



Janale van den Berg in her fencing outfit.
Photo: Reg Caldecott

Aspiring dentist wins international fencing marathon

Students battling to focus or to excel in maths should consider taking up fencing as a sport.

It might just change their lives.

Ask Janale van den Berg, a second-year dentistry student at Tuks, who recently won the Fencing Marathon Tournament in Prague.

In the space of two days, she contested about 70 fights losing only a handful of encounters to ensure an overall victory.

To say that she is passionate about fencing would be an understatement.

As far as she is concerned it is a holistic sport which not only has distinct physical benefits but also stimulates one's brain.

"I took up fencing while still at school. I immediately started to reap the awards. What was amazing is that my maths marks improved by 10 percent," she said.

"Apparently, that is not unusual. I have read about a study that has been conducted in the USA at schools where the learners have the opportunity to fence."

They were found to be more disciplined and did remarkably well in maths and science.

"From personal experience, I can say that since I have started fencing my awareness of what is happening around me has drastically improved," said Van den Berg.

"I am also able to concentrate for much longer and can understand complicated facts quicker."

At first, Van den Berg was an avid pentathlon athlete.

But a sport where the athlete got to master the art of fencing, shooting, swimming, horse riding and running was time-consuming.

So, she was forced to make a choice.

"I chose to specialise in fencing. It was an easy decision as I am by nature an individualist preferring to do things on my own," said Van der Berg.

"Fencing is very different compared to other sports. In a competition like running, for example, the most significant challenge is just to get to the finish in the fastest possible time."

A fencer have to think all the time, very much like chess.

"Every opponent has her unique style favouring certain techniques.

"The challenge is to figure it out as quickly as possible and then plan counter attacks," she said.

"All of this got to be done in mere seconds. That is what makes fencing so exciting."

Van den Berg chose not to take time off over December, like many other athletes.

She opted to spend the time in Europe, honing her fencing skills.