



# Just one guy with a sword

GOMEZ IS MEXICO'S LONE HOPE TO WIN HIS COUNTRY'S FIRST MEN'S FENCING MEDAL

By ZHANG CHUNMEI  
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — He sat alone in the corner of the training arena, looking at fencers from other countries playing with their teammates at the Exhibition Center of Shenzhen.

"Fencing is not popular in Mexico. People prefer to play soccer or basketball. It's hard for me to come to Shenzhen, as it is an expensive trip," said Daniel Gomez, 21.

Growing up in Mexico, Gomez did not have many fencers to look up to. He practiced soccer, running, gymnastics and tennis before becoming a fencer.

"It has a special charm to me. When I stand on the strip, holding a sword in my hand, it is really interesting, and different. You know, men always like this feeling to fight against and conquer rivals," said Gomez, a senior from Pennsylvania State University.

He will compete in the men's individual foil today.

"If you learn running or swimming, you just repeat the same movement all the time. Fencing is a physical trick. You trick, attack and defend on the strip. Only the smart people can win the game," said Gomez.

According to Jorge Castro Rea, the president of the Mexican Fencing Federation and Mexico's fenc-



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(Left to right) Mexican fencing coach Jorge Castro Rea and fencers Nataly Michel and Daniel Gomez pose during an interview with China Daily.

ing coach, the country has only 3,000 fencers.

"It is easy to find a ground to play soccer, but hard to find a fencing club. Even if most clubs are free, you still need to afford the cost of the equipment," said Rea.

The Mexican Fencing Federation organizes competitions, training camps and trips to other countries to earn money for fencing in Mexico.

Mexico, not well known for its fencing, has had only one fencer

win a medal at the Olympics - Pilar Roldan took home a silver in the women's foil at the 1968 Mexico Games. That was more than 22 years before Gomez was born.

"My country and Pennsylvania State provided scholarships to support me, to attend competitions in the US and Europe. The fencers in Europe can hold matches and communicate with each other every weekend, but it's a long way for me to go," said Gomez.

The Mexican Fencing Federation sent an invitation to the Chinese Fencing Federation in December last year to invite Chinese fencing coaches to teach in Mexico.

"The Chinese team is on top of the world. As a new force in fencing, China has made great progress in the past. Their experience will be very helpful," said Rea.

This is the first time Gomez has come to China. His teammate, the

only female fencer from Mexico, Nataly Michel, reached the round of 16 in women's individual foil on Aug 14.

"It's a tough year for a senior like me to fence and study at the same time, but my parents and Pennsylvania State always supported me," Gomez said. "I'm a little bit nervous for the coming competition. I hope I can reach the round of 32. I need to earn more points to get a ticket to London next year."

## Fencer takes a stab at Olympic qualification



ZHANG CHUNMEI / CHINA DAILY

Max Heinzer watches his teammate's performance in the quarterfinals on Sunday.

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SHENZHEN — Switzerland's Max Heinzer fills his days with fencing for the national team, which has taken priority over his studies at the University of Basel and his modeling aspirations, as he struggles to qualify for the 2012 Olympics.

The 23-year-old epee fencer ranks eighth in the world but was defeated 15-13 by Czech Martin Capek in the round of 64 at the Universiade.

"I am relaxed and do not think about the result," he said.

"I also want a medal in this competition but no pressure. Fencing

is not like swimming. If you swim fastest, you can win the gold, but the result of fencing always changes. No one has the dead certainty they'll win."

Heinzer took the bronze at the 2007 Bangkok Universiade and the gold in the men's epee team at the 2009 Universiade.

Heinzer hopes to qualify for the 2012 Olympics. He ranks first in the Games qualifiers and is just 10 points short of a ticket.

Competing in the Olympics is a childhood dream, he said.

"When I was five years old, I accompanied my older brother to a local fencing training club, and I was immediately addicted," he recalled.

"I started (fencing) and trained regularly. My brother really liked pirate movies. This is the reason he started to take some lessons and brought me into the whole scene with him."

Heinzer has developed a large fan base with his fencing skills and good looks. His website is rife with encouraging posts from admirers.

"Until the summer of 2012, I will focus purely on fencing," he said.

"Whenever I have time, I teach fencing to newcomers, and I sometimes work as a model. I do not ask for modeling jobs, but if others contact me, I will consider them."

Heinzer believes talent alone is not enough to become a top fencer.

"If you want to reach a goal, you need ... a lot of diligence and focus — no pain, no gain. It is the same in sports and other areas."

He interrupted his studies last year to concentrate on fencing and devote more time to training.

"The biggest challenge on the way to London will be the hard qualification period," Heinzer said.

"If I qualify, I don't want to only take part. I really want to win a medal. I am looking forward to a fantastic opening ceremony, and then I will fully concentrate on my competition," he said.

"The (Olympic) men's epee is on Aug 1, which is our national holiday in Switzerland. I quite like this date."