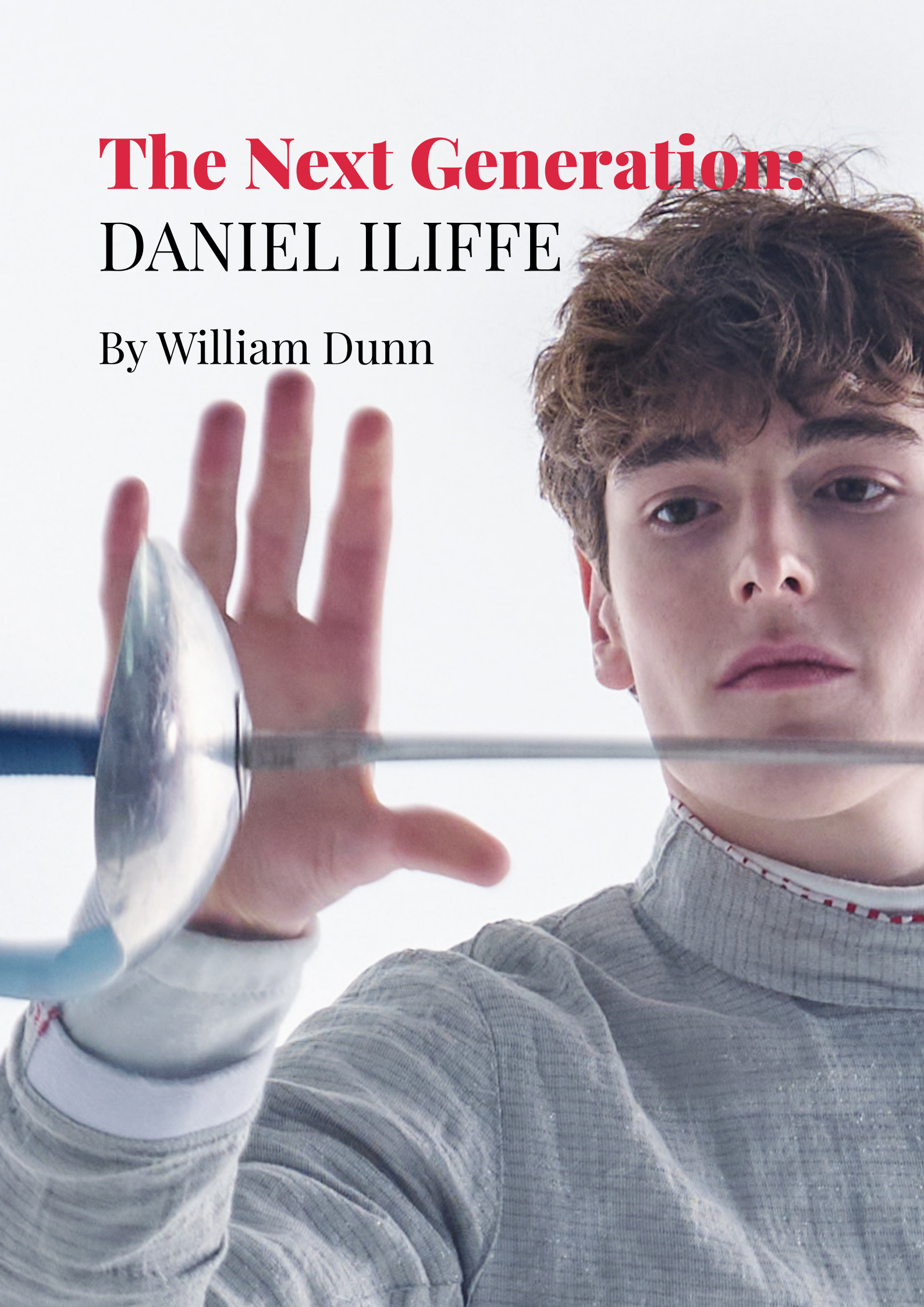
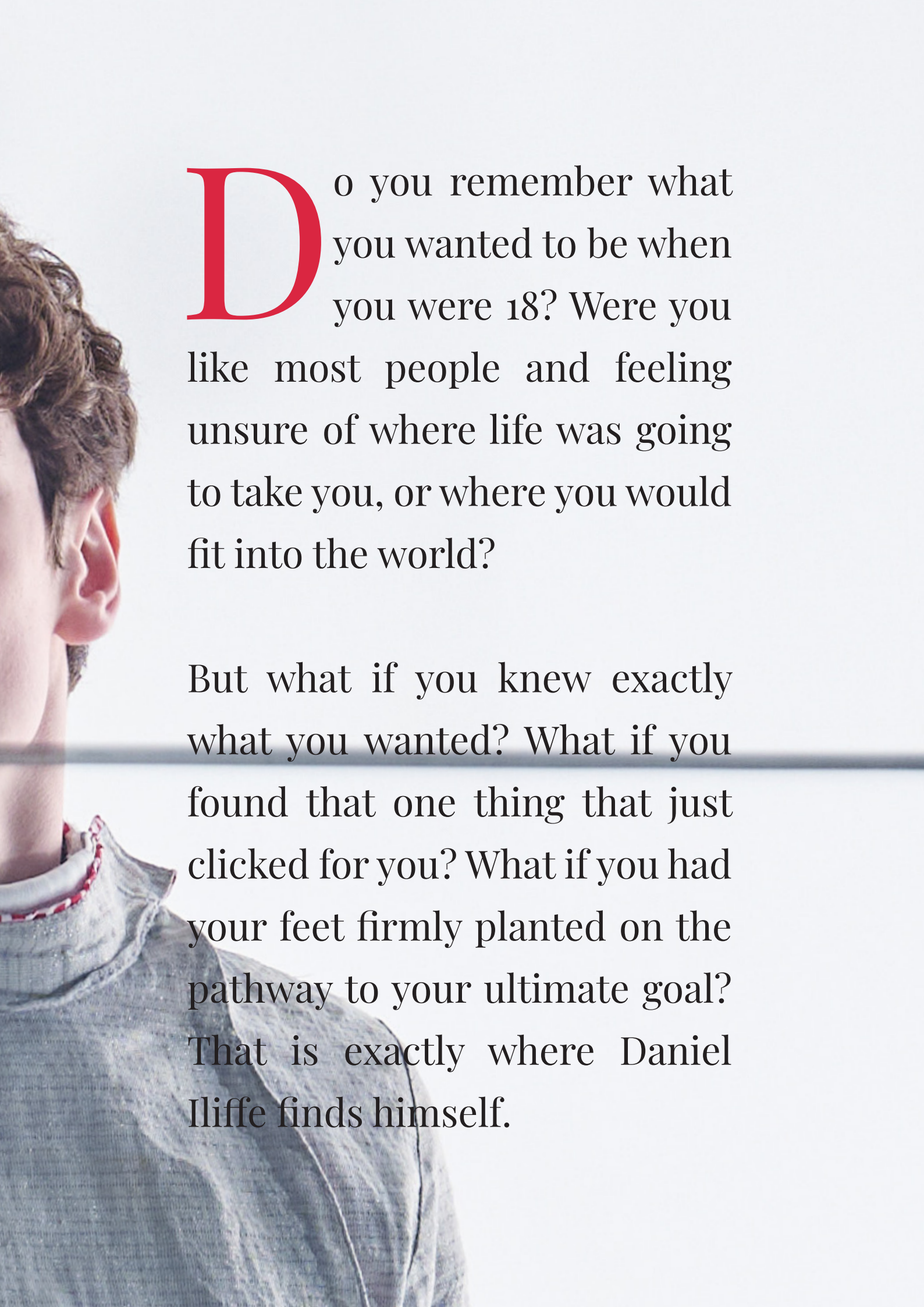
The Next Generation:
DANIEL ILIFFE

By William Dunn





Do you remember what you wanted to be when you were 18? Were you like most people and feeling unsure of where life was going to take you, or where you would fit into the world?

But what if you knew exactly what you wanted? What if you found that one thing that just clicked for you? What if you had your feet firmly planted on the pathway to your ultimate goal? That is exactly where Daniel Iliffe finds himself.

Fencer **Daniel Iliffe**
[Australian Men's Sabre Team | Penn State NCAA]
Producer / Concept **Fencing Sport Photography**
Art Director & Studio Photographer **Ed Chiu**
Opponent to Daniel in Illustrative Photos **William Dunn**
Behind the Scenes Photos and Videos / Assistant **William Dunn**
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Additional photos purchased from
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2025/26 Robyn Chaplin Senior and Veteran Championships
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It's an overcast May morning at a photography studio in the industrial section of Frankston, and Iliffe is here for the day from his home in Sydney. He's walking down the quiet street, his equipment bag in tow. When you first meet Daniel you see a calm, quiet, and polite young man, traits seemingly at odds with the speed, intensity and emotion of sabre fencing. But then you notice it. There is that unmistakable fire in his eyes, the kind that fuels a dedication and focus few of us can truly understand.

If you weren't a part of Australia's fencing community, you might be forgiven for not knowing Daniel's name. Fencing is, after all, an incredibly niche sport in a country where footy dominates weekends in the winter, and cricket rules the summers. Mentioning fencing to people usually elicits one of two responses; a polite curiosity surrounding that 'thing with swords from the Olympics', or a look of confusion as to why building fences is considered a sport. But with the path that Daniel is on, his name is definitely one you will be hearing sooner rather than later.

He is in town for a media day organsied by Fencing Sport Photography. It's a first for the young athlete, and a new experience for me as well, as I take on the role of both interviewer and photographer's





assistant. As the photoshoot goes on, I move about the space trying my best not to knock over any expensive looking lighting set-ups, and try to convince myself I know what it is I am meant to be doing. In contrast, Daniel stands in the studio with a calm attentiveness that suggests someone who is quickly getting used to the idea that posing for photographs may be a much more common activity in his future.

"I love working hard, putting the effort in and improving. That's probably what I find most rewarding, actually. So, never discouraged really."

As well as being composed, Daniel is also incredibly humble. "So I say that I do fencing?" he asks as we settle down for the interview. 'Doing fencing' is, to put it simply, a huge understatement. At 18 Daniel is arguably the top sabre fencer in Australia, and was recently crowned Men's Senior National Champion in Brisbane. Fencing has been part of Daniel's life since he was 10, when a teacher suggested he give the sport a try, and he was immediately at home with it. "After the first session, I did one session



2024/25 Australian National Championships
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of fencing at school, and then right after that I signed up to the club that managed the program" he says, "so it was immediate. Yeah. Really immediate". As he speaks he flashes a large, bright smile, a character trait that has become somewhat of a trademark for the young competitor both on and off the piste.

The sport quickly became a driving focus through Daniel's school years, and he began to build towards his ultimate goal of representing Australia at the 2032 Olympics. As any aspiring athlete knows, following this dream doesn't come without sacrifices, but Daniel relished the challenge. "I love working hard, putting the effort in and improving. That's probably what I find most rewarding, actually. So, never discouraged really."

Even for his young age he has experience in having to deal with the doubters and naysayers. Before he found fencing Daniel was a dancer, training in ballet and contemporary dance. It was a

past-time that others his age didn't understand. "I started in primary school, doing that until about year six. There were people thinking 'Oh well, why are they doing dance?' But that taught me from a young age that it doesn't really matter what other people think of you, it's more about what you actually enjoy." In the end, the skills he had learnt in his dancing lessons helped make the transition to sabre fencing a relatively smooth one for Daniel. "I can attribute that to the fact that ballet obviously there's flexibility, there's physicality, but most importantly there's a really strong mind/body connection. I think that really transferred well, because I could kind of feel what I was supposed to do and I could feel what was right in sabre."

"If you want to get good at the sport, you need people around you to motivate you, to help you. I mean, it's really always a group effort to get good at the sport."

This September, Daniel starts classes at the prestigious Penn State University in the United States, heading there to compete in NCAA Division 1 fencing while looking to study law. It's a big move; not only going from the local high school to a top-tier university, but venturing out of the fencing community that has been supporting him for the last 8 years. "It's probably a bit hard





(L - R) 2025/26 Robyn Chaplin Senior and Veteran Championships
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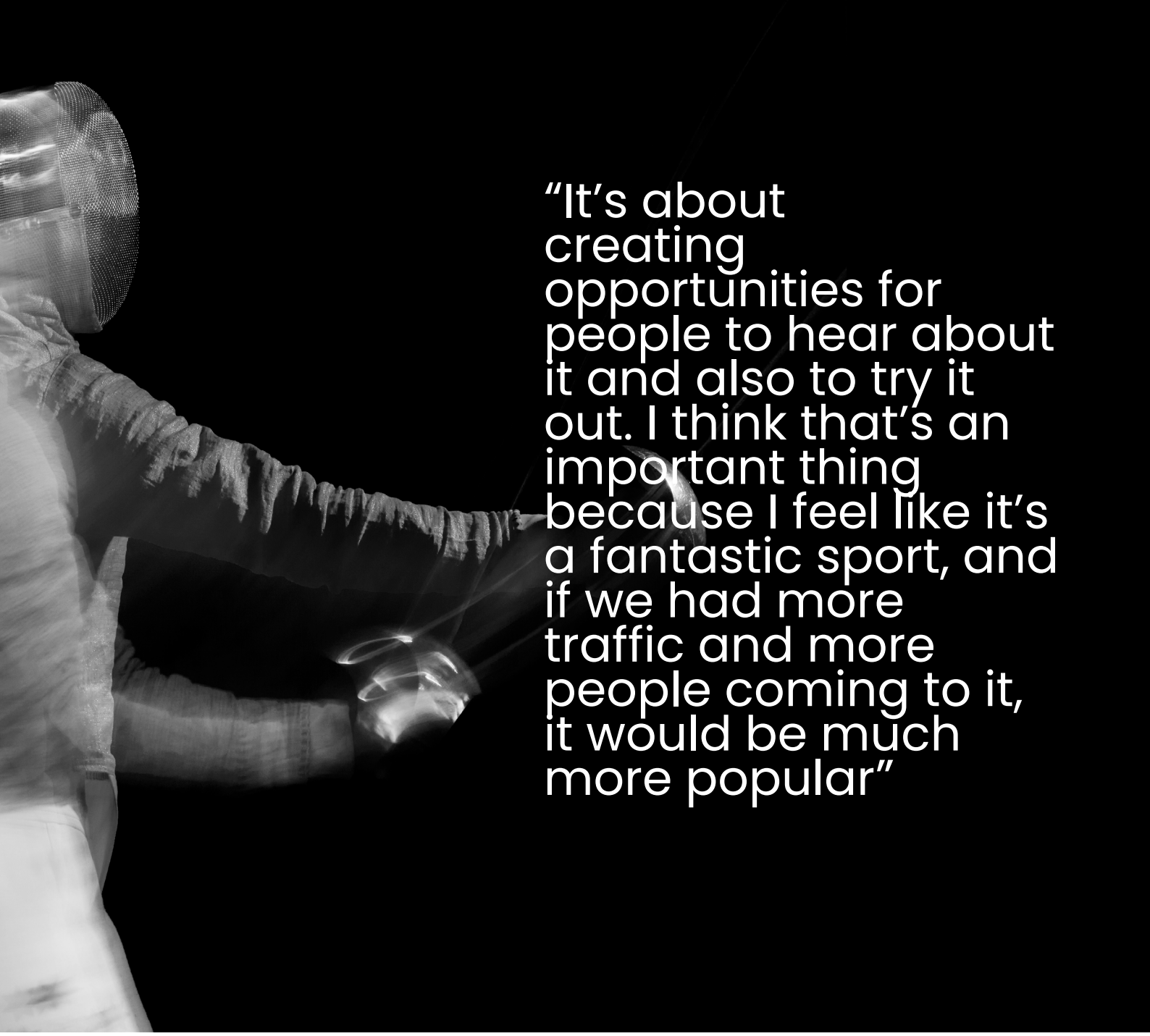
to grasp even thinking about it because the Australian fencing community is incredibly tight knit and incredibly supportive." But it's that same kind of community and support network that Daniel is looking to build once he arrives at college, "if you want to get good at the sport, you need people around you to motivate you, to help you. I mean, it's really always a group effort to get good at the sport."

While it's a huge change for anyone to uproot their life and move to another country, finding a sense of home in different places is something Daniel has become used to over the years. Travelling for competitions and training camps, he's used fencing to explore new places and cultures outside of his home in New South Wales. "I think often it's very good to kind of just get out there, take the competition out of your mind to go take on new experiences, and then trust the work that you have put in as well. It's nice to find that balance that I honestly think sometimes enhances the competition as well."

For all the focus, dedication, and passion that Daniel directs towards his own goals, he still finds time and energy to promote and grow the sport of fencing in Australia. "It's also about creating pathways for people so they can hear about fencing and then also have the resources to start," he says when



asked what he thinks will help build exposure and participation in the sport. He's also sure that, like the first time he tried it out, once people get a taste for the sport they will be hooked. "It's about creating opportunities for people to hear about it and also to try it out. I think that's an important thing because I feel like it's a fantastic sport, and if we had more traffic and more people coming to it, it



“It’s about creating opportunities for people to hear about it and also to try it out. I think that’s an important thing because I feel like it’s a fantastic sport, and if we had more traffic and more people coming to it, it would be much more popular”

would be much more popular”

A coach at Sydney Boys High School, as well as a qualified sabre referee, Daniel works hard to share his love and passion of fencing with others. “I always want to show a sense of passion, as I think that can really rub off on people”.

Daniel knows that his rising profile in the Australian sporting scene comes with responsibilities, and even though he has barely gotten used to life outside of high-school, he is facing the prospect of being a role model for fencing in Australia. But in typical Daniel fashion, he sees it simply as another exciting challenge. “It’s definitely always something that I need to take into consideration. So I’m acting like I’m showing how people should be acting, and I try

my best to do that. And I think it's also about expressing passion for the sport. I think the biggest thing I've learned is that when you show how passionate you are, it's often reflected in your students."

At the back of his mind through everything is the countdown to the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, the ultimate goal at the end of the long road ahead. "Obviously that's looming in the back. But I think for me, I really enjoy focusing on what I can be doing now."

For Daniel, fencing will always be more than just a weekend hobby or passing interest, it is something that is ingrained in his very being. Beyond college, beyond the road to qualify for 2032 and the Brisbane Games themselves, the draw of the contest, the thrill of victory, and the community that surrounds the sport will always remain for the polite young man from Sydney with the bright smile. "I kind of have to do it. When I'm away from it I miss it immediately."

Talking with Daniel it's clear that he is determined to forge his own path, and it's one that is lined with opportunity and possibility deserving of a future champion.



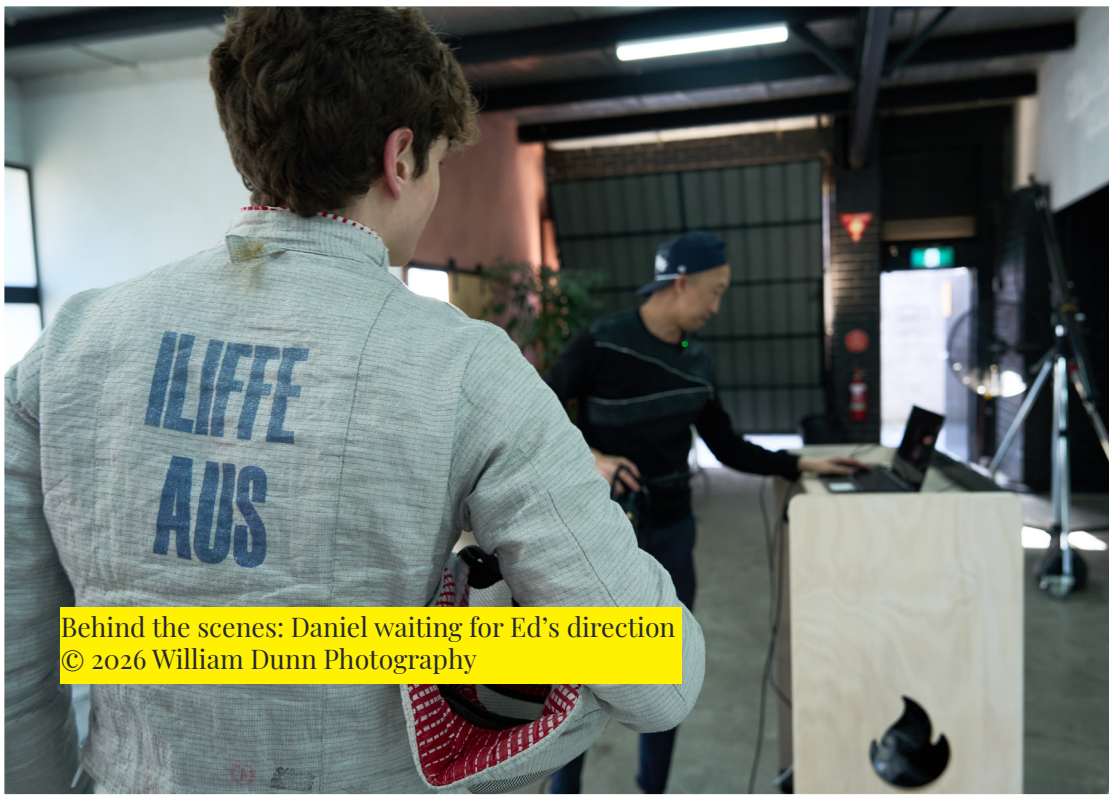

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If you'd like to support Daniel on his fencing journey towards the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, you can make a contribution to his fundraising page by scanning the QR code below or clicking this link which takes you to his Australian Sport Foundation profile.









Behind the scenes: Daniel waiting for Ed’s direction
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