

Nathan finished 100th of 183 in the Y12 foil and 85th of 97 in the Y12 epee competitions.



## A PERFECT PAIR

At Summer Nationals there were more than 3,000 fencers, 300 officials and about 40 non-fencing spectators, but if you were there you may have noticed that there was only one dog. Her name is Sylvia and she is a service dog for Nathan Selove, a 12-year-old foil and epee fencer from Stephens City, Va.

Nathan is a young man with Asperger's syndrome, a high functioning form of Autism that makes it difficult for him to relate to other people. One of the most difficult things for Nathan is concentrating in noisy, active environments, which is where Sylvia comes in.

Nathan's father, Ramon, also a competitor in Miami, says that having his hands in hair is very soothing for Nathan. When he was younger, he was able to play with his mother's hair, but as he grew older his parents began to look for a more age-appropriate outlet. Susquehanna Service Dogs provided the answer they were looking for.

If you took the time to chat with Nathan, you would have been struck by his gentle and polite demeanor and probably would not have suspected his diagnosis. He would tell you, confidently and calmly, about his experiences in the Y12 foil and epee events and chatter excitedly over his upcoming birthday (he turned 12 on July 7<sup>th</sup>). But for Nathan, it is not just about the competition, it's also about learning to be more independent.

Nathan says his biggest challenge in fencing is "learning to respect the referee's decisions," a problem many fencers and coaches deal with regularly. One of the primary symptoms of Asperger's is a difficulty seeing things from another person's point of view, and Nathan feels that fencing is helping him learn how to do that.

While Nathan was accompanied by his entire Family to Miami this summer so everyone but his mother could compete, his parents say their goal is for Nathan and Sylvia to be able to go to tournaments alone.

By next summer you may see the young man and his dog competing in the Y14 boys foil and epee events with his parents proudly at home.

