

# En garde! Greece students take foils in hand

By Kevin Myers

They weren't the Three Musketeers, and their instructor was not Cyrano de Bergerac, but they were practicing fencing, the sport that made those men famous in literature.

Appropriate to the varying sizes and shapes typical among children of their ages, the third through eighth grade students at St. Charles Borromeo School learned and practiced a sport at which tactics and mental reflexes

outweigh strength.

Searching to provide his physical education classes with something a little different, physical education teacher Doug Schneider, thought back to a fencing course he took at Brockport College. Fencing is definitely "a little different," he thought, and it teaches skills that will improve students' performance in all other sports.

After teaching his students the fundamentals of the sport, though, he decided to thrust the students into the heart of fencing. He called the Rochester Fencing Club, and talked to owner Anthony Leach, who volunteered to run a three-day fencing program for Schneider's third-through eighth-grade students. The program was offered at the school October 16 to 18.

According to national competitors, unique balance and unfamiliar body positioning make fencing a difficult sport to grasp initially. "The students did very well, though," Schneider said.

He noted that in most ball sports children are taught to throw with their right hands while balancing on their left feet. Fencing, however, teaches a different form; when the fencer is dueling with the right hand, his body weight must also be balanced on the right foot.

Fencing originated in Spain, but the style now practiced here was brought to the United States by French and Italian fencing masters at the end of the 19th century. For generations, fencing has been considered a gracious, gentlemanly sport. The sons of European noblemen throughout the centuries received fencing instruction to develop their characters and mental acuity.

It is unlikely that the St. Charles Borromeo students who participated in the fencing program will ever be noblemen, but with foils in hand, they learned some of the same mental and physical skills once studied by such European Kings as Charles IX.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal  
Fifth-grader Lisa DiNicola can't bear to look as her friend Melissa Burton practices her lunges, poking Lisa in the stomach.



Stacy Tears, right, and Michelle Kelly are en garde as they practice what they have learned at St. Charles Borromeo School, Rochester.



To get a clearer view of fencing instructor Anthony Leach, Lisa DiNicola lifts up her mask so she doesn't miss the important points of what he is saying.



Danny McNally, fourth grade, takes a breather, but will not be foiled again.