

## From Star Wars to Senior Spring

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When I was 7 years old, I was a total fan of Star Wars. I was the kind of child that loved the tales of Anakin Skywalker so much, that I earnestly believed that the force existed in me. So, I spent quite a bit of time of my seventh year trying to move objects without touching them, which quite unfortunately remained totally unsuccessful. However, one day, a Wednesday in the middle of the month of October at an athletic complex right by our apartment, I did find something extremely close to the world of light sabers: a fencing room. That room was full of older children, teenagers 3 or 4 years older than me combatting each other with electric swords. I wish I could have seen the look on my face at that afternoon - I was right away hooked to the sport.

Fencing isn't at all like Star Wars, it is an Olympic sport that opposes two athletes who hold a sword in their hand and none of them die at the

end, they fortunately just fence to 15 touches. There aren't light saber colors but three types of weapons. I fence one called epee. For the past 15 years, I have dedicated myself to the sport, to the point, where I still feel like I've never left that room.

This sport has brought me to incredible highs. I have had the chance to fence off the best fencers in Switzerland, the country where I am from, by qualifying to national competitions, which in turn led me to the international fencing scene. When I was 15, I was fortunate enough to be selected by national coaches to represent my country internationally for the U17 and later U20 European and World Cup competitions. This gave me the opportunity to quite frankly travel the world, from Göteborg in Sweden to Amman in Jordan and dozens destinations, I was able to push myself to my limits and practice a sport I loved. Until one match in 2010, during the Junior World Championships in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, where everything stopped. Fighting for a U17 World medal and a spot for the Youth Olympic Games against the number one Cuban

fencer, my hip broke. I had to abandon the competition and go back home empty handed.

During my recovery, a very annoying and weird question came to me.

Why is it that I am fencing? Why is it that I dedicate so much of my time, energy and effort into something that has the power to make me so miserable?

It took me a couple of months to get back on the fencing strips both physically and mentally. But slowly and slowly I felt like I was back again in that room, when I first discovered the sport as a seven year old, just loving it. Loving the game and everything that came with it.

As a senior, this season defending the colors of Harvard will be my last one. And as my time as a student-athlete comes to an end, I ask myself again, why is it that I am still fencing? There were so many highs and lows? Why didn't I quit half-way through?

What I realize now that I didn't understand in 2010 is that for things we love, the reason why we love them changes through time and evolve as we – ourselves – change and grow up older. I am not fencing because I believe I have the force anymore, nor am I fencing today to fulfill my goal of going to represent my country at the Youth Olympics. No, this season I am fencing with the goal of seeing the smile on the face of my teammates when we hopefully bring our fourth-straight Ivy League trophy back to campus. I never thought four years ago that I would care so much about the collegiate circuit. Even less so, I didn't expect to care so much about my teammates. In fact, I didn't think that I would be giving my Lowell speech about them – but the process of writing it, made me realize that they are like my family here. In latin there is a phrase for this “si vales, valeo”. If you are well, I am well.

So whether, it is a field of study, an entrepreneurial venture or even a relationship – the fencing room that I entered that Wednesday afternoon

has taught me that the reasons we keep doing the things we love evolve through time and will keep evolving. We just have to sit tight and keep going, even when we fall and think we can't get up again.

Thank you.