

Museum of American Fencing



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Zold, Dr. Francis

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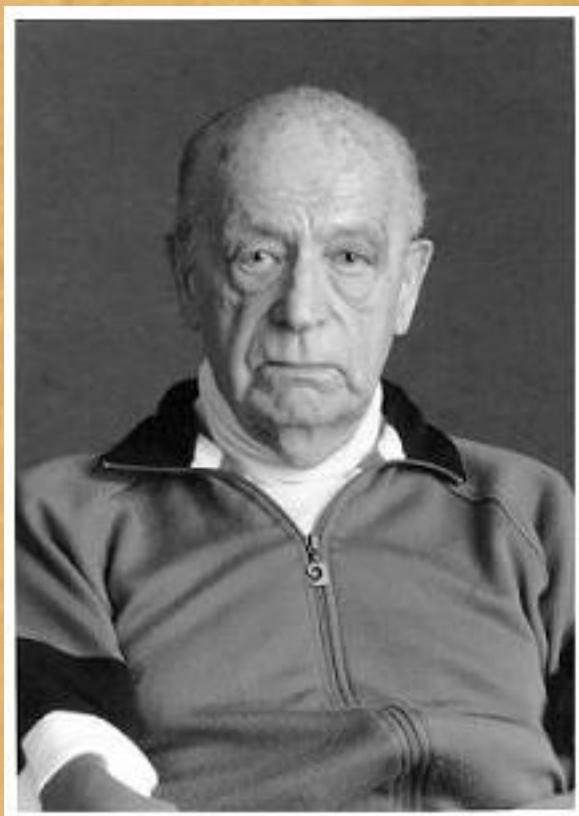
Excerpt from "Tribute: Francis Zold Retires" by Rockwell Herron in Pomona College Magazine Spring 1998

The son of a decorated general in the Austro-Hungarian Army of World War I, Francis Zold was born into a noble family loyal to the last Hapsburg emperor. Choosing academia over a military career, he attended Pazmany and Eotvos universities in Hungary, where he obtained doctoral degrees in both law and Hungarian language. An able athlete, he began fencing in the 1920s. Eventually, he became a student of the legendary Italian fencing master, Italo Santelli, and earned a master's degree in fencing.

Though his last national and international fencing tournaments were in the late 1940s, he continued teaching fencing. Zold's professional career was actually in publishing, but with his characteristic energy he split his time between career and fencing. Elected Secretary of the Hungarian Fencing Federation, he resigned this position in 1939 in protest of the German National Socialist influence over Hungary. When war broke out, he served in the Hungarian Army until 1943. From then until the end of the war he worked as



one of the few International Red Cross representatives in Eastern Europe, during which time he was an associate of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. After the war, Zold returned to publishing and fencing. When the Hungarian communists consolidated all private publishing into one government-run entity, non-communist Zold was greatly surprised to find that he had been selected to be chief of the new government publishing organization. From 1946 to 1956, he worked strenuously to run his publishing organization without running afoul of the regime. In 1948, he was a captain of the Hungarian Fencing Team at the Olympic Games in London. When the Hungarian Revolution broke out in late 1956, he defected with his wife and son, first to Austria and then to the United States.



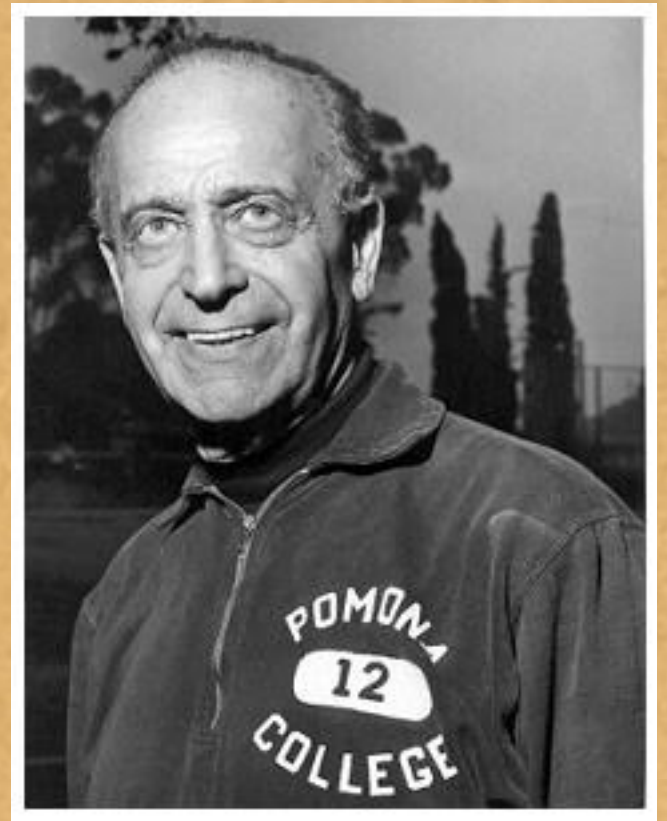
In America, he relied on fencing to support his family, and after experiencing so much travail he sought a quiet community to start a new life. He settled in Claremont, where he began teaching at Pomona College in 1959 and USC a few years later. In his spare time, he edited works of Hungarian literature and wrote hundreds of articles for various Hungarian exile newspapers. He worked for years as a reporter for Radio Free Europe, including a stint as a commentator for the 1960 Squaw Valley Winter Olympics. In addition to coaching in USC, he also coached at Claremont, San Diego State University, UCSD, Cal Poly Pomona, University of Redlands, and the L.A. Athletic Club. He was a U.S. Junior Olympic team coach seven times. Over the years, he was sent by the United States Sports Academy to be a guest coach in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Australia. Pomona College [and the University of Southern California were] fortunate to have this world-class coach, and his students were fortunate to receive from him lessons on fencing and on life. One lesson was far more important to him than all the others: "Never give up! Not just in fencing, but in life. Never give up!"

"Francis Zold Tries to Build Up Troy Fencing" by Mike Schroeder, Staff Writer, Daily Trojan

He appears to be a distinguished-looking man in his mid-80s. But it sure would be hard to picture him in a businessman's suit.

Francis Zold wears the suit of a champion fencer, and as USC fencing coach, tries to instill the same expertise in his athletes despite tremendous obstacles.

He certainly knows what it is to be a champion. Before coming to the United States several years ago, he was one of the top fencers in Hungary, known at the time as "the new world" in fencing. At one time, Zold was ranked 7th in the saber and 9th in the epee, as well as being the captain of the nation's epee team. (The saber and epee, along with the foil, are weapons used in the sport)



He is known worldwide as an expert fencer and as a fencing teacher. He served as the U.S. Junior Olympic coach and team representative seven times, and has been to about every country in the world that has someone that can hold a saber.

Among other things, Zold has also published nearly 2,000 articles on the subject of fencing in several foreign languages.

So what is Zold doing here, coaching a club sport and teaching five fencing classes in the physical education department parttime?

Although he speaks with a marked Hungarian accent, one thing he makes clear is the reason for his activities: "I'm working to improve college and junior fencing."

And the university isn't the only place he lends his hands. He has also taught at the Claremont Colleges for a year longer than his tenure here.



FRANCIS ZOLD

He believes there is much to improve on, particularly in the United States' fencing program. He knows this is where the problems facing the university's team and other college squads across the country begin.

"After being around the world many times in international competition, seeing the fencers from other countries compete, I know the U.S. has the talent to become a fencing champion. But we just don't have the support or facilities," he said.

He sees this problem filtering down as one of the chief problems of the Trojan team.

"We don't have a chance to improve our program when we can only practice four to five hours a week when some

schools practice from four to five hours a day," Zold said.

The USC team can only practice in the gym that much a week, and is very hard pressed to get extra practice time.

"If we stay in here (the dance room) five minutes over our time, they kick us out," he said. "We just don't have any place to practice."

Another problem lies in the financing of the sport.

Zold admits that the sport is expensive, but said team members must pay for all their equipment. This can keep many people out of the sport.

"If a fencer is rich, he can buy new blades when they break. But if a poor (athlete) breaks his blade in the middle of a match and can't buy a new one, he can go home and cry," Zold said.

When talking about problems with the sport, the coach continually repeats the phrase, "no money."

"We (the team) would all like to go to tournaments all over the country, but there is no money. We were able to get more this year, but it still isn't much."

Again, the U.S. Olympic Committee seems to explain the situation.

"You want to know how much the Olympic Committee spent on fencing every year? \$12,000," Zold cracked. And that's for the whole United States Olympic effort

But all the news isn't bad. Zold has seen the USC program in the physical education department rise from 52 students in 3 classes to 216 students in 5 classes today.

The national athletic group is getting the message, too.

A 600-page report written while the Ford Administration was in power after the 1976 Olympics called for new expenditures in the area of the U.S. national fencing

program.

"We may get \$140,000 next year," the coach speculated.

He noted the press gave little attention to USC alumnus Jan Romary after she won two Pan American gold medals and four golds in the Olympics, as well as taking the United States crown 10 times.

"Jan got about two lines in the L.A. Times even after doing all that," Zold said.

But this could change with increased popularity of the sport, as the "Pacific area's teams have increased in number from seven or eight when he came to the university in 1959 to 42 today."



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