



KT INSTAVOTE
Is the Arab world soft on the Palestiniar
 Yes No Can't say

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CITY EN GUARDE

BY BINDU RAI

It's time to be on guard Dubai, as your very own Athos, Porthos, Aramis (better known as the three Musketeers), Zorro, Errol Flynn and El Capone are gearing up to swashbuckle their way into local history.

The thrust and riposte of battle, the romance of the duel at dawn, the cavalier clash of steel, now for the asking in our own city. If you too have dreams of flexing your muscles that extra bit, then you can also sign up for the fencing classes at the Jumeirah Beach Club, Dubai.

The clash of the blades, the glint of steel and the mental manoeuvres are all integral parts of this sport. Some even refer to it as 'chess with muscles', where the mind works equally hard as the rest of the body. And if that isn't enough to sway you, then let me inform you that fencing is one of the safest sports in the world, unlike the bloody battle you get to see in Madonna's latest video of the Bond flick, Die Another Day!

"Gone are those days when fencing was conducted without protective gear," says Mihail G. Kouzev, fencing instructor. "Everyone is now required to wear protective suits, masks and gloves - not exposing even a sliver of skin that could come in contact with the sword." Kouzev has been professionally fencing for 16 years and is a former member of the Bulgarian National Team. Moving to Dubai may have distanced him from his passion for a while, but it wasn't long before he decided to pass his fencing skills down to others by offering special classes.

"Unfortunately, as fencing is not a popular sport in the UAE, the equipment is not readily available," he states. "I supply all my students with the required gear, including the epee swords for combat practice."

A little history lesson at this point will not go amiss. Sword fighting - contrary to what most people think - did not originate in ancient Rome or Spain. It was actually the ancient Egyptians who mastered at this art in 1200 BCE, which was then carried on by the Romans and then the rest of the world. As time



Chess with muscles is the name of this game

passed, the shape and style of the sword was moulded and changed to suit different needs.

"The three popular fencing swords today are the foil (a modern version of the dueling rapier), the épée (a heavy duelling sword, with a larger guard and st blade) and the sabre (a modern cavalry sword and a cutting weapon)," explains Kouzev. "While the foil's target area is the front and back of the torso and the sabre's target area being the area hip upwards, the épée targets the entire body, thus making it the most difficult to master."

In today's times, a single point is scored by striking a person on the designated areas, with the maximum score being fifteen. To avoid cheating or miscalculation, all suits are electronically hooked up with a portable apparatus that flashes red and green lights according to the hit.

The students who are already enrolled in the classes, couldn't care less about the technical details. Says one: "All I know is that there is something so wild and dangerous about the sport that I just couldn't resist. Some may say that is the perfect blend of patience, discipline and competition - I simply call it artistic excellence."

Classes are available once a week for adults and juniors, at Dh35 per lesson members and Dh45 for non members.

A final note of advice: Some of you may feel silly initially with your arms and elbows thrust out in different positions (not to mention the legs), but to master the game, a little inhibition has to be shed.

If you think you have it in you, give it a shot - while I head back to my El Capone cartoons with the horse yielding his sword and galloping into the sunset screaming, "Touché, Away!"

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