The first time he watched high-level fencing was the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, two years after being introduced to the sport, but the inspiration to get more serious with fencing did not come until he was thirteen, and watched the Senior Men’s Saber World Cup in Brooklyn, New York face-to-face. "I was fascinated by the different styles of fencing," Thompson said. "Additionally, I was happy to see two other black men go far in the tournament." Daryl Homer, a new three-time Olympic fencer and teammate of Thompson, finished eighth, and Bolade Apyit of France finished second. Thompson used this as encouragement to continue making progress; "seeming other black fencers doing well on a high level" inspired him to keep fencing.

"Actually fell to the ground the moment [he] won the match." He was told later on that Jonah lost his match and fell into disbelief. "I felt relieved that I had finally fulfilled a lifelong dream of qualifying for the Olympics," he revealed.

"I told some of my best friends that I qualified first, I waited until the competition was over and when I told them, they were all super excited," not realizing that they had been following the results of the tournament closely all day and knew before Thompson himself.

While this had been extremely intimidating for him and his loved ones, it wasn’t always a smooth ride. He stated that an earlier bump in the road was trying to qualify for a national team. "I had missed the Cadet & Junior national teams. It’s very hard to get to the next level of competition, you’re no longer fencing people your age. I’ve fenced people 20 years old and 40 years old on the same day.”

Another deterrent occurred after he began attending college. “I originally started at Penn State University but took a leave of absence when I was diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety,” Thompson explained. “I felt that it was the end of the road for me,” feeling ready to quit fencing and go back to square one with a new life.

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Fortunately, his mother, sister and family at the Peter Westbrook Foundation understood how much fencing and other aspects of his life actually meant to him; they made sure that he never got to the point of quitting. His family helped him through the break, eventually bringing his confidence back up to start school again. To suggest a change of pace, his mother brought up the idea of going to NJIT instead, and he realized that it was the better place for him.

Since then, he has not had too much time in a normal college experience, with his first year being interrupted by COVID-19. “I had to regain my footing. I took a light course load in Fall 2019 and wasn’t in school at the beginning of 2020,” he mentioned. “So coming back to school only online was a difficult adjustment, but my experience was better than I expected. I’ve made some friends at school and have become comfortable with being in school again.”

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