

# **Evelyn Halls - Olympic Fencer...**

*Guy Gaudion*

Evelyn Halls is a Young Lawyer for whom sport is important, combining the pursuit of Olympic aspirations with a career at a mega firm. "The Olympics are now only 794 days away," she pointedly announced only moments into the interview.

Evelyn commenced her legal career as an Articled Clerk with Freehill Hollingdale & Page and was admitted to practice in December 1996. She has chosen to specialise in revenue law, finding the technical aspects of the work interesting.

She is also Australia's number one fencer and is presently ranked 20th in the world. Supported by the Olympic Athletes Program, her goal is to compete for Australia in the year 2000 Olympics in Sydney.

For Evelyn, OJOP has been a vital component in her pursuit of both a legal career and her Olympic goals. OJOP stands for Olympic Job Opportunity Program. It was established in 1992 and is promoted by the Australian Olympic Committee.

OJOP's aim is to allow athletes to establish a career path, rather than simply working to support Olympic ambitions. Employers provide backing for OJOP by agreeing to support employees involved with the program.

Freehills agreed to support Evelyn on OJOP, at the time she accepted Articles. During her Articles interviews, she found that not all firms appeared keen to take on employees with such demanding extracurricular interests. Some regarded her interest in fencing with suspicion. "There was an either/or approach. Did I want to be a lawyer, or did I want to pursue my Olympic goal."

Fortunately for Evelyn, she has not had to choose one or the other. Freehills' support for OJOP has allowed her to do both. This support included agreeing to guidelines for her working conditions. Such guidelines are specific to each employer and athlete and vary depending upon individual requirements.

Evelyn's present guidelines provide that her hours of work are 9.00am and 5.30pm and she is given special leave to compete overseas as required. Typically, this amounts to about 12 weeks per year. Occasionally she works outside the specified times, but generally her supervisors manage to work around her special requirements.

"The current guidelines are working very well. I haven't missed training all year."

For Evelyn, training involves fencing from 6.00pm to 9.00pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 1.00pm Saturday. She also runs 2 to 3 lunch times each week and has appointments with her coach, physiotherapist and sports psychologist.

Each year she competes in the World Cup Circuit. Most of the competitions are in Europe as this is where fencing has its origins. To obtain her ranking, she is required to compete in at least the World Championships and 6 World Cups a year. However, Evelyn considers it necessary to compete more often than this, in order to get sufficient experience against the best competition.

Evelyn first took up fencing at the age of 10. Her younger sister wanted to join a team at school and persuaded Evelyn to make up the numbers. By the age of 16, she had competed in her first World Championships and, more importantly, had begun to beat her sister.

**"...She admits that her passion for fencing is not without the occasional motivation challenge...Then she counts the number of days left until the Sydney Olympics..."**



# Sporting Lawyer

There are three fencing disciplines. These are foil, épée and sabre. Each involves a different set of rules. Originally Evelyn competed in foil, but switched to the épée 3 years ago. The épée is now her weapon of choice and the one with which she has had most success.

Her short term goals include the Commonwealth Championships in August and the Worlds in October. As far as the long term picture is concerned, "I haven't really planned beyond the Sydney Olympics." She plans to reassess her fencing career after the Olympics. This is likely to involve taking a break from the sport, perhaps even a whole year off.

To help fund her pursuits, Evelyn receives financial support from the Australian Sports Commission. This covers part of her travel expenses. She also has a scholarship with the Victorian Institute of Sport. Nevertheless, much of her income goes towards fencing.

According to Evelyn, travelling to Europe does have its drawbacks. Although she often has other competitors or a coach with her, at times she is away by herself. "When visiting a foreign city for a competition, we do get the occasional day off. However, you are usually too tired to do the tourist thing."

She admits that her passion for fencing is not without the occasional motivation challenge. Every couple of weeks or so, the temptation arises to go out for Friday lunch instead of her run. Then she counts the number of days left until the Sydney Olympics. Her rationale is that any time she does not use, is time lost.

By combining a career with her fencing, time is one of her biggest challenges. However, Evelyn believes that doing both actually helps her succeed in fencing. "When I go through a tough patch in fencing, work forces me to take my mind off it. It provides a balance."

