



## Motivating Beginners

The basics of teaching fencing have changed very little in decades. Some coaches continue to complain about losing people after the first session. Yet it is not uncommon that the only experience a new fencer has is the first session is that presented by the coach. New fencers/beginners do not return to subsequent sessions for all kinds of reason, the more common of which are as follows:

- Fencing is not what they expected
- Adults might not return if there are too many children present
- Children might not return if there are too many adults present.
- Too long spent listing/warming up and not enough time devoted to sword in hand
- The kit doesn't fit or is shabby and badly maintained

One of the major and probable the most important factors, which determines whether a beginner returns after the first session, is how the material is presented. Too many coaches are fixated with teaching the on-guard position and footwork worse still spend valuable time (sometimes in excess of 30 minutes) conducting vigorous unrelated exercises to "warm-up" the group. When in practice the beginner just wants to "play the game", and why can't they just get on with it. Two other common practices is to teach beginners to lunge and execute simple attacks and then how to parry simple attacks. Is it any wonder why some of the beginners get frustrated? Even for the most advanced fencers, simple attacks are difficult to accurately time. So how then could you present the sport differently, so that the beginner can enjoy the sport?

- Kit the individuals out (no sword at this stage)
- Give a brief introduction to how fencing can be conducted safely
- Give the briefest of introductions to:
  - o How to hold the sword
  - o How to stand, move forward and backward and emphasize fencing in straight lines
  - o How to hit
  - o How to parry and what to do next
  - o Give them a sword, pair them up and let them have a go

The above should take no longer than 10 minutes

After a brief attempt to fight, you can begin to teach the class how to overcome the difficulties they have just experienced. Or better still how to do what they have just been doing more efficiently. Relating your teaching/coaching to what has just been happening is far more successful, than teaching/coaching without a common reference point

With a little bit of thought and some commonsense, new fencers/beginners can have fun fencing and fighting so long as the conditions under control. If the beginners are not having fun or enjoying the sport we all love, is it any wonder they don't come back