



David Guardino, coach of the BU Fencing Club, communicates with the help of interpreter Bethany Bertrand.

# En Garde!

## Fencing Club's David Guardino

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IT'S A WEDNESDAY night in the three-court gym at the Fitness & Recreation Center, and the Fencing Club is making its usual racket. Weapons clatter and clang as students spar; scoring machines beep when a target is hit. Coach David Guardino, wearing a white fencing jacket, padded glove, and baggy shorts, is at the back of the room with a half-dozen foil fencers. He faces Becca Lauzon (CAS'13), and they both pull a protective mask down

over their face.

"Are we..." she starts to ask, wondering if they will be practicing a move or simply sparring. In a moment, a young woman

dressed in street clothes appears at her side, facing Guardino. "Are we just fencing?" Lauzon continues. Guardino watches the woman, then nods to Lauzon, and the two begin.

### *Coach refuses to let challenges stand in his way*

The unusual exchange is one of very few indications that Guardino (CAS'08) is not a typical coach. He has a hearing loss, and he communicates during the club's practices and competitions with the help of a sign language interpreter, almost always Caity Cross-Hansen.

Guardino, who fenced with the club as a BU student and has been coach since 2009, can hear sounds and read lips. But because the gym is such a noisy place and because all fencers must wear masks—making it nearly impossible to see their faces—he relies on an unmasked signer to tell him what's being said.

"Caity has a good rapport with the fencers and me," Guardino says. "She knows the sport and the coaches."

The strategy works. Guardino teaches some 40

students the art of foil, épée, and saber. (Each weapon is different, and each has its own set of rules.) They describe their coach as knowledgeable and enthusiastic and say communication is rarely a problem. And they are happy to learn a little sign language along the way.

Ralph Conserva says Guardino is not just a coach; he's a mentor. "There were a lot of issues with my style when fencing that he was able to point out early, unlike any other coach I have had in the past," says Conserva (SMG'13), who started the sport as a high school freshman. "Because of him, I do believe I am not only a better fencer, but a better athlete in general."

Guardino, who hails from Pine Brook, N.J., was born with a hearing loss. (Both his parents and his sister are deaf.) He attended a public high school that has a program for deaf students. And while he was busy with extracurricular acti-

vities—he was a peer leader, editor of a newsletter for the deaf, and a member of the fishing club and the academic bowl—he didn't play any sports. "I was the least athletic kid in school," Guardino says. "I just liked reading."

But when he started his sophomore year at BU, he decided to try a physical activity and joined a fencing class. After a few weeks, he was hooked.

At the club's four-night-a-week practices, Guardino and Cross-Hansen incorporate some sign language into each lesson, teaching students how to count or how to say, "ready," "okay," and "understand."

Guardino enjoys seeing fencers develop as athletes. "We have a lot of people come in with no fencing experience," he says, "and they're very awkward. But when they reach a point where they'll go all-out and do what it takes to win, that's when it feels good."

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**WEB EXTRA**  
David Guardino talks about the challenges and benefits of being a deaf fencing coach in a video at [bu.edu/bostonia](http://bu.edu/bostonia).