

THE JOURNAL RECORD SECTION B

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INNOVATORS

Touché - A Blind Fencer's Story

Revealing a skill of the sight-impaired

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THE JOURNAL RECORD

OKLAHOMA CITY – Inevitably, when George Adams explains the nature of his documentary film, someone chuckles at the idea of giving a blind person a sword.

And therein lies one of the primary reasons he produced *Touché - A Blind Fencer's Story*, Adams said.

"The comment I got, more than any, was, 'Isn't that dangerous?' ... No. It's an accomplishment," he said. "I am humbled by these brave individuals. As the sighted world fears the idea of losing one's sight, the subjects of the film live with this impairment and yet are emboldened and empowered to not let anything slow them down."

The 89-minute film takes an emotional look at four people living in Oklahoma City who have either low or no vision as they learn the Olympic sport of fencing. The fencers are Catherine Bolton, Robbie Hopper, Cathy Tuton and Ani Brady, who practice at the Oklahoma Sport Fencing club in north Oklahoma City under coaches Carolyn Gresham-Fiegel and Bob Fiegel.

Adams was introduced to the concept after reading a news feature about a blind fencing tournament in Boston. While inquiring about the coach, he discovered that the winner of the competition had moved to Oklahoma City. After months of fruitless effort to contact the fencer, Adams accidentally bumped into Bolton at a local business. Their conversation set the tone of the film, he said.

Skillful fencing actually involves little contact or force, but rather a deft touch. Lacking visual cues for a sense of distance, sight-impaired fencers nonetheless develop the same sort of intuitive body-to-body mapping from somatic sensory feedback, so-called muscle memory, and lots of practice – in other words, pretty much like any other athlete.

And like any other athlete, the accomplishment of mastering a sport feels wonderful, even more so because other people don't believe it's possible.

"The idea of a blind person using what most people think of as a sharp object intrigued me," he said. "But once you appreciate the hows and whys and the similarities between a cane and an epee, it all makes sense."

Adams recently finished production of the two-year project and has started the screening phase of promotions. The next showing will be Saturday at the Paramount theater and meeting space



Producer/director George Adams and fencer Catherine Bolton from the documentary film *Touché: A Blind Fencer's Story*.

COURTESY PHOTO BY HANNAH CRAIG

in the Film Row district in Oklahoma City. He's also submitting his work for consideration at film festivals across the country. Travel plans include Washington, California, Utah and Kansas so that he can be on hand to answer questions.

Adams developed the project on a self-funded micro-budget that he wouldn't disclose. One of the business lines he's been exploring is in-house production of BluRay and DVD copies with additional video material that he can sell at festival screenings.

"The VOD (video on demand) model works well because the film is 'parked' on a server," he said. "For \$4 to \$5, a buyer can purchase the film with a small percentage going to the host site."

Adams said he will also package the film with a coach's workbook to market to fencing clubs. He met recently with an organization interested in renting a copy of the film for a fundraising event.

He began the project simply to satisfy his creative drive, but Adams said he also believes that *Touché* can help reveal the potential for greater interaction between sighted and blind communities.



Fencer Catherine Bolton from the documentary film *Touché: A Blind Fencer's Story*.

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