

## British Academy of Fencing **ACADEMY NEWS**

*May 2009  
Issue 50*

***"Run by coaches for coaches"***



# EASTER SUCCESS FOR LIAM

After the Easter course, the Academy has a new full Master. Liam Harrington successfully completed his Diploma Epée exam and is now fully qualified and able to use the proud title of Professor Harrington.

Liam's achievement is all the more remarkable, as he has achieved it all under the current examination system, starting with a Level 1 Foil pass in June 2004. As he himself put it after being told of his pass, "I remember struggling then with Level 2 Foil and, if anyone had told me that I would become a fencing Master in five years time, I wouldn't have believed them".

When Academy News spoke to the new Master a few minutes after the result, he was understandably delighted, but finding it hard to find the words to express that delight. He did manage, however, to thank all those who had helped in on the way: "I'm very happy and I'm very grateful for all the help I've had from everyone in the Academy. I've done a lot of preparation and training to do this and I've been able to do that because the Academy was there to help."

Apart from Liam, there were two other passes at Diploma level. The successful and delighted candidates can be seen in our photograph on this page. One of these is John Crouch, who passed at Diploma Foil. We asked him for his first reaction and he declared ".....a real sense of satisfaction at having achieved this at the end of a really good course. More than a good course... it's probably



*John Crouch, Liam Harrington and Franco Cerutti are obviously pleased with their Diploma passes*

the best course in the world, according to those who have come from overseas". John admitted that this pass, at his second attempt, was really to achieve a personal goal – "I'm a top level referee, I've competed at a high level and now I've got the highest level of coaching award"

As John mentioned in his comments, there were a number of international candidates on the course and one of these was Franco Cerutti, an Italian now living in Switzerland. Franco has coached in the USA and has competed in A-Grade competitions, but confessed to one of the staff during the week that he found our course "harder than an A-Grade!". In the end, he achieved a splendid pass at Diploma Epée, with Distinctions in both of his lessons. Asked for his impressions

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***NEXT ISSUE: July***  
***Contributions by June 15th, please***



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**RECOMMENDED  
RATES OF PAY**

Level	Weekday	Weekend
Diploma	35.50	32.50
Maitre d'Escrime and Provost	28.50	26.00
Member	23.50	21.75
Associate	21.00	19.00

Travel - included for first 20 miles,  
thereafter 17p/mile

**PROFICIENCY  
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The current rates for awards are:

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1 - 4 Awards £3.70 each  
5 - 9 Awards £3.60 each  
10+ Awards £3.40 each

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5+ £2.30 (**£2.65**) each

**A4 Syllabus leaflets:**

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(**70p**) each.

**A3 Sized Wallcharts:**

65p (**75p**) each  
Figures in **RED** are for non-BAF  
members

**EXAMINATION  
FEES**

Level 1 Assessment £11.00

Level 2 to Diploma £21.00 (**£26.00**)

These are for "normal" exams - for  
Special exams, consult the Course  
Officer. Figures in **RED** are for  
non-BAF members

**DOCUMENTATION**

The following documentation is available from the Course Officer, Dave Jerry

Key Teaching Points Foil	}	.....£7.35 ( <b>£9.45</b> )
Key Teaching Points Epee		
Key Teaching Points Sabre		
Key Coaching Points Foil		
Key Coaching Points Epee		
Key Coaching Points Sabre	}	.....£7.35 ( <b>£9.45</b> )
Glossary of Terms.....		
Translation of Fencing Terms in Four Languages.....		
Teaching/ Coaching Tactics (2nd Edition).....		£16.80 ( <b>£21</b> )
CD-Rom Issue 4.0 – this contains all the syllabuses and current questions for BAF examinations, as well as other examination material.....		£6.30 ( <b>£7.35</b> )
Examples of past written Papers – for the Advanced and Diploma examinations -		
<b>FREE</b> - apply to Course Officer		

All prices include p & p. Figures in **RED** are for non-BAF members



## THE PRESIDENT WRITES.....



### England Fencing Coaching and Club Development Conference

Following an invitation from Norman Randall, Profs L Hill and myself attended the conference. This conference was the first to be held by England Fencing in its new form. It was aimed at EF coaches, club organisers and volunteers to give them an opportunity to hear about the latest developments in coach education, club organisation, and club links with fencing and competition in schools. The conference was also an opportunity to meet the EF board, hear about EF's future plans, network with other coaches and club officials and discuss and share experiences and ideas. The conference was not only well planned and effective in achieving so much, but it also afforded the opportunity to see many friends and colleagues. It was particularly encouraging to see that a large proportion of the delegates were members of the Academy, which clearly indicates that the bonds between our two organisations remain strong. For the good of our sport, we can only hope they grow ever stronger. On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to congratulate Norman for his hard work in both organising and for the invitation. (see also Letters on page 11)

### New Master

I am please and honoured to announce the Academy has a new fencing master, namely Liam Harrington. Liam completed the final part of the diploma on this year's Easter course. On behalf of the committee and the membership I would like to congratulate Liam for his dedication, hard work, and success in our examination. I trust I can call upon his services on future courses. Well done Liam!

### Denstone - Easter 2009

First of all I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all those who made the course the success that it undoubtedly was, namely Andy Vincent, Peter Cormack and Miguel Rodriguez Medina. The course was well attended with approximately 50% of candidates being both new to the Academy system and non-members. Once again the Academy was hosts to coaches from America, Switzerland and Hong Kong. I would also like to congratulate all who took and passed examinations and thank all the examiners who gave up a day to examine.

One feature of this year's Easter Course was the free goody bags for all participants, donated by Leon Paul. The bags contained a number of items, including posters, a water bottle, stickers and a £10 voucher. Very many thanks to Leon Paul for their ongoing and generous support of the Academy.

This year the committee decided to offer a £100 bursary to those attending the Advanced and Diploma sections of the Easter course. In order to receive a bursary each candidate was asked to write a short article explaining why they would be a worthy recipient. The bursary was won by Paul Stimpson, who was presented with a cheque at the end of the Easter course

*Philip Bruce*

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS

The under mentioned names are published as having applied for membership of the British Academy of Fencing. If anyone wishes to raise objections or has information which he or she feels is relevant, please contact the Secretary of the BAF.

All objections will be required to be made in writing and will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Rosalind Hamson	Loughborough
Philip Hamson	Loughborough
Richard Burn	Birmingham
Herman du Preez	High Wycombe
Simon McGrory	Rotherham
Peter Russell	Newport, Wales
Sarah Paveley (née Kellett)	Sudbury

See the Academy web site at [www.baf-fencing.org](http://www.baf-fencing.org) for details of the latest applications.

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# FULL STEAM AHEAD

by Chris Beadling

As a young boy I enjoyed watching Thomas the Tank Engine and riding on steam trains in museums. It wasn't until I started fencing that I heard the analogy between steam and electric fencing; I thought it was apt. I learned to 'steam' fence before I ever fenced in an electric competition or in the university club using 'electrics'. I thought this was a logical progression and this was how all clubs operated in getting their beginners to learn how to fence in a competitive situation; especially when it came to presiding and judging hits. Little did I know that this could be far from the truth.

When I started coaching, I followed the same progression, simply because that was the way I had been taught. It was also easy to set up a steam pool without having to muck about with pedantic electric kit! It echoes in history that this was the way matches were fought in the 'pre-electric' days. Richard Cohen gives a gripping account of a Sabre steam fight from 1972 (as Sabre was the last weapon to be 'electrified') in the prologue of his book "By The Sword".

So why is steam fencing apparently disappearing? In my opinion, it is a solid way to start people presiding, watching the phrasing of fights and understanding priority in a Foil/Sabre match. Concentration is the key to ensuring you watch every move YOUR fencer makes; a common mistake for beginners to try is to watch both fencers at the same time! This leads to a major disadvantage of steam fencing; how good are your judges? If one is busy picking their nose (= not watching the action, but it gets a giggle from the beginners!), they cannot possibly be able to give a definite YES or NO answer to your phrasing. If a judge is also unsure, this can hinder the progress of the match. Also, if a beginner is presiding and they do not know enough to be able to phrase a hit correctly, this can cause tension between members in the group.

Why am I raising these aspects of steam fencing? In January I was assisting at the East Midlands Cadet Squad as an assistant coach. When we couldn't get the electric boxes from the

cupboard (the lock was broken) we were left considering what to do. I had 8 'foilists' to coach and my immediate thought was to put them into a steam pool.

After the moaning and complaining, twisted faces and foot stomping (à la Kevin and Perry) had abated, the teenagers settled into it and began to fight. Quite quickly - and unsurprisingly - arguments began to occur between judges and fencers, fencers and president, president and judges, when hits weren't being awarded and should've been etc. As a teacher I should have stepped in at some point to settle things down, but I happily took a few steps back and allowed them to continue their arguments for a few more minutes. Nothing was too overheated, but it raised the same questions beginners ask; How can you award that to them - it was my hit!? Were you watching what was going on, are you sure that was a good hit (enough penetration to draw blood), was it a good parry-riposte, etc?

The situation only arose due to the fact that they were attempting to fence with flick hits and Prime parry-ripostes; something they've seen other, more advanced fencers do. Once it was pointed out that the judges needed to see the hits clearly (as well as the judges getting their acts together!), the style of fencing changed and became a lot clearer in terms of what was an attack and what was a defensive action with only one hit being scored. In my opinion it is quite clear that the cadets I was coaching were too used to fencing with two lights appearing on an electric box and then not understanding why the hit did or didn't go their way. There was also no luxury for 'lazy presiding', to which they were quite used when they presided each other. Their usual complacency had been replaced with a sudden burst of, "This was my hit!" When the question was asked "Why?" they were mostly able to explain why. Unfortunately for the presidents at the time, they were getting it in the neck quite a bit!

So what did this ultimately do for the cadets? I believe they had a greater appreciation for how difficult presiding

can be when you first start and are not used to it. They also understood that flick hits no longer worked in this situation, as well as being able to ensure there was only one hit; theirs. It also proved that they do have some limited knowledge of the moves they were attempting to use, however they were not always used in the correct context.

I will readily admit that I am not the greatest fencer, as well as not being the best person at presiding; sometimes I get it spot on, sometimes I get it wrong. However, it is also to do with the attitude and manner you promote when acting as president to a fight.

There used to be the East Midlands Region Beginners' Steam Foil Competition; at which I won Gold back in 2003/2004 (I decided to quit competing on a high!). Now, whilst the same competition is still designed for beginners, it is, however, no longer a steam competition. It is now beginners' Foil, Epée and Sabre, but only one option was offered last year, - electric only. I am deeply saddened if this is the way things are going, however. I know that steam is not a modern method of scoring and can relate little to modern competitions. But, as mentioned at the start, it is a good way to get beginners enthused and fencing at an early stage in their fencing education. Not only does it promote good sportsmanship (saluting judges, president, opponent and audience) but it also shows beginners how to demonstrate successful offensive and defensive actions in order to ensure there is only one hit - theirs. This is something the cadets were missing; how to ensure they promote good sportsmanship and demonstrating to a president the hit is theirs.

I will continue to teach my beginners how to fence steam. What do you think?

*Editor's Comment: Thank you, Chris, for an interesting article which raises a number of points about the role of "steam" fencing. I'm sure other coaches have their experiences and opinions. Why not share them through the Letters column?*





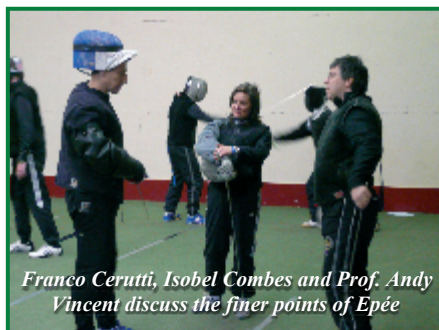
*A busy course in full flow*

## EASTER COURSE.....from page 1

of the course, he said, "I had heard good things about the British Academy of Fencing. I was looking to further develop my skills as an épée coach and mentor..... I have been very happy with the quality of the course, as well as all the help I received from the staff. I'm very happy about the course, very happy about the material and very happy about the skills of the mentors and Professors. I think that, even with a Diploma, it is still worth coming back to develop my skills. I have forty years experience of fencing and, although I dedicate my time to épée, I may return to try the Diploma Foil".

There were sixteen full passes at all levels at the end of a busy week, as well as four partial passes, and the full list can be seen on the right of the page. As well as the Italian Franco, there were course members from Norway, Austria, the USA and even Hong Kong! It would seem that the reputation of BAF courses continues to grow worldwide. Even one of the course staff, Professor Miguel Rodriguez Medina, had travelled from his home in Sweden to assist with the instruction. Course Director Philip Bruce and his staff, Professors Andy Vincent, Peter Cormack and Miguel, certainly needed good communication skills this week!

Once again the Academy has hosted a successful course. It is expected that there will be a training day and an examination day during July, which will give an opportunity for those who did not achieve full success this time to have another go. Bookings are already being taken for the next residential course in October (see page 15).



*Franco Cerutti, Isobel Combes and Prof. Andy Vincent discuss the finer points of Epée*

## CONGRATULATIONS, DEREK!

Derek Evered, a regular contributor to the pages of Academy News, has been honoured by his local authority with a presentation in recognition of his long service to sport.

Derek has chaired his club for more years than he cares to remember and also produces the club's quarterly Newsletter, often writing most of it himself. The Editor of Academy News sympathises with him there and would like to thank Derek for his many messages of support.

## EXAMINATION SUCCESS

The following candidates achieved passes in their exams at the end of the Easter Course.

### *Diploma Foil*

John Crouch

### *Diploma Epée*

Liam Harrington

Franco Cerutti

### *Advanced Epée*

Isobel Combes

### *Level 3 Foil*

Stuart Clough

Kevin Nelson

Andrew Wong

Glenn Cooper - part pass (Class)

Tim Miles - part pass (Class)

### *Level 3 Epée*

Jason Fox

Conrad Makosi - part pass (Individual)

### *Level 3 Sabre*

James Lee

### *Level 2 Foil*

Marisol Taylor

Mike Burke- part pass (Class)

### *Level 2 Epée*

Simon Norman

### *Level 2 Sabre*

Marina Hauer

Rachel Granville

### *Level 1 Foil*

Marianne Wilson

Michael Burke

### *Level 1 Epée*

Simon Norman

### *Level 1 Sabre*

Rachel Granville

Marina Hauer

We send our congratulations to all these successful candidates.

# TACTICS IN FENCING - PREPARATORY ACTIONS

by Zbigniew Czajkowski

## GENERAL REMARKS ON TACTICS

*The tactical preparation of a fencer is the main part in his development as a competitor. That is the most difficult part of his training but also the most practical one.*

VITALI ARKADIEV

*Once a fencer has learned the mechanisms of basic fencing movements, the activity loses its primary, total physical requirements and becomes more of a mental exercise. Concentration, self-control, and a quick decision command muscles and reflexes for successful scoring.*

MICHEL ALAUX

Every young fencer experiences a great deal of difficulty when it comes to his first free bout with an opponent. His fencing master has taught him certain movements and also indicated when and how to use them in a bout. However, when on his own in a bout, facing an active opponent, he does not know which movements he can use and when.

After many encounters, both in training and competition, with a real opponent, he learns, step by step, to apply his fencing actions in a bout. Slowly, he develops the ability to evaluate his opponent and to choose the most appropriate action in a given tactical situation.

The selection of the right stroke is probably the most basic tactical ability of a fencer. This is connected closely with timing, "feeling of surprise", and acuity of perception.

Fencing tactics are described, briefly, as using all fencing actions, both preparatory and ultimate ones, in such a way as to avoid being hit, score hits against one's opponent and thus ensure victory.

Tactics could be defined in a simplified manner as applying technique in a bout.

We could say, a little more precisely, that tactics are a fencer's application of all his technical and tactical knowledge, motor qualities, and psychological preparedness for the purpose of winning a bout or achieving the best score, taking into consideration the strength, technique, fencing style and tactics of his opponent.

Tactics are closely connected with technique and other factors of training as I have described in other articles and books. The significance of timing - "feeling of surprise" - is described many of my books and articles. In this article, I would only like to emphasise the most important features of tactics and discuss a very important factor of tactics: preparatory actions.

## Technique

Technical versatility is the base of richness of tactics and enables the fencer to surprise his opponent, not only by speed and choice of time, but also by variety of action. It is obvious that if a fencer has a rich technical repertoire, then his tactical "plays" and solutions will be more effective and more surprising for the opponent.

Various ideas and practical solutions require mastery of an

extensive technical base. In gymnastics, figure skating, diving and similar sports, which are based on closed motor skills, (internal motor habit patterns), it is most important to reproduce, with as much precision as possible, the prescribed form of a movement - conventionally accepted as full of gracefulness and beauty. In these sports, technique is the most important goal - a purpose in itself. In fencing technique based on open motor skills (external motor habit patterns) is not a purpose in itself, but should serve as a base for the psychological and tactical preparation of a fencer.

It is well known from practical experience - even if not everybody wants to admit it - that excellent technique, in the narrow sense of the word, does not guarantee success in competition. Technique, important though it undoubtedly is, must be combined in a bout with physical and psychological abilities and tactical capabilities.

It is obvious that a fencer should not think about how to execute a stroke during a bout, but must concentrate on watching his opponent and on preparing his tactics. This is why fencer's technique must be highly automated and flexible - a high level of an open motor habit pattern. The level of technical competence certainly influences the style and tactical repertoire used by a fencer. He may choose and perfect his technical actions while creating his own style of fencing tactics.

If we say that the role of technique is to enhance tactics, and that tactics depend on technique, then we have to emphasise that the real base of tactics and tactical abilities is technique. We mean technique, however, in the wider sense of the word: not limited only to a structure of movement - which some conservative fencing masters have thought up till now - but as a modern, elastic and universal knowledge, combined with a whole gamut of special, technical, and other qualities.

The following technical - and other - qualities of a fencer help in the development of his tactics:

- A high degree of automation of movements and their relaxed, economical, and purposeful execution.
- The ability, when executing a movement, to take into consideration time, space and the whole tactical situation (open motor skills, adapted to changeable situations).
- Speed of movement, its correct rhythm, and the capacity to accelerate or change the direction of the movement.
- Speed of simple and (various kinds of) other sensory-motor responses.
- High co-ordination, dexterity, and swiftness of movements; the ability to apply and execute the same stroke in a fast and variable manner, depending on conditions.
- The ability to control muscular contraction and relaxation at the appropriate times.
- The ability to fluently build up compound actions, based on simple basic strokes.
- Fencing-specific endurance in all its aspects: combating



Professor Czajkowski is an Honorary Member of the British Academy of Fencing



muscular, sensory, mental and emotional tiredness.

- The ability to reproduce, in actual movements, the mental picture of an action.

- High quality of neurophysiological processes, connected with the execution and application of fencing actions in a bout: selective perception, precision and speed of perception, qualities of attention (high concentration, a large range of attention, divisibility of attention, etc.), operative thinking and memory, etc.

The most important factors in tactics are:

- The ability to assess, in a fraction of a second, the situation on the strip (speed and accuracy of perception on a higher conceptual functional level).

- The ability to perform an action unforeseen by the opponent and take him by surprise. The best tactical application of a new stroke creates a situation in which the opponent has difficulty in anticipating the timing, speed, and real intention of the fencer.

In trying to hit while avoiding being hit, one has to forestall one's opponent. In foil and sabre, a fencer tries to get priority in the eyes of the director - which nowadays leads to the abuse of conventional rules. In epee, one has to be literally faster than one's opponent. The necessity to score hits "in good time" means, not only the speed of movement, but also, and most of all, more selective, precise and quicker transformation of information. To win, a fencer has to think quicker and to see more than his opponent. In competition, slow movements are not so dangerous as slowness of seeing, thinking, and taking decisions,

It is very important for a fencer to be able to come close to his opponent in a bout, in a situation most inconvenient for the opponent. Generally, the purpose of many preparatory movements on the piste is to get within the opponent's "critical" distance, at the same time keeping the initiative and the possibility of ending the action - when the opponent has a lapse of concentration, is off-balance, is preparing an attack, or is surprised by a sudden change of rhythm or distance.

It is also very important to predict the opponent's movement and intention without revealing one's own intention.

A fencer's tactical mastery depends a lot on his repertoire and the quality of his preparatory actions, giving him more effective use of the ultimate, "real", actions with which he scores a hit.

After watching many important international events in fencing for many, many years, I have come to the conclusion that the principal tactical characteristics of top fencers are as follows:

- 1) The most frequently used successful actions are relatively uncomplicated (simple attacks, attacks with one feint, attacks preceded by action on the blade, parry-riposte, simple counterattacks, short *phrase d'armes*).

A first intention simple attack is very effective, although difficult to carry out. The success of such an attack depends on timing, speed, precision, and acceleration. Simplicity of style and movements should not be confused with a poor, one-sided or poor technical, repertoire. Simplicity and crudeness are definitely not the same.

In training, however, one should use, not only simple, but also complicated movements because, used from time to time, they are very effective and they are a first-class means of developing many technical fencing abilities (continuity of action, precision of movement, feeling of rhythm and cadence, motor co-ordination, etc.).

- 2) Great fencers are noted, not only for the simplicity, but for the VARIETY of their actions. Variety of actions and tactics is characterised by:

- a) a relatively great amount of strokes used (rich technique);
- b) alternating actions - offensive, defensive, counterattacks, simple and compound actions, etc.;
- c) various ways of executing the same strokes depending on the situation,
- d) clever use of preparatory actions;
- e) alternative use of premeditated (foreseen), unpremeditated (unforeseen), and partly anticipated (partly foreseen) actions;
- f) various solutions to the same tactical situation, both in offensive and in defensive actions.

*Variety of tactical movements* - both preparatory and ultimate - confuses the opponent. He doesn't know what sort of action to expect in certain situations. That makes him less sure of himself and increases his difficulty in planning his own actions. It is worth emphasising this because some fencing masters and fencers maintain that, for efficient participation in competition, it is enough to master a few very well-trained strokes. Such limited training leads to a one-sided fencer who cannot cope with the great variety of styles of various opponents.

A wide variety of fencing actions and tactical ideas, successfully employed by a fencer in a bout, by no means excludes the use of one's own favourite actions. Fencers should, however, both in training and in competition, try not to rely too heavily on their favourite strokes, thus avoiding the danger of losing the "element of surprise" and of "ossification" of their repertoire. Over-use of favourite actions in training bouts may lead to them becoming "reflex-compulsory" actions: the fencer using them in the most inappropriate situations.

- 3) A significant attribute of top-class fencers is their own highly characteristic style of fencing and the practical application of their doctrines. Looking at the technique and style of great fencers, one can recognise the influence of particular fencing schools and particular fencing masters. Apart from these, it is the fencer's individuality which has the greatest influence upon his style and tactics: height, traits of temperament, agility, power of concentration, and various other traits of personality.

In training we want to teach and perfect a number of basic positions, movements, and fencing actions. We want the pupil to master the correct and most typical sensory-motor skills (motor habit patterns) of fencing technique. We teach them the typical basic strokes, not to make everybody fence in exactly the same way, but in order to make them able to find and elaborate their own individual style of fencing according to their character, temperament, body structure, and entire personality.

A fencing master should resist the temptation of imposing the same technique and style to all his pupils; he should undertake the difficult task of helping each fencer to find his own style.

Various fencers may like various fencing styles and tactics. In international competitions, there are successful fencers who represent totally different schools and styles. One should, however, warn those wishing to blindly imitate great champions, as the technique and tactics useful for one fencer could be completely useless for others.

Type of nervous system and traits of temperament are very important factors in building up a fencer's own style of fencing and his tactics. It is known, for example, that only a fencer with a strong, lively, and balanced temperament and with great mobility of neurophysiological processes can base his style and tactics on lightning-speed improvisation, using unforeseen actions based on compound - mostly choice - reaction. On the other hand, a phlegmatic fencer who is not so fast and whose nervous processes



have a certain amount of inertia, must base his style and tactics on careful observation and premeditated actions, taking advantage of simple reaction, and using mostly second intention actions.

#### VARIOUS TYPES OF PREPARATORY ACTIONS

*Success depends to a great extent on the fencer's ability to deal with the opponent's game: to evaluate his strong points as well as take advantage of his weaknesses.*

MICHEL ALAUX

All fencing actions, from the point of view of tactics, can be divided into actual (ultimate – real) actions and preparatory actions.

Actual actions are ultimate, specific actions intended to ward off a hit or to score a hit, directly (first intention) or indirectly (second intention).

Preparatory actions are numerous and varied fencing actions, not intended to score a hit directly or indirectly, but facilitating and preparing the successful application of actual actions.

Preparatory actions are very often neglected in training and yet they play an important part in competition. Preparatory actions in a bout serve the following tactical purposes:

- General assessment of the situation in a bout;
- Misleading the opponent;
- Drawing certain actions from the opponent and subtly directing the opponent's game;
- Manoeuvring, gaining the field of play and preparing one's own attacks;
- Hindering the opponent's concentration and his assessment of distance, etc.

Obvious lack of appreciation of preparatory actions in modern sabre is one of the symptoms of its degeneration. Sabreurs, nowadays, do not seem to remember an apt remark of the old master, VINCENIO SAVIOLO, "Some set upon their enemies with rage and fury after the fashion of Rammes, and for the most part come to misfortune." [1]

Preparatory actions play an important part in foil and, above all, in epee, which has recently become the most spectacular, versatile, technical, and "honest" weapon.

Generally speaking, however, a fencer's tactical mastery depends a lot on his repertoire and the cleverness of his preparatory actions. As a matter of fact, some of the greatest fencers use only a very limited amount of real actions, but prepare their application with great variety and ingenuity.

It is important for a fencer to be able to change preparation into a "real" action, as well as to be able to deceive the opponent by a long, slow preparation followed by an accelerated real action - for example: a slow, preparatory lunge and a very fast renewal of the attack by fleche.

Preparatory actions often contain several tactical goals. For example, a false attack serves the purpose of reconnoitring the opponent's reaction, revealing his intention, misleading him about our own intentions, and getting good distance for a fast real attack.

Let us now briefly describe some types of preparatory actions:

#### Reconnaissance/Exploratory Moves

The aims of reconnaissance, preparatory actions are very varied as are their forms.

The general aim of reconnaissance is the assessment of the opponent's strengths and style of fencing and orientation in the tactical situation during the course of a bout. This entails evaluation of the opponent's tactical type, his technical possibilities, his intentions and psychological state.

Among the more detailed aims of reconnaissance, by means of exploratory movements, is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- In which situation does the opponent attack most often?
- Which are his favourite strokes?
- Taken by surprise, does he parry or use counter-attacks most often?
- How does he react to various movements such as a jump forward, sudden attack, beat on the blade, etc.?
- What are the external signs of his concentration or lack of concentration?

- Does he change his posture prior to an attack?

- Does he unwittingly betray his intention or is he trying to mislead his real intention, etc.?

Reconnaissance of the opponent's defence is carried out by the initial movements of various attacks or complete false attacks with a slightly shorter reach. Sometimes, in order to assess the opponent's defensive system, technique and speed, it is necessary to engage in an exchange of parry and riposte. This, of course, is dangerous,

but gives us good information.

Evaluation of the opponent's reaction to various attacks, feints, actions on the blade, and other actions, is carried out by means of cautious, isolated execution of these strokes, accompanied by steps forward or a half lunge. A general impression of the opponent's technique, style, and speed is not gained only in the actual bout, but also by careful observation of his warm-up exercises, pre-competition lessons with his fencing master, and, above all, by watching him fence with other opponents.

The importance of reconnaissance to the fencer cannot be exaggerated. This is why lessons should not be limited to practising and perfecting ultimate actions, but should also comprise exploratory and other preparatory movements. In applying a fencing stroke, it is not only the actual execution of the stroke which counts, but also the perception and anticipation of the opponent's movements.

Counteracting the opponent's reconnaissance consists essentially of two kinds of closely connected preparatory actions:

- 1) Concealing one's own intentions,
- 2) Misleading the opponent.

#### Concealing One's Own Intentions

This is the more passive form of counteraction against the opponent's reconnaissance. The essence of it consists of the ability to not betray unwittingly - by unnecessary gestures and movements - one's own intention or state of mind. The successful - hiding of one's own intention is possible only when a fencer, in the course of his training - both in lessons and competition - has learned to discriminate finely between real and false actions. This



ability is based on compound differential reaction, allowing him to discriminate between very similar stimuli.

### Misleading the Opponent

This may be described as an active form of counteracting the opponent's reconnaissance. On recognising the opponent's exploratory movement, the fencer "shows" a certain line of action while, when the real attack comes, he uses a completely different stroke.

The active and passive forms of counteracting the opponent's reconnaissance lead to a very subtle and crafty psychological struggle - the greater part of it often taking place in the heads of both fencers. CHARLES DE BEAUMONT summed up this point excellently when he said, "Fencing is a game of subtlety, and bluff can be met with counter-bluff." [2]

A fencer who is making a reconnaissance has to be very careful and try to decide whether the opponent's reaction to his exploratory movements is really an unwitting betrayal of his intentions or an attempt to purposefully mislead him. After he considers if the opponent betrayed himself unwittingly, it is not the end of his troubles as now he has to decide whether the opponent has noticed his mistake or not. In accordance with each of these possibilities the fencer's action must, of course, be different.

### Directing the Opponent's Game

A good fencer not only takes advantage of his opponent's mistakes and of certain tactical situations arising during the progress of the bout, but tries actively to create such a tactical situation as is convenient for his own plan - warding off an attack to score with a riposte or to launch an attack in a situation favourable to himself. By the use of certain moves, he draws the opponent's movements and actions, influences his tactics and even his psychological mood. In other words, he tried to control the opponent's game.

This ability allows a fencer to foresee and even provoke his opponent's movements in order to nullify his efforts by means of already prepared actions.

The most typical and extreme example of drawing the opponent's action is the second intention, false attack with the object of drawing the opponent's counter-attack or parry-riposte. A counter-attack or parry riposte, so provoked, is more easily dealt with (second intention counter-time and second intention parry-counterriposte are, of course, "real", ultimate actions, not preparatory).

Thus, by certain false attacks, feints, changes of position, manoeuvring on the strip and actions on the blade, one may draw concrete, foreseen actions from the opponent. An experienced fencer, however, not only provokes certain actions but tries to influence his opponent's psychology and tactics. For example, when fencing against an opponent who has a strong defence, one may assume the role of a very panicky fencer, very much afraid of the opponent's attacks. This may induce the opponent to make a rather wild and badly chosen attack, which is easy to parry. A forward movement with an expression of concentration, as if one is going to attack at any moment, may draw out the opponent's attack which again is easy to parry and counter-act in such circumstances.

### Manoeuvring

Manoeuvring on the strip may serve a series of practical purposes. One of them may be to push the opponent into a less convenient position near the end of the strip. One gains distance by steps forward, short lunges, and short advance-lunges, accompanied by feints. Manoeuvring also plays an important part in defence - for example, parrying with a step back. Another important purpose served by manoeuvring is to find the appropriate

distance from which to commence one's own attack. The struggle for "one's own distance" is complicated, very often accompanied by various movements of the blade and consists of steps forwards and back - of various lengths and rhythm, sometimes creeping towards the opponent, sometimes executing lively jumps, etc.

### Hindering the Opponent's Game

Hindering the opponent's game means hindering the opponent's concentration, assessment of distance, and application of attack. By various movements and manoeuvres, a fencer tries to lower the opponent's state of concentration, to induce a false sense of security, to make it difficult for him to assess distance and to launch his attacks. A fencer who is about to attack has an advantage when his opponent's concentration and watchfulness is lulled. This may be attained by drawing the opponent into a rather slow and phlegmatic interchange of footwork or slow, rhythmic movements of the blade.

The ability to control the rhythm of one's own movement and, by using rhythm, to influence the opponent's psychology and state of concentration, is the quality possessed by great champions.

There are other, more active, ways of distracting the opponent's attention, which also make it difficult for him to assess the distance and to find the right moment for launching an attack.

Among such preparatory actions one may quote:

- Constant jumps forward and backwards,
- Combined use of jumps, movements of the blade and actions of the blade,
- Very strong, perhaps even brutal, beats on the blade which irritate certain opponents, upset their concentration and lower their precision,
- Holding the sword in line against an opponent who favours compound attacks,
- Absence of blade and constant movement of the weapon against an opponent who likes engagement and attacks preceded by actions on the blade,
- Sudden closing of the distance against an opponent who likes attacks from long distance, etc.

Other, less subtle, ways of distracting the opponent's attention and hampering the initiation of his attacks belong rather to "gamemanship" than to swordmanship and this is why we shall not deal with them.

The description of a few chosen preparatory actions has been, of necessity, brief and sketchy, but I hope that it still stresses their tactical significance and the necessity for studying and practising them.

I think that it is appropriate to end this chapter on tactics by quoting the words of the famous French master - who, for some years, worked in the USA - MICHEL ALAUX: "For most fencers, fencing is a unique combination of quick thinking and elegant movements." [3]

### References

1. SAVIOLO, V.: *His Practise in Two Books, the First Entrating on the Rapier and Dagger, his Second on Honour and Honorable Quarrels*. London, 1595.
2. DE BEAUMONT, G.L.: *Fencing - ancient art and modern sport*, Nicholas Key, London 1960.
3. ALAUX, M.: *Fencing*, Charles Scriber's Sons, New York 1975.

## COMMENT

This issue of Academy News is a bumper 16 page issue, thanks to an article by Professor Zbigniew Czajkowski, which should be of interest to all our members.

If you want more of the wit and wisdom of Professor Czajkowski, the BAF has a 3 DVD set of the master classes he gave at the Royal Armouries in 2005 at a price of £16.80 for the set of three (£21 to non-members)

You can also find more along the same lines as this article in his book "Understanding Fencing - The Unity of Theory and Practice" (ISBN 0-9659468-8-6). The book covers a wide range of topics, concerning all aspects of fencing and is highly recommended. It is available from Leon Paul.

### PRICE INCREASES

The prices of Academy documentation, etc., have not been increased for over eighteen months, but, sadly, financial pressure means that we need to increase the price of all goods and services by around 5% from March 1st. This is reflected in the prices quoted on page 3. Other prices, for merchandise, etc., can be found at [www.baf-fencing.org](http://www.baf-fencing.org) or on application by email to [treasurer@baf-fencing.org](mailto:treasurer@baf-fencing.org)

### KEITH WREN

The Academy was saddened to hear recently of the death of Professor Keith Wren.

Keith was a long time member of the BAF and had been honoured by being made a Life Member.

It is hoped that Academy News can produce a fuller appreciation of the life and work of Keith in our next issue and we would ask any of our readers with memories they would like to share to send them to the Editor.

## Letters

### England Coaching & Club Organisers Conference

Loughborough – 29<sup>th</sup> March 2009

*Purely personal reflections from Philip Bruce*

The First England Coaching Conference was held recently at Loughborough University and I am grateful to the organisers for their invitation for me to attend as a guest.

The objectives were to bring club organisers and coaches together with members of the England Board for an exchange of views on development and to provide an up-date on the new structures for coach education in England.

The conference successfully achieved these objectives.

There can be little doubt that the organisers, and Norman Randall in particular, had worked hard in preparing the conference and they deserve our thanks.

However, in my opinion, too much emphasis continues to be placed on children's fencing. Even the 'tactics workshops' were based on the assumption that coaches attending were only involved with coaching young fencers.

Unfortunately, there was little or no mention of the coaching skills required at the highest levels of competitive fencing.

Is there a danger of fencing becoming a lightweight entertainment for kiddies?

I fear that unless there is some moderation of this emphasis, those who have higher aspirations may begin hanging up their swords and turning away.

*Philip Bruce*

## NEW ACADEMY TRACKSUIT



### *Don't shoot the model!*

It's been a while, but the Academy has a new modern tracksuit by **adidas**, cost **£64.99** + postage.

If you would like one or more, please send your order to [treasurer@baf-fencing.org](mailto:treasurer@baf-fencing.org).

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## HARRINGTON'S HARANGUE

Musings from your Members' Rep.

I've spent a not inconsiderable amount of time over the past few years attending coach education courses. Mainly because becoming a decent fencing coach means acquiring a whole range of technical skills, and that means doing a lot of training. A few months ago, however, I tried something different, and attended a coaching conference put on by my local sports partnership.

This was the first time I'd tried going to a general coaching event rather than fencing specific one, so I was not sure what to expect. The day turned out to be very rewarding and enjoyable, not to mention good value for money. (Just £10 for the day, including coffee, lunch, post conference drinks, and a free drinks bottle. Organisers of other events take note!)

Unsurprisingly, none of the speakers were from fencing. Nevertheless, I was able to take something worthwhile away from every session. Since there were coaches there from a whole range of sports, the sessions tended to focus on general themes or concepts. Some, such as one on warming up and injury prevention, had an obvious application for fencing. However I think the ones I got the most out of were the sessions, where on the face of it, the subject appeared to be less relevant. The good thing about those from my point of view, was that I was forced to think for myself about how I might use the general concept being discussed or demonstrated in my own coaching. Too often in the past I've come away from a coach education course and just copied what I'd learnt, without thinking too much about why I was doing it. Something that is far too easy to do. However being forced to look at things from a different angle was very refreshing, and I came away from the day feeling much more enthusiastic about my own coaching.

The opening keynote address was from Shane Sutton, one of the coaches of the British Olympic cycling team. There were obviously a lot of factors that contributed to the success of the British cyclists in the last Olympics, but I'm going to finish by passing on just one of the things he said. The team aimed for incremental improvement day by day. They would try and be a little better every day. Not a lot better, but just a little better. Look where that got them!

*Liam Harrington*

## JUBILEE UPDATE

Have you ever wondered what a seventeenth century prize fight would look like or what Nell Gwynn would have said to Henry VIII? This, and many other wondrous 'swordy things' will be revealed at the Academy's Swordplay Spectacular at Warwick Castle on Sunday September 6<sup>th</sup>.

Roy and Angela Goodall are becoming old hands at this sort of thing. They wrote and produced 'Silver Swords' on the Academy's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, then 'Golden Swords' at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, ten years ago for the Academy's big 5-O and this will be a contribution to celebrate 60 years of Academy achievements.

Production will be by the same team as ten years ago - Producer David Austin, writers/directors Roy and Angela Goodall and Andy Wilkinson, with many of the old backstage staff only too eager to help again. You can expect fireworks, maybe literally, superb swordfights in correct period costume, punch-ups, dancing and many, many other fascinating scenes. If the treatment of our history is a little irreverent, that all adds to the fun!

2009 is exactly the right time to celebrate our existence. Not only is it the 60<sup>th</sup> years since the BAF was reformed after the last war, but it is also the 40<sup>th</sup> year since the start of the British Academy of Dramatic Combat, formerly known as the Society of British



Fight Directors of which Roy and Angela were founder members. Perhaps more important, it is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the coronation of King Henry VIII, whose inspiration it was to form an Association of Fencing Masters, our ancestors of the sword, from whom we trace the development of our Academy today.

As ten years ago, the Academy has the complete co-operation of the British Academy of Dramatic Combat to help create and direct the fight scenes and many of the countries top drama schools will be contributing to the event. The performance will take place on the green of the castle, surrounded by ancient battlements, with a specially constructed stage and seating. During the weekend it is hoped that tents will be dotted around the castle in which all kinds of fencing activities will be taking place –

especially come and try it sessions. The show is not only for our 60<sup>th</sup>, but to publicise fencing as a sport as much as possible.

So you, our members, can play a part in this once-only event. We would like BAF members to volunteer their services to help to man the tents, act as stewards, runners, sellers of programmes etc – all to make this a wonderful evening for the Academy. Don't forget that on both Saturday and Sunday, during the day, the castle is open for all its main attractions; and it really is a great place to bring the family and visit. Look up their website to see for yourselves.

And even more important we want to make this a financial success and your support is needed to publicise the evening, sell tickets or organise a coach to bring your club members. When we did "The Globe", ten years ago, coachloads of fencers came from all over the country. It was the biggest fencing show ever put on in this country – but this one will be even better.

So when we send you a poster, please put it in a prominent position on your club notice-board and organise your pupils to come and see this wonderful evening. It won't happen again for a long, long time.

**Volunteers should contact Roy Goodall or David Austin:**

member@goodall28.wanadoo.co.uk or  
austinbaf@hotmail.com

The British Academy of Fencing  
to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of its reformation proudly presents

A pageant of swashbuckling swordplay  
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**6th September 2009 7.00pm**

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or email [royangela@goodall28.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:royangela@goodall28.wanadoo.co.uk)

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## COURSES

### BAF RESIDENTIAL COURSES 2009

**Autumn Course: 26th - 31st October 2009**

**Fees for the Course (provisional)**

**Residential: £355 (BAF Member) £410 (Non-member) £355 (Pupil)**

**Non-residential: £295 (BAF Member) £320 (Non-member) £295 (Pupil)**

**Course to be held at Denstone College, Staffordshire.**

**Places on this course are already being booked, so don't delay!**

**Contact Dave Jerry, the Course Officer, to ensure your place.**

***Contact details are on page 3***

Various Coach Education courses are held on a regular basis. The following contacts may be useful. Otherwise, contact Dave Jerry, the Course Officer, for the latest information.

**Yorkshire Coaches' Club:** monthly 10 am to 4 pm at Ackworth School, Pontefract. Levels 1 – 4 catered for; Level 5 by arrangement. Coach Educators of the Academy will cover the Theory and Practice of Coaching. All coaches and their pupils are welcome to attend. Please contact Provost Dave Jerry (see page 3).

**Sunday Coaches' Club, Birmingham:** normally the first Sunday in each month, from 10 pm to 4 pm at St. John's Primary School, Mortimer Road, Kenilworth, Warks. CV8 1FS. Coach educators are Prof. Peter Northam and Prof. Pete Cormack. For full details, contact Pete Cormack at [cormack@ntlworld.com](mailto:cormack@ntlworld.com) or on 01926 859881.

**Saturday Coaches' Club, Norwich:** Monthly at the University Sports Park, Norwich. Advanced Coach Andrew Sowerby invites all coaches in the Norfolk and Suffolk area wishing to prepare for Foil, Épée and Sabre (levels 1 to 4) to come along. E-mail Andrew via [www.sowerbyfencing.com](http://www.sowerbyfencing.com)

**Hemel Hempstead:** Due to problems with the venue, the courses run by Prof. Chris Norder are suspended for the time being. If you are interested in coach education in this area, please contact Prof. Liam Harrington for the latest situation.

**If you are organising a Coach Education course, please contact the Editor if you wish to have it publicised. You should also inform the Course Officer.**

**See also the Academy web site for the latest news on courses. Contact the webmaster, Isobel Combes, if you wish to publicise any events there.**

[www.baf-fencing.org](http://www.baf-fencing.org)

## IMPORTANT

**All Course organisers and potential attendees should be aware of the following condition, which applies to all BAF Courses, including "non-official" courses run by Academy members.**

**Please note the Course Officer and the Course Director reserve the right to refuse an application to attend the course.**

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