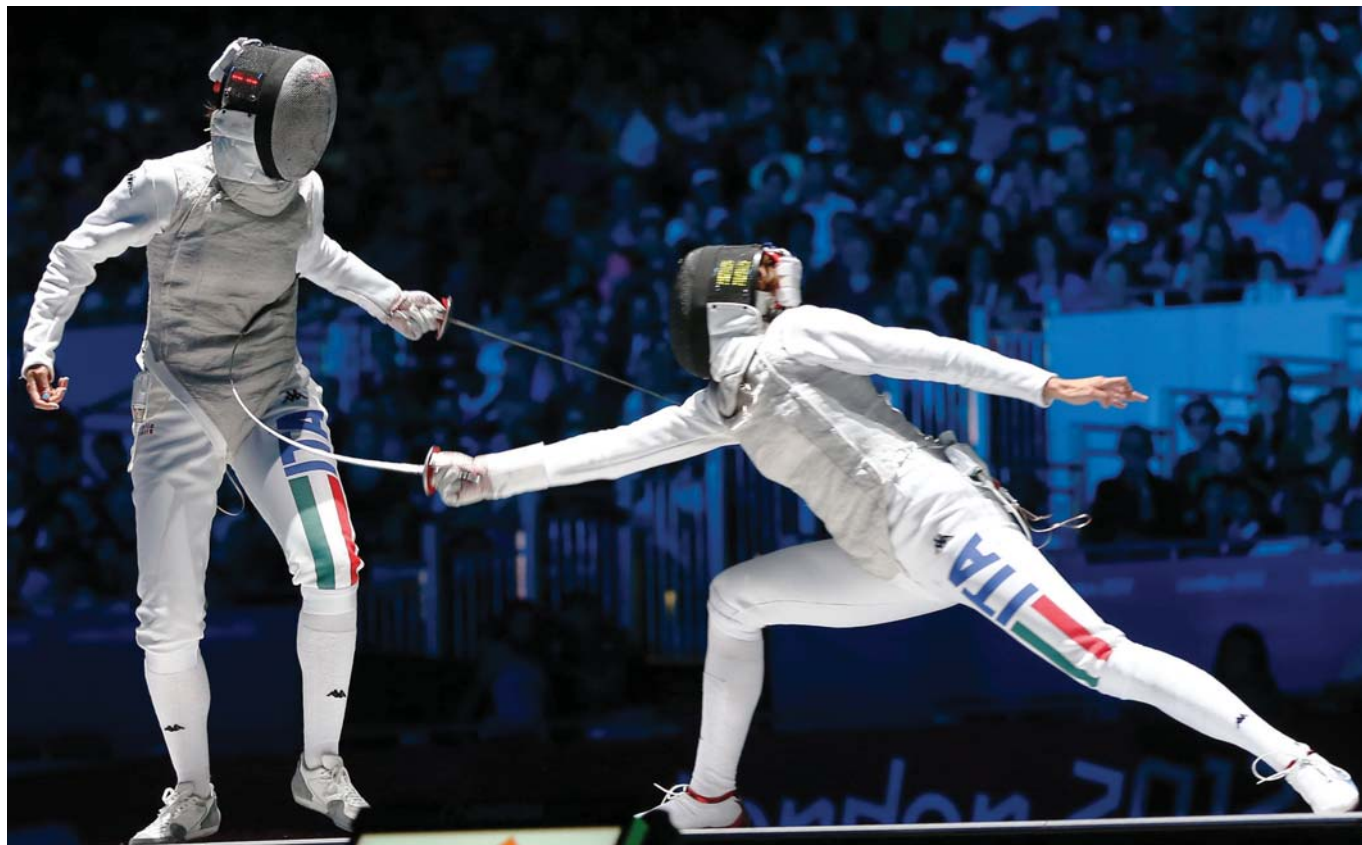
On the close match against the Italians: "Everything went almost exactly to plan, which was to be in it at the end. We were there but they have a top-class finisher (Baldini) and he just saw them through. We would probably have beaten anyone else in the competition with that performance."

Britain had warmed up by beating Egypt 45–33 to secure their place in the quarter-finals.

Women's foil individual

Italians pull off a clean sweep

In a remarkable tour de force, Italy's women foilists swept all before them. Elisa Di Francisca beat her teammate Arianna Errigo 12–11 in extra time to win the gold medal, with Valentina Vezzali taking bronze.



Di Francisca scores against Errigo (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



Errigo reaches the final (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Errigo was 11–8 up with 45 seconds left, but Di Francisca scored three times in quick succession to equalise and then, with priority against her, launched a surprise attack followed by an immediate remise to score the winning hit.

She said: *"I wanted this gold medal so badly. I've been working so hard to get it, especially from a psychological point of view. On the physical side, everything was perfect. But the mental side of my fencing lacked something, and that's what I've been training so much on."*

On Errigo: *"We are close friends, but if I had lost to her, I would have been so upset with myself. We know how to separate our fencing life from our everyday life, so I'm sure this is not going to affect our friendly relationship."*

Errigo said: *"Right before the very last point I tried something brilliant and special, but it didn't work out."*

Three of the last four fights went to the last hit, but the match of the day was the stunning bronze medal fight in which world No. 1



Errigo (left) and Vezzali go head to head in the semi-finals (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Vezzali came back from the dead to beat Nam Hyun Hee (KOR) 13–12 in extra time. Down 12–8 with 18 seconds to go, Vezzali repeatedly drove Nam to the back line, finally equalising in the last second of fencing time. With priority in her favour, she counter-attacked into Nam's fast advance to claim the last hit.

Vezzali said: *"It was such a tough battle, but in the end I managed to get it, although my goal was to get my fourth gold in a row. When I carried the Italian flag at the Opening Ceremony, it was fantastic. My message to everyone is to live the dream. My life has proved it. You have to fight until the very end to realise your dreams."*

Women's foil individual



WF bronze: Vezzali parries a flying attack from Nam (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



WF L16: Di Francisca demonstrates the passata sotto against Golubytskyi (Aidan Byrne)

For the Korean it was a bitter disappointment. Di Francisca had snatched victory from her by an equally close margin in the semi-finals, winning 11–10. Four hits down with one minute left, the Italian stormed back by using her reach to pin Nam to the back line in a series of blistering attacks, winning six of the last seven hits and robbing the Beijing 2008 silver medallist of a chance to go one better in London.

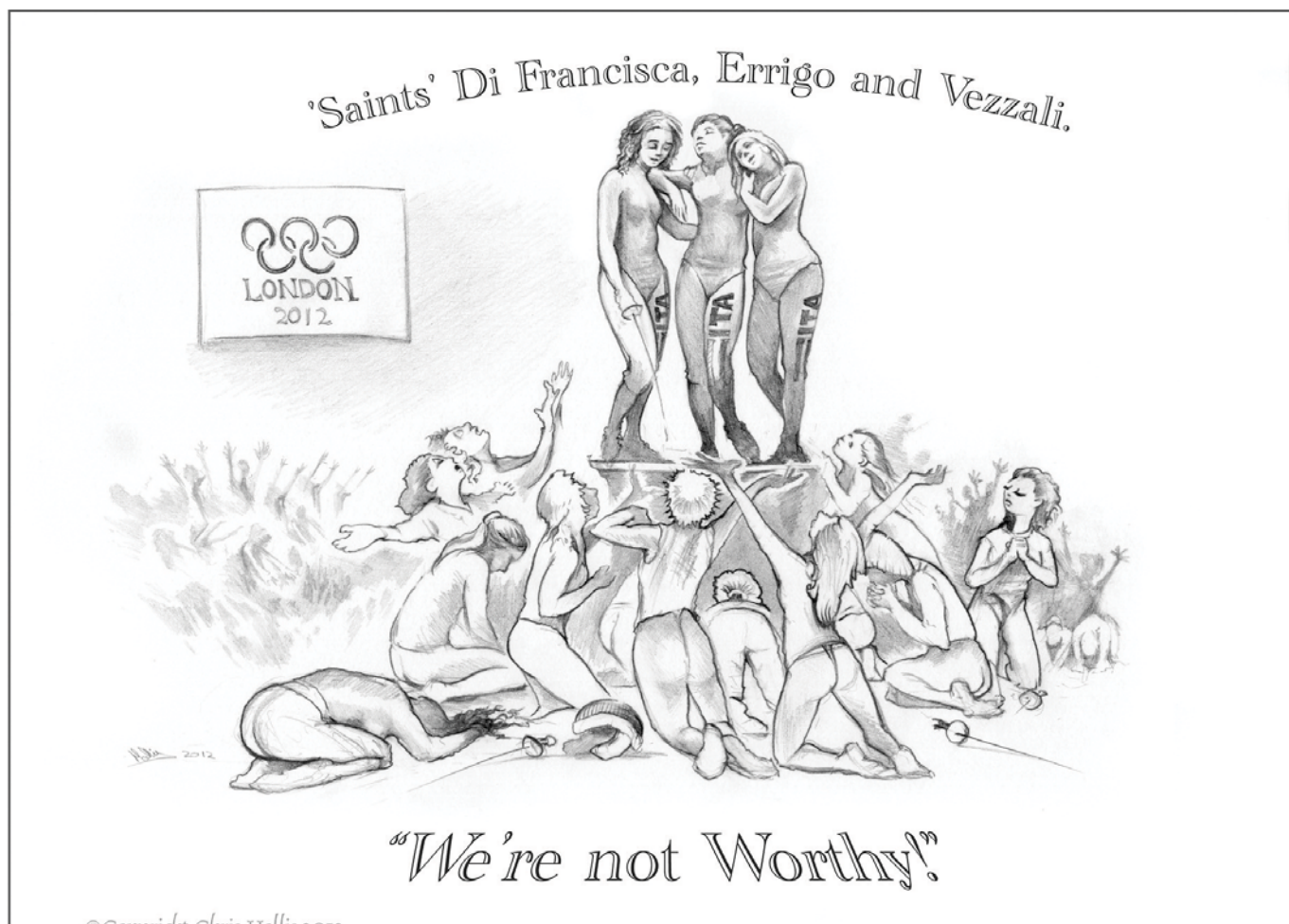
In the other semi, Errigo trailed Vezzali 3–0 to start with, but came back to win 15–12. The match was fought at a furious pace, with 21 hits scored in the first three minutes. In a crucial middle period, Errigo scored five consecutive hits to open up a gap that Vezzali was unable to close.

For the triple Olympic champion, it brought to a close her quest to become the first woman in Olympic history to win four consecutive individual titles. But at 38, in her fifth Olympic Games, she collected her fifth individual medal – three gold, one silver and one bronze – a record unequalled by any other fencer.

Both Vezzali and Nam had narrow escapes in earlier rounds, Ines Boubakri of Tunisia coming within a whisker of knocking out the Italian in the quarter-finals with time expiring at 7-all, only to lose in the sudden-death last minute. Nam survived an equally close match against Aida Mohamed (HUN) in the L16.

“You have to fight until the very end to realise your dreams”

Valentina Vezzali



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Women's foil team

WTF gold: Vezzali wins for Italy (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



Italy crush Russia



WTF gold: Di Francisca about to score against Deriglazova (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Italy reinforced their position as the best women foilists in the world by beating Russia 45–31. Such was their dominance at these Games that in all their individual and team bouts, they lost to no one except each other.

Key facts

- Valentina Vezzali became the first woman to win six gold medals in fencing. Five men have won six, with Aladar Gerevich (HUN) on a record seven
- Vezzali also became the first woman to win nine Olympic medals in fencing. Three men have done this, with Eduardo Mangiarotti (ITA) holding the record of 13
- Italy continued its streak of winning a medal in women's team foil in all Olympics since 1988 and equalled Hungary's record of seven medals in this discipline
- It is the first time Italy has won all the medals in a women's event in any sport at the Olympic Games. Italy had previously done it twice in men's events – individual epee in 1936 and 1956
- Italy became the first country to win 10 Olympic gold medals in women's fencing



WTF podium: Medal winners Di Francisca, Errigo, Vezzali and Salvatori celebrate their team gold (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

The crack team of Olympic medallists, Di Francisca, Errigo and Vezzali, destroyed the Russians, Aida Shanaeva, Inna Deriglazova and Larisa Korobeynikova, despite relaxing towards the end by bringing on substitute Ilaria Salvatori, who conceded nine hits.

In the bronze medal match, Korea beat France 45–32. At 10-9 down, Korea produced an inspired run of 13 consecutive hits, mainly by Jung Gil Ok and Jeon Hee Sook, to give them a 12-hit cushion and cut the heart out of French resistance.



WTF bronze: Jung makes a double-jointed riposte against Blaze (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



WTF bronze: Oh and Guyart clash (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

France replaced Ysaora Thibus with substitute Anita Blaze, who pulled back two hits, and Corinne Maitrejean continued the recovery by closing the gap to 25–21 at one point. But the Koreans rallied strongly and brought on substitute Oh Ha Na to share the bronze medal experience. Nam was hardly needed.

Italy and Russia powered their way to the final in convincing style, thrashing France 45–22 and Korea 44–32 respectively.

The top four seeds all reached the semis without difficulty. As expected, Italy overwhelmed Great Britain 42–14 in one quarter-final and Russia brushed aside the challenge from Japan 45–17 in another. The third and fourth seeds had slightly harder matches but still won comfortably, Korea beating USA 45–31 and France eliminating Poland 42–31.

In the fight-offs for places five to eight, Poland beat Britain 43–20 and USA beat Japan 44–22. The two winners then met to decide fifth place, which went to Poland 45–39, while the losers, Great Britain and Japan, fought for seventh place, which was won by Japan 30–21 in a slow-scoring match.

Britain had a comfortable 45–34 victory over Egypt in the match to qualify for the quarter-finals.

Reflecting on their overwhelming dominance, Di Francisca said: *“Some days we are up against each other because we are the three best fencers out there and one day later we fight and stand all together as a team. Because we are the sort of people who always like to win everything. We trust each other, and we are all passionate and very competitive – that’s the main reason for our victories.”*

Salvatori on beating France by 23 points: *“Right before this match Astrid Guyart (FRA) said they were individually better than us. We set them straight.”*

Looking back on her career, Vezzali said: *“I want to thank my fencing maestro Giulio Tomassini, because I’ve been coached by him for 23 years. It’s because of him that I’ve become who I am now. I really hope to go on training with him in the future, although it’s going to be difficult because he’s moving to France.”*

“At the end of last November I almost died in a car crash. All that made me to reflect a little, because Pietro (her son) needs his mother. Then I came back and I fought stronger than before.”

On her future: *“I’ll take a break now. It’s been a tough four-year period. So I want to dedicate myself to my family and my son for one year. I want another son or daughter. Then I’ll think about my future. But after this, most probably I’ll come back and try to go to Rio. I want to take part in another Olympic Games to do better than this.”*

“ Right before this match Astrid Guyart said they were individually better than us. We set them straight ”

Ilaria Salvatori

First fencing gold for Venezuela



ME podium: Medal winners Piasecki, Limardo Gascon and Jung (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Perfectly timed fleche attacks carried Ruben Limardo Gascon (VEN) to a 15–10 victory over Bartosz Piasecki (NOR) as he became Venezuela's first Olympic fencing gold medallist.

Key facts

- Limardo Gascon won Venezuela's second Olympic gold medal in any sport, and first since Francisco Rodriguez won the boxing light flyweight title in 1968
- Jung Jinsun won Korea's second Olympic medal in this discipline, following Lee Sang-Ki's bronze in Sydney 2000
- Nine different countries have now won the last nine medals in this discipline at the last three Olympic Games



ME L16: Limardo Gascon fleches at Heinzer (Aidan Byrne)

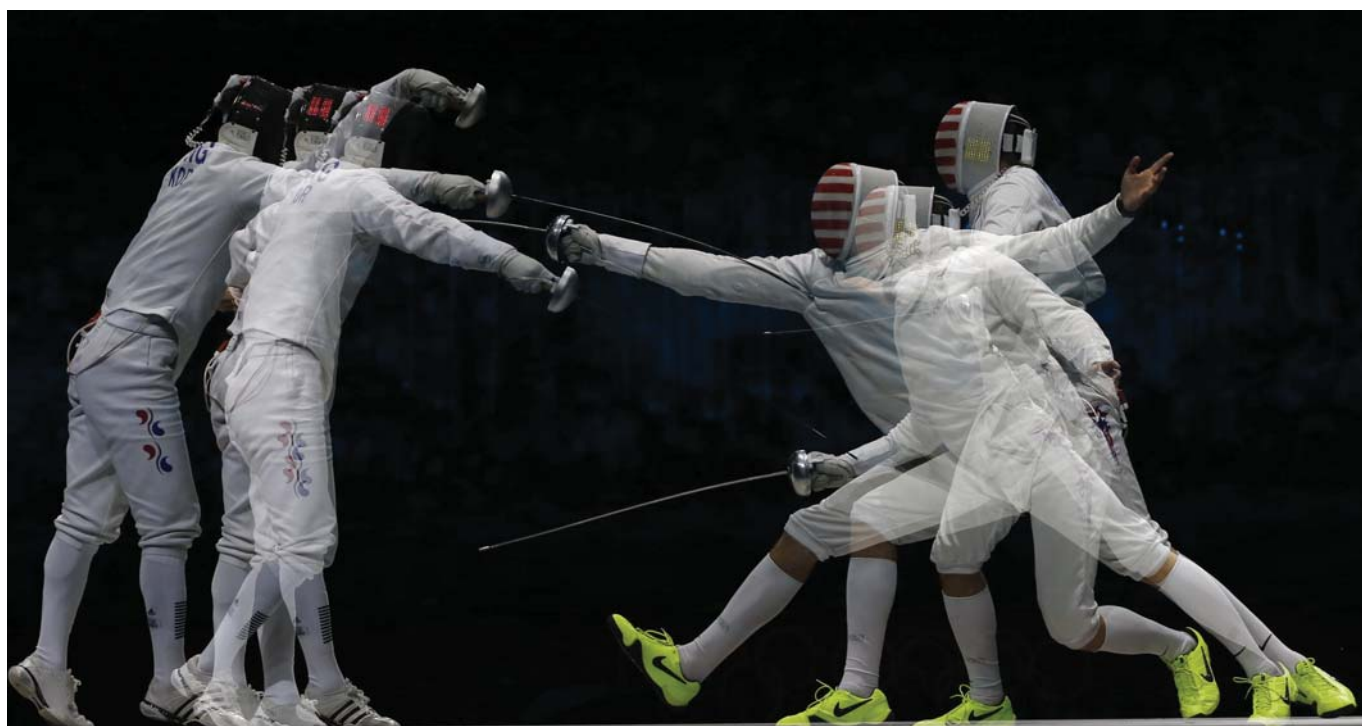
At 14–6 up, Limardo Gascon became slightly dazzled at the prospect of winning and allowed his much taller (1.95m/6' 5" to 1.75m/5' 9") opponent to score four hits before executing another superb beat fleche attack to end the contest.

Polish-born Piasecki came out of nowhere to win silver and become the first fencer from Norway to win an Olympic medal. Ranked a lowly 49th in the world and with no significant win to his name, he defeated some of the best epeeists in the world, including Geza Imre (HUN) and Frenchmen Gauthier Grumier and Yannick Borel.

Jung Jinsun (KOR) and Seth Kelsey (USA) fought off for bronze, the bout reaching 11-all, with a minute of extra time and two double hits before Jung's inspired dart to toe succeeded in bringing up a single light and victory for the Korean.

Limardo Gascon had snatched victory in extra time against Kelsey in the semi-finals. The slow-scoring match reached only 2-all at the end of the first period and halfway through the second the referee brought it to a premature end for non-combativity. The score was still only 5-all when time expired. In the sudden-death play-off, priority went to the Venezuelan. As the tall American (also 1.95m/6' 5") prepared to take the initiative, Limardo Gascon launched a lightning fleche attack and scored, continuing on to race around the piste in joy at having guaranteed himself a medal.

In the other semi, Jung and Piasecki level-pegged to 10-all before the Norwegian produced three long lunges to the body to lead 14–11. But the Korean was not finished and riposted twice to make it 14–13 before a final lunge took Piasecki into the gold medal match.



ME bronze: multiple images of Jung v Kelsey (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



ME gold: Limardo Gascon makes the winning fleche (thePhotoman.co.uk)

Limardo Gascon had defeated world champion Paolo Pizzo (ITA) 15–12 to reach the semi-finals, while Piasecki came from behind to edge out Borel 15–14 in their quarter-final.

None of the top 10 seeds made it to the quarters. Kelsey pulled off the shock of the competition when he defeated world No. 1 Nikolai Novosjolov (EST) 15–11 in the second round.

Both Swiss seeds were blown away, world No. 2 Fabian Kauter by Borel and world No. 5 Max Heinzer by Limardo Gascon, while Jung accounted for world No. 4 Elmir Alimzhanov (KAZ). The event's lowest ranked fencer, world No. 281 Leung Ka Ming, almost caused the upset of the tournament by leading Pizzo 14–12 in the first round, but the Italian rallied to win 15–14.

Limardo Gascon said: *"I dedicate this medal to my mother who is in the sky. She was a psychologist and taught me how to concentrate. I feel all the joy in the world. I visualised the whole competition. I knew I was going to win it. This medal is for my*

countrymen in Venezuela, but also for all South American countries. Everything is possible if you believe in it"

Piasecki on winning a medal: *"The best I hoped for was a place in the quarter-finals. I just went on and on. Unbelievable. My father is a Polish fencing coach. We came to Norway when I was two years old."*

Jung on winning bronze: *"I'm extremely happy (bursts into tears). I can't describe this moment. It's very special to me. It's really a dream come true (weeps uncontrollably). I'm overwhelmed."*

Kelsey was philosophical in defeat: *"You win some, you lose some. He hit my foot by a quarter of an inch. Olympic medals are won and lost by such close margins"*

Pizzo on just beating the lowest ranked epeeist in the first round: *"I didn't expect it to be so close, but in epee you can never tell how it is until the very end. I've got balls (screaming out loud). Balls: these are what I hang on to when I'm in trouble."*

“ I didn't expect it to be so close, but in epee you can never tell how it is until the very end ”

Paolo Pizzo



Women's epee individual

Ukrainian wins after controversial semi-final



WE gold: Heidemann scores against Shemyakina (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Yana Shemyakina (UKR) survived an onslaught from 2008 Olympic champion Britta Heidemann (GER) to win the gold medal 9–8 in extra time after a night of drama and controversy. For the fourth fight in succession, she pulled through by one hit.

Key facts

- Shemyakina won Ukraine's first individual Olympic gold medal in fencing
- Bronze medallist Sun became the first medal winner from a non-European country in women's epee
- Hungary, for the first time in the history of this event, failed to win a medal



WE podium: Medal winners Heidemann, Shemyakina and Sun (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

The win was overshadowed by an emotional semi-final protest from Shin A Lam (KOR), during which she refused to leave the piste in a dispute over timing at the end of her bout against Heidemann.

The final that followed was a slow and tense encounter. Both fencers initially moved so cautiously that the referee brought the first period of time to an abrupt end for non-combativity. Time expired at 8-all.

Heidemann took the offensive in extra time and forced the Ukrainian to the back line, fleching to try to finish the fight. But Shemyakina was ready with a counter-attack and twice they scored double hits. Finally, a third fleche from the German missed and Shemyakina's counter scored to make her the new Olympic champion.

Earlier, cheers and stamping of feet had greeted Shin as she came on for her bronze medal match with Sun Yujie (CHN). The crowd felt that in her semi-final against Heidemann she had been robbed of the chance to fight for gold. Every hit she made received tremendous applause. They reached 9-all, then 11-all. But in the end, Sun's reach (she is 1.85m/6' 1" to Shin's 1.67m/5' 6") gave her an advantage the Korean could not overcome, and the Chinese won 15–11. The crowd rose to their feet in appreciation of the loser.

“It was hard to say goodbye after 25 years; all the tears, the stress, the people, highs and lows”

Flessel-Colovic

Women's epee individual



WE semis: Heidemann and Shin score a double hit (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Pandemonium had broken out at the end of the dramatic semi-final between Heidemann and Shin. With the slow-scoring match level at 5-all at time and priority to the Korean, the German tried desperately to score a single hit in the dying seconds of extra time.

Four doubles brought the time to one second showing on the clock, with Shin within a toe's length of the end of the piste. Two more doubles followed, but the clock remained unchanged, although it had been counting down from just under two seconds to within a few milliseconds of time. Then the young volunteer timekeeper accidentally triggered the clock. It had to be reset to one full second. Add in the half second it takes an inexperienced operator to start the clock on hearing the referee call *Allez* and Heidemann had another chance to bring up a single light.



WE bronze: Shin ducks under Sun's attack (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

The referee also made mistakes by allowing the German to come on guard too close to her opponent and starting, video replays later confirmed, just before play was called. Using a compound action, Heidemann scored just before time expired.

Shin burst into tears. Korean officials protested and called for the *Directoire Technique* to determine why the clock had not moved. After half an hour of review and discussion, the DT decided that the clock had been operating correctly and so the hit had to stand.

Shin was devastated, standing on the piste crying uncontrollably, unable to believe her misfortune. The Korean coach immediately told her to stay put while he made a written appeal, as leaving the field of play would be an acknowledgement of defeat.

With her head in her hands, Shin waited another half hour for the result of the appeal. Then, without any formal announcement, she was escorted off the piste and told to prepare for the bronze medal match. It was a public relations disaster for the FIE which looked incompetent and was unable to communicate the decision to the audience.

Afterwards Shin said: *"It's just impossible to accept. I should have won. I still don't understand why my match was not declared finished after her last double hit."*



WE L32: Gherman catches Corinna Lawrence (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Heidemann had no qualms: *"When there is one second showing on the clock, it could be one second or one second and 99 hundredths of a second. I have experienced this against myself before and I am happy with the decision that was made. The whole discussion was unnecessary."*

US epeeist Courtney Hurley added her take on the incident: *"It happens all the time. It sucks for her (Shin). There have been a lot of mistakes by referees. There are a bunch of dumb refs out there. I don't know why, because they don't have much to do in epee."*

Now all but forgotten, the other semi-final had produced a fine display of shrewd tactical fencing from Shemyakina as she edged out the favourite Sun 14–13. After a slow start in which the only hit in the first two minutes was a penalty against the Ukrainian for stepping over the back line, Shemyakina tempted her taller opponent into attacking before gathering the blade and riposting or ducking under the line. From 9–7 up, she hung on with doubles and dropped only one hit.

Sun had reached the semis by a well judged counter-attack into a desperate fleche by Rosetta Fiamingo (ITA) at 14-all in the last five seconds of her quarter-final. In equally tight matches, Shin outreached world No. 3 Anca Mariu (ROU) in a last simultaneous attack to win 15-14 and Shemyakina confounded world No. 4 Simona Gherman (ROU) with a ducking stop hit.

Only slightly easier was Heidemann's passage against Sarra Besbes (TUN), which went to 15–12.

In the L16, the audience paid farewell to the grande dame of women's epee – 40-year-old Laura Flessel-Colovic (FRA), who carried the French flag at the Opening Ceremony and bowed out against Gherman. The first women's epee Olympic champion in 1996, bronze medallist in 2000 and silver medallist in 2004, she has won more Olympic medals for France than any other athlete. On ending her fencing career, Flessel-Colovic said: *"It was hard to say goodbye after 25 years; all the tears, the stress, the people, highs and lows. I want to tell the press to carry on supporting fencing because it's a good sport and it needs publicity."*

Heidemann won four matches by one hit, starting her high-wire act in the L32, when she beat Bianca Del Carretto (ITA) 14–13, and knocking out world champion and world No.2 Li Na (CHN) by the same score in the next round. Shemyakina won another 14–13 nail-biter as she defeated 2008 Olympic silver medallist Ana Branza (ROU).

Women's epee team

China overpower Korea

Sun added a team gold to her individual bronze medal as China beat Korea 39–25 in the final of the women's epee team event. The last bout was a rematch of the individual bronze medal fight and once again Sun used her reach to devastating effect against an increasingly desperate Shin.



WTE gold: A double from Choi and Li (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

After four bouts, there was nothing separating the two sides at 9-all, but then China gradually moved ahead, increasing their lead bout by bout until Shin was faced with the impossible task of making up eight hits.

After the disappointment of her individual event, Shin said: *"This silver medal is very special because it comes from the strength of our team. After the individual event, the team supported me and my coach helped me to come back so I was able to perform at my best and that's the reason why I eventually won a silver medal."*

The bronze medal match between Russia and USA ended dramatically as Courtney Hurley and Anna Sivkova fought themselves to a 30-all standstill at time. In the extra minute, they came together and, after some frantic jabbing, Hurley's light came on to give USA the bronze.

Courtney's sister Kelly (substitute) said: *"I can't believe how well it all came together. It's the best moment of my life so far. We are the only family in the world with a fencing strip (piste), which our dad built in the back yard. We fence each other every day."*

Sun held off a determined assault from Sivkova to give China a 20–19 victory in extra time of a slow-scoring semi-final. The Russian had come from four hits down to draw level at 18-all and then take the lead before Sun equalised as time expired.

In the other semi, Korea continued their unexpected run by outpointing USA 45–36. The eighth-seeded Koreans had already staged a major upset by defeating the No. 1 seeds Romania 45–38 in the quarter-finals. By the halfway point, Korea were 30–18 ahead and ran out comfortable winners, despite Gherman scoring 12 hits in the last bout.

Branza said: *"This is the most painful moment in my life. We wanted to win so much and that might have blocked our performance. I apologise to everyone. We put a lot of effort into*

the preparation and it's so disappointing. I miss the old team. It used to be good and ready."

Maroiu added: *"I would give any 10 of my other medals for a gold in the Olympics."*

The turning point in an initially close USA v Italy quarter-final came in the fifth fight when Maya Lawrence beat Fiamingo 4–0, and Courtney Hurley followed up by trouncing Del Carretto 8–3. Mara Navarria was the only Italian to put up any resistance, scoring an impressive 20 hits in winning all her bouts, but to no avail, as the Americans dominated to win 45–35.

Fiamingo said: *"I feel ashamed of myself, because I didn't fence the way I know how. I feel sorry for our fans and my teammates, not having honoured Italy this way."*

Third seeds China were always ahead against Germany in their quarter-final and hung on in the face of a spirited comeback by Imke Duplitzer and Heidemann, who scored 16 hits in the last two bouts, to win 45–42.

No. 2 seeds Russia won the fourth quarter-final against Ukraine comfortably 45–34.

In the fight for the minor placings, Germany beat first Ukraine and then Romania to come fifth. Italy lost to Romania but then defeated Ukraine to finish seventh.

“This silver medal is very special because it comes from the strength of our team”

Shin A Lam

*Aboulekassem (EGY) scores in mid-air as Choi (KOR) topples off the piste in the men's foil semi-finals
(S. Timacheff/FencingPhotos)*







Ω OMEGA

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Hungarian gives a sabre lesson



MS gold: Szilagyí dominates Occhiuzzi in the first half (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Aron Szilagyí (HUN) upheld the honour of Hungarian sabre with a brilliant display of attacking fencing against Diego Occhiuzzi (ITA) to win the gold medal 15–8.

Key facts

- Hungary is the most successful country in men's individual sabre (13 gold, seven silver and eight bronze medals), but had not claimed gold since 1992, when Bence Szabo won the title
- At 22, Szilagyí is the youngest gold medallist since Ioannis Georgiadis (GRE), also 22, won the first Olympic sabre gold medal in 1896
- Italy claimed silver for the seventh time and now has 12 medals in this event
- Kovalev claimed Russia's first medal in men's individual sabre since 1996, when Stanislav Pozdniakov won gold and Serguei Charikov took silver



MS podium: Medal winners Occhiuzzi, Szilagyí and Kovalev (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

“It's an amazing feeling. I'm the Olympic champion. I have dreamed of it since I was nine or 10 years old”

Aron Szilagyí

It is 20 years since there was a Hungarian Olympic sabre champion and it was fitting that representatives from the two countries with the strongest tradition of sabre fencing should contest the final. Both fencers are European bronze medallists, Szilagyí last year and Occhiuzzi this. But in the Olympic final the Hungarian was in a class of his own.

In the first period, Szilagyí completely outclassed his opponent. At the break he was already 8–1 up with a series of lightning attacks to wrist and arm, parry-ripostes and beautifully judged attacks on preparation. Although the Italian came back to match him hit for hit in the second period, the damage was done and he was unable to close the gap.

Men's sabre individual



MS L16: Homer knocks out Yakimenko (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



MS: With his God Save The Queen haircut, Montano seeks British support (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Szilagyi said: "Wow. It's an amazing feeling. I'm the Olympic champion. I have dreamed of it since I was nine or 10 years old. Before my old coach died in 2008, we always spoke of this. This is for him. It means a lot."

In the bronze medal match, Nikolay Kovalev (RUS) raced to a 10–3 lead against Rares Dumitrescu (ROU). Although the Romanian managed to fight back and score six of the next eight hits, it was to no avail. The Russian, who has only ever won one world cup event before, picked off the 2009 world silver medallist to win 15–10.

In the semi-finals Szilagyi hardly put a foot wrong from 5-all as he dominated Kovalev to win 15–7. An unstoppable series of attacks and stunning parry-ripostes won him 10 of the last 12 hits. The Russian, who had eliminated the world No. 1 Nicolas Limbach (GER) 15–12 in the quarter-finals, had no answer to the Hungarian's precision and timing.

LIMBACH said later: "I made one or two mistakes today. When it comes down to it, I look like an idiot."

From the first point of the other semi, which Occhiuzzi scored without making a touch as Dumitrescu was forced over the back line, the Italian was always ahead. 8–5 up at the break, he kept his nerve against the higher-ranked Romanian to win 15–11. Occhiuzzi had earlier knocked out his compatriot and 2004 Olympic champion Aldo Montano 15–13.

Szilagyi, world No. 6, was the highest seed to reach the semi-finals after the havoc of the early rounds in which the top five seeds fell by the wayside. In the L16 he eliminated the 2008 Olympic champion Zhong Man (CHN) 15–10 and then defeated Max Hartung (GER) 15–13. The German had earlier survived two 14-all encounters, knocking out Luigi Tarantino (ITA) in the second round and going on to remove the world No. 3 Gu Bon Gil (KOR).

Daryl Homer (USA) caused an upset in the L16 when he edged out world No. 2 Alexey Yakimenko (RUS) 15–14.

Men's sabre team



MTS gold: Won wins for Korea (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Korea sweep aside Romania



MTS gold: multiple images of Kim and Dumitrescu (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

In a one-sided team final, Korea overwhelmed Romania 45–26 to win their first ever Olympic fencing team gold medal.

Key facts

- Romania won their eighth Olympic medal in team fencing, none of which has been gold. It was Romania's first team silver since 1996 women's team foil
- Italy claimed their 20th medal in this discipline with bronze

“That's what fencing is all about: playing until the very last hit and giving the crowd a spectacle”

Aldo Montano

Kim Junghwan, Won Woo Young and Gu dominated their Romanian opponents Dumitrescu, Tiberiu Dolniceanu and Florin Zalomir. Only Dolniceanu put up much resistance with a six-point win halfway through the match. Both teams brought on substitutes – Oh Eunseok and Alexandru Siriteanu – to ensure each received a medal.

Italy took the bronze medal by defeating Russia 45–40. In a shrewd substitution for the final, Italy replaced the oldest man in the tournament, 39-year-old Luigi Tarantino, with Luigi Samele and he proved to be their star performer, winning 19 hits to give anchorman Aldo Montano a cushion of nine hits going into the final bout. The delirium of the Italian team as the end approached earned them a red card for noisy behaviour.

Tarantino on Samele, who took his place: *“Luigi was the best of us. He was fantastic. You'll hear from him a lot in the future, because he is very strong. We got this bronze medal mostly thanks to him.”*

Korea had earlier defeated Italy 45–37 in one semi-final, while Romania beat the favourites Russia 45–43 in the other to set up an unexpected gold medal match between the sixth and fourth seeds.

Dolniceanu played the lead, scoring 22 points in his three bouts and, despite individual bronze medallist Kovalev pulling back 10 hits for Russia, Romania kept their nerve to edge out the No. 1 seeds.

Dumitrescu said: *“It's the first time we have ever beaten Russia and it was a very difficult match. But the better team won.”*

Italy were 20–18 up against Korea after four bouts, but strong performances by



MTS bronze: Samele attacks Yakimenko (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



MTS bronze: Montano parries Reshetnikov (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



MTS bronze: Yakimenko makes a leaping counter-attacks against Montano (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)



MTS gold: Gu and Dolceanu clash (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Gu turned the match around for the Koreans, as Montano and Tarantino, the mainstays of the Italian team for the past 12 years, faded.

There was high drama in the quarter-final between No. 2 seeds Belarus and No. 7 Italy as Montano came from behind in the last bout to score nine hits and snatch a 45–44 victory.

The Italians started well and were 30–26 up after six bouts, but nine hits by Dmitri Lapkes followed by a poor performance from Tarantino gave Belarus a healthy 40–36 lead going into the last fight. Then Montano worked his magic, picking up five consecutive hits and, after three simultaneous attacks, parrying his opponent to make a winning riposte.

Montano said: *“This time it was me saving us all. In these situations, you fence just with your heart. That’s what fencing is all about: playing until the very last hit and giving the crowd a spectacle. People want to see the score going up and down until the end of all the bouts; they love the unpredictability of sabre.”*

In another quarter-final upset, sixth seeds Korea knocked out the No. 3 seeds Germany 45–38. Limbach scored 20 hits in his three bouts, but did not receive enough support from his teammates to pull Germany through.



Women's sabre individual

Kim wins in commanding style



WS semis: Kim and Zagunis claim the same hit (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Kim Jiyeon (KOR) raced to a 6–2 lead against Sofya Velikaya (RUS) and maintained her momentum to win the gold medal 15–9.

In the bronze medal match, Mariel Zagunis (USA) led all the way to 9-all before Olga Kharlan (UKR) nosed ahead. There was no stopping the Ukrainian after that as she swept the double Olympic champion aside to win 15–10.

Kim had booked her passage to the gold medal match with an extraordinary comeback against Zagunis in the semi-finals.

Somehow, the wheels came off the well-oiled Zagunis machine. She was fast out of the blocks, leading 8–2 at the break and then 12–5. But the Korean stormed back to score 10 of the next 11 hits, equalising at 13-all and producing two crisp ripostes to win 15–13.

On her dramatic victory, Kim said: *“I changed my tactics during the break. At first we were attacking together and I was losing points. In the second session I used a lot more feints and that let me catch up.”*

Zagunis said: *“She did not beat me. I defeated myself. I was dominating the fight and everything was going right. But I got too excited at 12–5 up and had a lapse in concentration. I was definitely impatient. I should have slowed down.”*

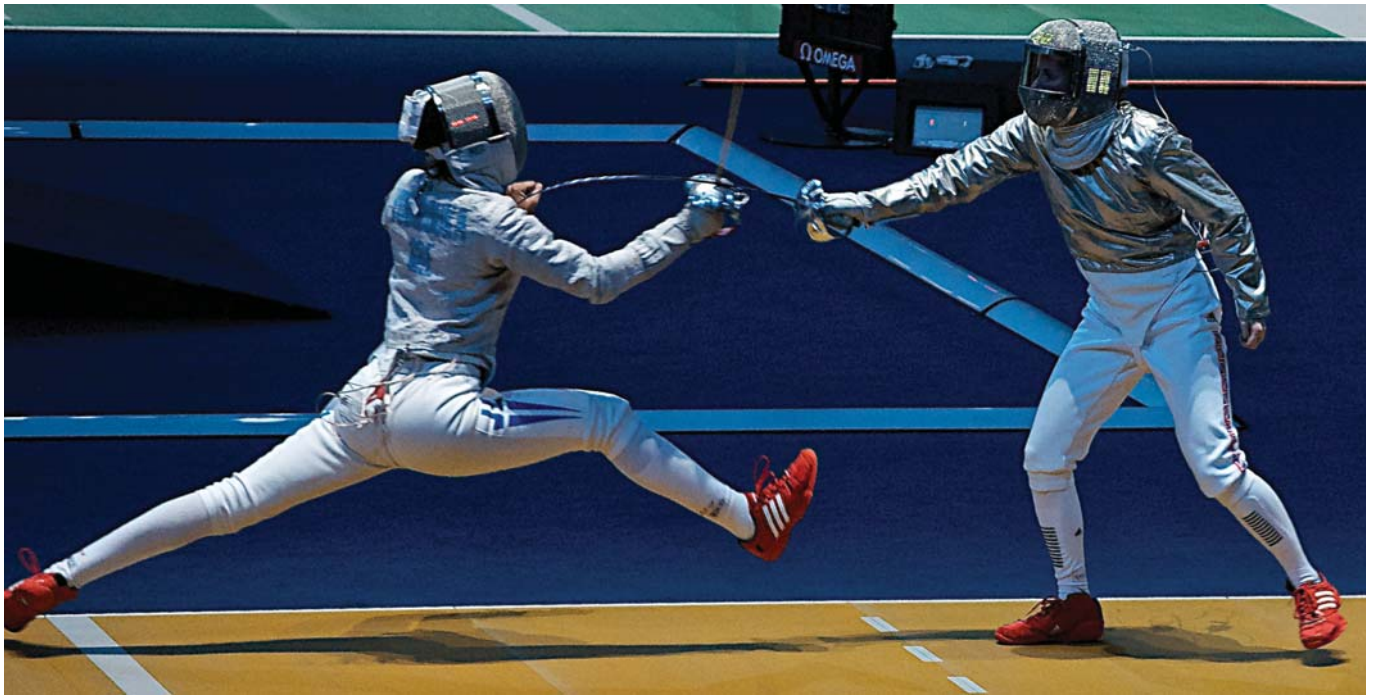
At 14–13 up in the other semi, Velikaya parried an attack from Kharlan and riposted to win 15–13. Ahead 8–3 at the break, the Russian kept her nerve in the face of a determined assault from the Ukrainian, who narrowed the gap to just one hit but could not quite finish the job.

To reach the semi-finals, Zagunis won her three qualifying bouts with consummate ease 15–7, 15–9 and 15–6. Kharlan, the world No. 3, found it hardly more difficult, winning 15–8, 15–10 and 15–9.

But Velikaya suffered a scare at the hands of Dagmara Wozniak (USA) before coming through 15–13. And Kim was 8–3 down against world No. 4 Vassiliki Vougiouka (GRE) before picking up 12 of the next 15 hits to win 15–12.

It might have been a different story had the Greek not been the victim of an unfortunate accident in the L16 when a clash of masks during her 15–7 victory over Aleksandra Socha (POL) broke two of her teeth. With less than 20 minutes to prepare for her quarter-final against Kim, all she could do was insert a temporary guard over the teeth and fight on.

Women's sabre individual



WS L32: Louise Bond-Williams stops Vougiouka in mid-attack (Aidan Byrne)



WS semis: Kim on the attack against Zagunis (thePhotoman.co.uk)



WS gold: Kim judges the distance perfectly in attacking Velikaiya (thePhotoman.co.uk)

Despite the discomfort, Vougiouka got off to flying start before the situation overcame her. Forced to keep her mouth closed to avoid the pain of air passing across her damaged teeth, she began to struggle to breathe and quickly became tired. Greece's lone fencer was left in tears, cursing her misfortune. To get to London 2012, she had to balance her training programme with final-year university studies. And the bitterest irony of all? Those studies are in dentistry.

Seven of the world's top eight contested the quarter-finals, the only dropout being Azza Besbes (TUN), the world No.8 who lost narrowly to Wozniak 13–15.

For once, the first-round matches went according to seeding, the only marginal surprise being the fight-back from 3–8 down by Seira Nakayama (JPN) to beat Leonora Perrus (FRA) 15–12. Vougiouka accounted for Britain's Louise Bond-Williams 15–8, while Sophie Williams lost to the world No. 6, Irene Vecchi (ITA), 6–15.

The youngest fencer in Olympic history, Lea Moutoussamy (ALG), 14, drew world champion Velikaya and did well to land six hits on her. The French-Algerian had qualified by beating a South African more than twice her age in the final of the Africa-zone qualifying tournament. It was her first competition at senior level.

Moutoussamy said: *"It was very stressful to fight against an opponent more experienced than me and because I had to think about my school examination at this time, but while I was doing my match all the stress disappeared."*

Born and raised in France, she has dual French-Algerian nationality from her grandfather, a French settler in Algeria. Neither she nor her mother had ever been to North Africa, but when the Algerian federation asked if she would compete under their flag, as they had no sabre fencers at international level, she accepted, travelling to Algeria in December 2011 for the first time.

At these Games, there were no men's epee and women's sabre team events, since the IOC restricts fencing to 10 sets of medals.

Placings

Olympic Medallists

	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Men's Foil	LEI Sheng (CHN)	ABOUELKASSEM Alaaeldin (EGY)	CHOI Byungchul (KOR)
Men's Foil Team	Italy	Japan	Germany
Women's Foil	DI FRANCISCA Elisa (ITA)	ERRIGO Arianna (ITA)	VEZZALI Valentina (ITA)
Women's Foil Team	Italy	Russia	Korea
Men's Epee	LIMARDO GASCON Reuben (VEN)	PIASECKI Bartosz (NOR)	JUNG Jinsun (KOR)
Men's Epee Team	–	–	–
Women's Epee	SHEMYAKINA Yana (UKR)	HEIDEMANN Britta (GER)	SUN Yujie (CHN)
Women's Epee Team	China	Korea	USA
Men's Sabre	SZILAGYI Aron (HUN)	OCCHIUZZI Diego (ITA)	KOVALEV Nikolay (RUS)
Men's Sabre Team	Korea	Romania	Italy
Women's Sabre	KIM Jiyeon (KOR)	VELIKAYA Sofya (RUS)	KHARLAN Olga (UKR)
Women's Sabre Team	–	–	–

British placings

Men's Foil (38):	Richard KRUSE 17th	James DAVIS 23rd	Husayan ROSOWSKY 34th
Team (9):	6th		
Women's Foil (38):	Natalia SHEPPARD 27th	Sophie TROIANO 37th	Anna BENTLEY 38th
Team (9):	8th		
Women's Epee (37):	Corinna LAWRENCE 28th		
Men's Sabre (37):	James HONEYBONE 36th		
Women's sabre (32):	Sophie WILLIAMS 27th	Louise BOND-WILLIAMS 29th	

Medal Table

Rank	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Italy	3	2	2	7
2	Korea	2	1	3	6
3	China	2	–	1	3
4	Ukraine	1	–	1	2
5=	Hungary	1	–	–	1
5=	Venezuela	1	–	–	1
7	Russia	–	2	1	3
8	Germany	–	1	1	2
9=	Egypt	–	1	–	1
9=	Japan	–	1	–	1
9=	Norway	–	1	–	1
9=	Romania	–	1	–	1
13	USA	–	–	1	1

Statistics

Fencing by Numbers

- 2 – Duels fought after quarrels at the fencing events of the 1924 Olympic Games: between Italians and Hungarians.
- 5 – Most fencing gold medals won at one Games: Nedo Nadi (ITA) in 1920 at all events except individual epee, from which he rested to prepare for the more important team event, so forfeiting the chance of a clean sweep.
- 6 – Most gold medals won by any competitor at consecutive Games: Aladar Gerevich (HUN) at sabre between 1932 and 1960.
- 7 – Most Games competed in by a woman: Kerstin Palm (SWE) at foil from 1964 to 1988.
- 13 – Most Olympic fencing medals won by one person: Edoardo Mangiarotti (ITA) at epee and foil over six Games from 1936 to 1960.
- 14 – Age of youngest Olympic fencer: Lea Moutoussamy of Algeria at sabre in 2012.
- 16 – Age of youngest fencing gold medallist: Ramon Fonst of Cuba at epee in 1900.
- 27 – Most Olympic medals won at a single weapon by one country: Hungary at sabre.
- 28 – Longest medal-winning span in years by any Olympian: Aladar Gerevich (HUN) at sabre between 1932 and 1960.
- 40 – Longest Olympic career in years: Ivan Osier (DEN) at epee from 1908 to 1948.
- 48 – Most Olympic fencing gold medals won by one country: Italy.
- 63 – Age of oldest Olympic fencer: Karl Munich (AUT) at sabre in 1912.

Fencing Siblings

Two members of a fencing-mad Tunisian family took part in the London 2012 Olympic Games: Azza Besbes, 21, a right-handed sabreur and her elder sister Sarra, 23, a left-handed epeeist. Each has been African champion three times.

Azza was the first African and Arab fencer to reach the quarter-finals of an Olympic Games (in 2008), missing the chance of a medal by one hit when she was beaten by world No. 1 Rebecca Ward (USA) 15-14.

At the 2011 world championships, Sarra refused to fence against her Israeli opponent, in support of the Palestinian protest movement Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions.

The Besbes family have two other sisters, Hela and Rym, in the Tunisian fencing team and their 17-year-old brother Ahmed Aziz also fences.

Two other Tunisian siblings fenced in London 2012: twin brothers Mohamed Samandi (foil) and Hichem (sabre), both 25 years old. Mohamed was African foil champion in 2007 and has been a silver medallist twice; Hichem has been sabre silver medallist for the past two years.

Egyptian sisters Shaimaa and Eman El Gammal, both foilists, have each won many medals at the African championships.

The American women's epee team fielded Courtney Hurley, 21, and her 24-year-old sister Kelley.

Brother and sister foilists Zain and Mona Shaito have dual US-Lebanese nationality and fenced for Lebanon. Mona won her first bout against Shaimaa El Gammal, but then met Di Francisca and scored just two hits. Zain also managed to get two hits on Zhu Jun (CHN).

Rumours and Rumblings

Italian coaches on the move: Vezzali's coach Giulio Tomassini is joining the French club Avignon, Errigo's coach Giovanni Bortolaso is said to be moving to Tauber in Germany and Di Francisca's coach, also national foil coach, Stefano Cerioni might go to Russia – if the price is right.

A gold medal is said to be worth 140,000 Euros to an Italian fencer; that's a cool £220,000 to Di Francisca for her two.

Russian head coach Vladislav Pavlovich has been demoted to assistant foil coach after Russia failed to reach its target of six

medals. Ilgar Mamedov becomes senior national coach, with Andrei Chouvalov in charge of men's epee, Alexander Glazunov women's epee and Christian Bauer sabre. The search for a senior foil coach continues.

French high-performance director Patrice Menon has been sacked after France failed to win a single medal and only one fencer made the top eight. Most of the top coaches have also gone, but technical director Eric Srecki remains in place to plan for the coming season.

Left-handers

When in the 1920s Giuseppe Mangiarotti started teaching his naturally right-handed son Edoardo to fence with his left hand, it was already well known that being left-handed was an advantage in fencing. Edoardo Mangiarotti went on to win more Olympic medals than any other fencer – 13 at foil and epee.

The results of the London Games reinforce that fact. Whereas around 10% of the population is left-handed, 25% of all Olympic fencers were lefties, the proportion rising to an average of one third of the top eight. The men sabreurs were the exception; of the 37 competitors, only six were left-handed and none reached the last eight. By contrast five of the top eight women foilists were lefties, two of the L4 and one of the finalists.

The history of the fabulous floor lights

The plan for the scoring lights evolved over a period of 4 years when, following the success of the Beijing lighting – dramatic white floodlights over each piste – the FIE requested further innovation for London 2012.

Jul 2009	At the 2009 World Championships in Turkey, the FIE Technical Director, Ioan Pop, first voiced his idea of floor lights in a conversation with Hilary Philbin. His proposal was for a horseshoe-shaped score light around either end of the finals piste.
Jan 2010	Hilary Philbin produced the first floor light sketch early in 2010, and spent the following 18 months seeking backing from a number of LOCOG departments with a potential interest – Technology, Venues, Lighting, Sport Presentation, Sport Equipment, Look, etc – but ultimately none was able to commit to a budget or a basic feasibility exercise. (All budgets sat within the central LOCOG teams, rather than with the individual sports.)
Feb 2011	Leon Paul outlined their design for a new finals piste for use at the European championships in Sheffield. This would be a raised structure, 300mm high, with LED lighting panels running along the entire length of both sides of the supporting frame. Barry Paul offered to make this available to London 2012, and it was compatible with the floor light proposal.
Jul 2011	The FIE and LOCOG approved the Leon Paul finals piste. There being no proposal for floor lights within LOCOG, Leon Paul then produced a prototype section of floor lighting in time for review at the European championships. The test piece was enthusiastically received by all.
Sep 2011	The floor light proposal for the finals piste was formally approved by the FIE and LOCOG. This included the all-important funding, which was based on LOCOG hiring the floor lights from Leon Paul.
Oct 2011	For the 2011 World championships in Catania, the organisers introduced their own floor lights, similar to Ioan Pop's design, but upped the stakes by adding them to the four direct elimination pistes as well as the finals piste. Following this demonstration, it was agreed that Leon Paul should produce four additional sets of floor lights for the London 2012 DE pistes.
Nov 2011	The finals piste and the associated floor lights were successfully demonstrated at the Test Event in ExCeL
Jan 2012	Final approval was given for the additional floor lights, funded by the FIE, and Leon Paul started production, having to overcome a number of technical challenges along the way.
	For those interested in numbers: the final installation had over 640 metres of light strips, 38,400 individual LEDs and more than 5km of cable.
Feb 2012	<p>In February, following an 11th hour request by Hilary Philbin, central controls were specified to enable the integration of the scoring lights with the overall lighting system to be used at the Games. This allowed the scoring lights to be set centrally to any one of three modes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Local mode, when the DE pistes were in use.▪ Finals mode, when the DE piste lights would reflect the hits scored on the finals piste.▪ Presentation mode, when the piste lights would match the piste colour and would be used to enhance athlete entry onto the field of play. <p>Control could also be switched between the competition team and the presentation team, who could then integrate the floor lights with the theatrical lighting.</p> <p>It's a credit to Leon Paul that this essential feature was incorporated at such a late stage, when the floor lights and power supply units were already in production.</p>
Jul 2012	The floor lights made their debut on 28 July at London 2012, and were acclaimed by all. They looked fantastic!

Heartfelt thanks should go to everyone at Leon Paul for the manufacture and fit-out within a very tight schedule, and in particular to Jack Jacob who was responsible for the design.

Sport presentation at London 2012



The dramatically lit finals piste and horseshoe-shaped floor lighting (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

Within LOCOG, a dedicated presentation team was established to deliver the staging of each sport, so it was vital that they worked closely with the competition teams. This was particularly true for minor sports, such as fencing, where there is no established presentation format. We worked well together from the start, sharing a view that fencing is a glamorous sport that could, and should, be made appealing to non-fencing audiences.

The positive response from spectators and TV audiences to the presentation of the fencing events at London 2012 was overwhelming. The following descriptions in the national press were typical:

“Producers have given the sport the sexiest of makeovers”

“Athletes march out, bathed in a halo of white light”

“Announcers introduce the fencers as if they were boxers”

“... the best theatrical lighting in the Games”

“... uplifting music and videos”

“Commentators ramp up the fervour”

“It is magnificent, it is wonderful”

Soon after joining LOCOG in 2010, I invited the director of sport presentation, James O'Brien, to the world championships in Paris. The French put on a great show in a spectacular environment, the Grand Palais, which enabled James to see and appreciate fencing at its best. The following year, George Meredith-Hardy was appointed as the senior producer for ExCeL-based sports, and I invited him to the world championships in Catania where we watched the men's sabre final – again it was a good show. George was completely engaged and said: *“I left feeling there was a real opportunity to emphasise the natural drama and theatre of the sport to help bring it to life to people who may never have seen it before, but also to remain true to the sport and its fans.”*

Over the following year George built up separate teams for each of the ExCeL sports, and at Games-time a team of 23 people worked exclusively on the fencing events, headed up by the fencing producer, Christophe Sevessand. His team included an associate producer, presenters, English and French announcers, floor managers, researcher, production co-ordinator, production assistants, audio and video playback technicians and a timings PA.

This team were responsible for managing all the show elements:

- **Overhead theatrical lighting** – including the moving coloured lights that helped create the excitement within the seating bowl.
- **Athlete entry** – the central floor light control boxes built by Leon Paul allowed the floor lights around each of the five pistes to be integrated with the theatrical lighting to great effect, which enhanced the athlete entry and atmosphere within the venue.



Fencing at ExCeL (Graham Morrison)

- **Content on the two giant video screens** – including video referee replays, television footage during breaks between fights, the A to Z video that explained the key concepts of the sport, a daily news update and a daily entertainment update.
- **Music** – fencing was categorised as a heritage sport, and the team were provided with music that matched this. The music library comprised 2012 tracks of which about 700 were in the heritage category. This included a title track written for us by Muse, called Survival, and this was the official track of the Games, used in every session.
- **In-ear commentary** – the three announcers provided an in-ear commentary service that was available to spectators through an earpiece available from the programme sellers. Over a thousand were sold each day, which helped non-fencing spectators to understand what was going on.
- Pre-show performances, audience interviews, etc.
- Announcements and commentary in English and French.

Fencing was fortunate in that it was one of only seven venues to have full theatrical lighting, which has never previously been used at an Olympic Games. The lighting effects were key to the overall presentation of the sport, and the Leon Paul scoring lights, including the centre piste LEDs and the five sets of floor lights, were an impressive sight. The effect of the floor lights was further enhanced by the over-piste theatrical lighting which matched the colour of each piste. A brief history of how the score lights came into being is shown in the panel below.

London 2012 demonstrated that fencing can be presented as live entertainment, rather than solely as a sports event. It also

showed that fencing can be presented well on television, and that it can be made appealing to non-fencers, who are willing to pay for a ticket.

Some of the show elements are expensive, but we are already part-way there. We have:

- An explanatory film to show to non-fencing audiences.
- Access to Leon Paul's finals piste framework with built-in LEDs, and the surrounding finals piste floor lights.
- Potential access to the additional four sets of floor lights built by Leon Paul, but owned by the FIE, along with the central control boxes that enable the floor lights to be integrated into the overall presentation.
- Experienced announcers and commentators (Mark Nelson-Griffiths, Jamie Thornton and James Williams).
- Floor managers who can manage the athlete entry and 'show' elements.

The staging of fencing finals in the UK has come on a long way in recent years. There is now a great opportunity to further transform the way we present our major events by developing our approach to sports presentation.

On behalf of fencing, I'd like to thank George Meredith-Hardy, Christophe Sevessand and the sports presentation team for the impact they have had on our sport.

Hilary Philbin
Fencing Manager – London 2012

Fencing's legacy: the people



Volunteers (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

The Olympic fencing events received generous praise from so many directions – the IOC, the FIE, the BOA, LOCOG, BF itself, participating athletes and team officials, spectators and so on. This feedback has invariably mentioned the quality of the huge number of people involved. The volunteers in particular have been described in glowing terms, and the words ‘superb’, ‘exemplary’ and ‘brilliant’ have been commonly used.



Hilary Philbin and her competition management team (S.Timacheff/FencingPhotos)

For British Fencing, much of our legacy will come from the people who contributed to this success. We have increased our ability to run major events through the higher numbers and level of experience of all involved, and we have gained numerous

additional volunteers who could be recruited to assist with the development of our clubs at grass-roots level.

More than 600 people have gained additional experience at the highest level:

- 12 people in the LOCOG competition management team were responsible for the planning and delivery of the fencing events over periods ranging from three months to three years
- 400+ sport volunteers, including 40+ team leaders, performed a wide range of duties in the competition arena, back of house athlete areas, training venue and competition management offices. Many of these volunteers were experienced fencers, but others had never before been involved with fencing and, based on their experience, offered to volunteer again at future UK-based fencing events
- 70 technology volunteers operated the video-referee cameras, timing and scoring equipment and public scoreboards.



Southend Seaxe coach Joanne Reynolds runs a Go/Fence session for British Fencing in the spectator zone.

- 31 armourers worked in weapon control, the call room and the competition arena
- 15 referees operated across the three weapons as referee, video-referee or assistant referee
- Three technical officials had roles on the *Directoire Technique*, Referees Commission or Medical Commission
- Three announcer/commentators made a valuable contribution to the presentation of the sport
- 12 Have-a-Go coach/volunteers introduced members of the public to fencing using the Go/Fence equipment in the spectator zone – close to 3000 people 'had a go' and lodged

their contact details with British Fencing. A second group ran a Have-a-Go session for the world's press, which will have given them a better understanding of what it takes to be a fencer

- 24 young games makers from BF junior and cadet groups acted as piste-minders in the competition arena, warm-up halls and training hall, observing the world's top fencers at close quarters. This was a unique opportunity for our next generation of Olympians
- 32 veteran fencers competed in mock-up foil and epee events in the competition arena, precisely replicating the athlete flows and processes, enabling us to train the volunteers on wireless installation and call room checking and assembly procedures
- And last, but not least, a number of staff from the BF office signed up as volunteers in a range of roles including the field of play, call room, sport equipment and the Games-time competition management office.

Everyone who played a part, no matter how small, should feel proud of their contribution to what has been described as an outstandingly successful event. My final message to all involved is:

Thank you – a job well done!

Hilary Philbin

*WE gold: Yana Shemyakina (UKR) becomes women's epee Olympic champion
(S. Timacheff/FencingPhotos)*

