



# Pride of Christel House

■ **Promising...** Christel House fencing team leader Kristen Matthews, from Manenberg, says fencing it is not just about winning, but learning how to deal with losing.

PICTURE: FUAD ESACK

## Athlone fencers get to the point point for championships

The clang of metal rattles in the background as the buzzer signifies the winners and losers on the fencing piste, but the team coached by Christel House teacher Randall Daniels are already winners just by donning their fencing kit, writes **JOHN ADAMS**

South Africa is not strong in fencing by world standards, says the 2008 South African Olympic fencing coach, Randall Daniels, who now spends his time teaching pupils at the Christel House, and coaching the school's fencing team.

"The product and pride of bringing fencing to these children is that we are able to give them a chance."

Daniels grew up in Athlone during the early 70s and was introduced to fencing while walking home one day and seeing a group of children "sword fighting."

As he looked into the practice area, he was approached by the club coach, Gwen Logan.

"I was asked if I wanted to give it a try, and I really enjoyed it," recalled Daniels.

"Fencing started something that changed my whole life. I had to determine the path I was on, and I had to achieve education.

"And I did because of the discipline I learned in fencing."

For the past three years, Daniels has dedicated his time to teaching the children at Christel House and now he has more than 20 fencers on his club team.

Last year two of his fencers, Sandisiwe Dingane and Wanda Mat-



PICTURE: DUNCAN VAN NIEKERK

■ **Confident...** Christel House, fencing coach Randall Daniels.

shaya, were selected to represent South Africa against top international competition in Catalonia.

However, Daniels does not measure success with wins and losses, but with how the sport changes the character of those who walked the same neighborhoods he did as a child. "If we can involve our kids in sport, the chances of them going down the road of negativity like drugs or any other thing is lessened," said Daniels.

"Those who participate tend to stay in school and even carry on studying further."



PICTURE: FUAD ESACK

■ **All for one...** From left, Tarryn Lasker, Wanda Matshaya, Kristen Matthews, Sheena McNab will take part in the SA national championships, at the University of Cape Town, this weekend.

One student who typifies what Daniels expects is team leader, Kristen Matthews.

Matthews was given the opportunity to learn fencing and travel South Africa because of assistance from Christel House and the financial support from Western Province Fencing.

But the most valuable opportunity could be the confidence she has gained through the sport. "When I fence it is not about winning," said the Grade 11 student from Manenberg. "It is about how I fence, and if I lose I know I don't have to lose the

same way the next time."

Daniels continues to challenge all his pupils beyond just fencing, and Matthews could be well on her way to a successful life on and off the fencing strip.

"It was up to me to decide if I want this or if I want that in life, and I knew I didn't want to end up walking around in circles," said Matthews.

"Many want to first go down the wrong road and then go down the right road, and I just chose the road that would give me a better future." Matthews is another example of

what Daniels said started the day his childhood coach offered him an alternative to disadvantaged living.

"Giving back is the passion we were given on the day my coach decided to give her time to us," said Daniels. In turn we are doing very much the same to our new learners in the hope that they would inspire others."

● The fencing senior national championship takes place at UCT on Saturday and Sunday June 13 and 14.

For more information about fencing, call 084 554 4566.