

Cards a 66 for 36-Hole 135 in Thunder Hungarian Fencer Uses Conversation of Blade

Bankuti Overcomes Teaching Problem on Long Island

By HARRY V. FORGERON
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LEVITTOWN, L. I., Jan. 24—The opportunity to develop a sports hobby is one of the magnets that draws persons from the city to the suburbs. Long Island's stepped-up program of adult education offers everything from archery to zither-playing. An offshoot of the program is the Long Island Swordsmen, a fencing club.

Jim Castello, a Levittown resident who is assistant fencing coach at New York University, opened the drive to form the club after the adult education course in the sport ended here last June. He fenced in twenty devotees of the blade to start the enterprise. From this sprawling community of ranch and Cape Cod homes he drew a doctor, a lawyer, several engineers, advertising men, salesmen and housewives.

Ex-Champion Is Teacher

"Castello obtained Louis Bankuti, a former Hungarian épée champion, as an instructor," said Fred Schnitzler, a copy writer who is president of the club. "Bankuti had left his native land during the 1956 revolution to take up residence in New York.

"As the word got around that Bankuti was teaching us, a number of former college fencers joined our group. Fellows such as Marv Amster of Ohio State, Sid Tiemann of Minnesota, Art Ward of Penn State and Al Backner of C. C. N. Y. feel that they have learned a lot from Bankuti and they have helped to instruct the novices.

"The Bankuti arrangement has worked well but we had a transportation crisis at first. Bankuti does not speak English so we were afraid he'd get lost if we turned him loose on the Long Island Rail Road. The first night I rode out with him from Manhattan and at the end of the meeting I put him back on the right train.

"We've made progress. Now



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Fred Schnitzler, left, head of the Long Island Swordsmen, and Louis Bankuti, instructor

he rides the subway to Penn Station and has learned where to get his train. He knows that when the conductor calls 'Wahagh' he has to get out. I always meet him at the station so he won't go astray."

How does Bankuti convey his instructions?

Taught Many Sports

"He uses what we call the 'conversation of the blade,'" explained Schnitzler. "Our faulty strokes serve as questions and he answers them by demonstrating the proper technique. You get the point fast."

Bankuti was born in Szokolaya,

Hungary, in 1916, and served in the Hungarian Army from 1940 to 1952. He was an officer in charge of athletics after completing his training.

At Ludovica Academy he taught soccer, swimming, skiing, judo, boxing and gymnastics from 1947 to 1952. During the same period he was a fencing instructor at a Budapest club. From 1952 to 1956 he taught fencing at the Tatabanya Technikum. Bankuti and his wife have a 9-year-old child.

In response to a question about the cost of taking up fencing, Schnitzler said, "I purchased a mask, jacket, sneakers, glove and two foils—all new—for less than \$40. Most fencers start with the foil and working their way up to the épée and sabre. An average price for a foil is \$5, but épées and sabers run about \$10 apiece.

"We're extremely grateful to the Levittown School District, which does not charge us for the use of the corrective gymnasium in the Division Avenue High School. We meet in the gym every Thursday evening.

"All of the members chip in for Bankuti's fee, which is reasonable because our group has grown to thirty-two. I guess we pay the wholesale price.

"Since last October we have been holding Saturday competitions in Levittown under the

auspices of the Long Island chapter of the Amateur Fencers League of America. I don't think any of us will get to the world championships in Philadelphia next summer but we've acquired some skill."

Schnitzler is aided in the administration of the swordsmen's group by Mrs. Ruth Sylvester and Mrs. Lois Braemert, both of Levittown, who serve as secretary and treasurer, respectively.

Success as Officers

"The members knew what they were doing when they elected women to these posts," said Schnitzler. "When it comes to collecting dues, keeping records, sending out meeting announcements and keeping scores in competition, you can depend on them.

"We're not the only fencers in this neighborhood," he continued. "Sperry Gyroscope in Lake Success has an active club that meets at the Carle Place School and East Meadow has a fine group in an adult education program."

Schnitzler has been trimmed during his fencing career and he's proud of it. He is 6 feet 2 inches, weighs 175 pounds and has a 31-inch waistline.

"That makes me nearly as svelte as any of the nine women in our group," he said.

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