



NEWS RELEASE

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Hangtown Saber Fencer Named 2021 National Champion

Two Hangtown Athletes Named to US Team going to Veteran World Championships

PLACERVILLE, CA (September 13, 2021): Chaz Smith of Hangtown Saber Club in Placerville battled her way to a gold medal in Veteran50 (for fencers 50-59) at the USA Fencing Veteran National Championships in Atlanta, GA on 8.27.21. Her club mate Claire Hanamoto placed 5th in Veteran70 (for fencers 70-79), and both athletes were named to the team representing the US at the Veteran World Fencing Championships.

Smith had an uncharacteristically rough seeding pool, dropping two of her six bouts 4/5 and heading in to the direct elimination portion of the event as the 5th seed. After a first round bye, Smith handily defeated the 12th seed 10-4, avenging a 9-10 loss at the North American Cup in Philadelphia in July. Rolling now, Smith handily dispatched the 4th and 16th seeds by the same 10-3 score to send herself into the gold-medal match.

“I worked really hard to stay in the moment and not think about the threat of fire near my home in Placerville,” Smith said. “I was working on integrating a new defensive approach I’ve been drilling, but today was really all about staying mentally present, and tough.”

Smith faced the 2nd seed, Jasmina Denner of Connecticut, in the final. “I defeated her easily in the final of the July North American Cup,” said Smith. “But I knew her nerves had taken her over in that bout and I shouldn’t expect the same fencer in this national championship final,” said Smith. “Sure enough, she came out firing.”

The bout was tight throughout with neither fencer pulling away. At 8-8, Smith executed a sophisticated second-intention action that allowed her a one-light riposte to Denner’s attack. She finished her opponent off with an attack in preparation, and promptly broke down sobbing.

“I think everything just hit me at that moment. Evacuating in our travel trailer as the Caldor Fire blazed too close by, breathing hazardous air, checking fire maps constantly and wondering every day if this was it and our home was going to go up in smoke,” said Smith. “I don’t think I’ve ever been prouder of my ability to keep fully focused on the task at hand regardless of what was happening elsewhere.”

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By exiting Veteran50 as the national champion, Smith, at 59, accomplished something exceedingly rare in American saber fencing. A fencer exiting a Veteran age group is typically at a physical disadvantage to the much younger fencers who just “aged in.” “A 50 or 51 year old is going to have more pop in their legs than a 59 year old – it’s just what the passage of time does,” said Smith. “That’s another reason I’m especially proud of this victory.”

Smith completes the season number one on the Veteran50 national point standings, making her the number one seed on the US team going to Veteran World Championships.

Claire Hanamoto, 72 of Sacramento, followed up her silver medal at the July North American Cup in Philadelphia with a 5th place finish at the Veteran National Championships. “It was a disappointing finish for me, given the high caliber of the physical, technical and tactical training I enjoy at Hangtown Saber Club and the work I put in,” said Hanamoto. “But fencing is a mental game. My coach gave me a great game plan, and I just didn’t follow it! I am very pleased to make the national team going to Veteran World Championships.” Hanamoto wrapped up the domestic season number three on the national point standings for Veteran70.

The up and coming Maya Barnovitz, 15 of Shingle Springs, claimed a silver medal at a Regional Open Circuit in Ontario, CA 9.5.21. “Maya’s jumped several levels over the last year,” said her coach Ted Smith. “Getting into the gold medal match of a Division 2 event, for fencers with a C rating or below, was another step in her development. “ (Fencers earn classifications through tournament placements. Classifications start at U, for unclassified, and go from E to A. Barnovitz is currently a D.) Barnovitz was especially pleased with her resilience. “I lost really, really badly to the fencer I beat in the quarterfinals the only other time I faced her,” said Barnovitz. “This time I dominated her so thoroughly she kind of gave up toward the end!”

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Hangtown Saber Club specializes in modern Olympic saber fencing. Classes, held at 1297 Broadway in Placerville, CA, are open to all comers starting as early as age 8 and extending to everyone able to stay on task for at least 15 minutes at a time and exert themselves aerobically. Fencing is one of the original sports included in the modern Olympics, and is often referred to as “physical chess.”