

British Academy of Fencing
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"Run by coaches for coaches"

MIKE JOSEPH

1943 - 2010

It has been a privilege and an honour to have known Michael. A genuine, caring, honest and likeable man who gave of himself unsparingly to all those with whom he came in contact. He was not just a fencing colleague but a true friend. He gained the respect of those who knew him in all the spheres in which he worked.

Professor Leon Hill, President Emeritus of the British Academy of Fencing, remembers Michael thus: "With immense admiration. In every office he held he was totally reliable, ensuring that every task he undertook was satisfactorily completed – allowing nothing to hinder this, even if he had to tread on a few toes in the process."

Michael was indeed a colourful character, never afraid to say what he thought, or voice his opinions. He did not suffer fools gladly. He loved and worked hard for fencing. He experienced ill health for much of his life. Towards the end he battled hard to overcome the disease that finally took him. He

rarely complained. He wanted to survive long enough to travel this year to Switzerland for the F.M.W.C. and Congress. Unfortunately it was not to be.

He began fencing at age 13 at Brooke House School, London under the tuition of Peter Hobson and went on to fence at Leyton Fencing club, Salle Pearson, Paladin and the Civil Service. He had a mixed career as a competitive fencer in many competitions in the U.K. and Europe. It was not long before he realised that he enjoyed teaching and coaching the sport and passed his first amateur coaching award – in 1964. It was in the 70's that he started coaching seriously which lead him to join the British Academy of Fencing. He undertook training from Professors Pat and Ken Pearson, Professors Roy and Angela Goodall, Professor Bob Anderson and Professor Bill Harmer Brown, all of whom described him as a cheerful, willing and enthusiastic student. He subsequently proceeded to pass on his skills to various local schools and fencing clubs, including Havering and



Salle Michael Joseph, Hornchurch. He travelled and lived for a while in both Israel, where he was appointed National Trainer, and Italy.

On joining the Academy, Michael commenced a serious training regime which took him in 1974 to his Provost Award followed by his Diploma in 1980. At that time Diploma requirements comprised coaching, fighting and "presiding" at all 3 weapons and written examinations including rules and regulations, anatomy and

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....from front page

MIKE JOSEPH

physiology all of which had to be completed in a single day. Phew!

Thereafter he served the Academy unreservedly and continuously for more years than any other member, progressing through the posts of Committee member, Associate and Provost Representative, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary, International Secretary and finally Vice President. In 2001 he received the much coveted Gauthier Trophy for services to the Academy. In 2003 he was awarded Life Membership of the Academy. As well as the posts mentioned earlier, he has, in recent times, accepted additional responsibilities within the Academy as Child Protection Officer, Chair of the Disciplinary Sub-committee, Insurance Liaison Officer, Awards Officer and International Secretary. Throughout his last days of illness he insisted in being made aware of the current activities of the Committee even though he was unable to help directly. The word 'commitment' comes to mind

Professor Leon Hill further recalls that Michael's service to fencing as Chairman of the Joint AFA/BAF Coaching Committee from its inception to its demise in the 80's and made it probably the most valuable and efficiently working committee that ever served the Coach Education System of British Fencing.

Always willing to help where he was able, he was appointed National Coach to Paraplegic Fencing and helped to establish their links with the Amateur Fencing Association (now the BFA) via their then President, Dame Mary Glen Haig. Michael became a member of the Academy d'Armes Internationale in the 80's after his Diploma and was involved with the very successful British Team which later took part in the Artistic World Fencing Championships in Vichy, France. He was, in recent years, a Vice President of the A.A.I.

Michael had in his lifetime turned his hand to other activities. Fishing, organic vegetable growing, flower cultivation (fuchsias in particular) and always very soon found himself in the midst of organising any club or group he joined. He had reached managerial status within British Telecom before he retired from that company. In early 2000, he felt he could voluntarily serve the local community. He sought approval and was appointed a Justice of the Peace to the Greater London Commission, which body he regularly served for the borough of Havering. In these days of email Michael always found time to pick up the telephone.

I have lost a wonderful friend and confidant. He will be sadly missed by all the very many people with whom he came into contact. They don't make too many like him. There will be a void in some areas extremely difficult to fill.

Michael is survived by his wife Kay.

Professor David Austin

Honoured Former President

COMMENT

This issue has been a sad one to compile, containing as it does news of the passing of two of our members. We trust that Academy members will understand why so much space has been devoted to this. Each one that we remember now has made a valuable contribution to the Academy, whether through years of service, or by brilliant success at world level.

We are also able to bring you another excellent article by Dr. Professor Z Czajkowski, which should be of interest to all coaches, at whatever level they may be. This occupies the centre pages of the News, so, even if you do not keep the rest of the issue, you can pull these out and file them for reference and inspiration.

The Editor

SUCCESS AT LAST

We are pleased to report that the Academy has another new Professor.

He is Alasdair Urquhart, who has just completed what has proved to be quite a long climb to the top.

Our records show that he passed his Foil Diploma back in 1997. This was followed by Sabre in 2001 and Epée in 2004.

Then followed quite a gap, until he finally completed the written papers in May this year. It may have taken a while to reach the summit, but Alasdair is there at last - Congratulations, Professor!

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THE PRESIDENT WRITES.....



Prof. Mike Joseph: As most of you will be aware Mike passed away in the early hours of Saturday the 29th of May. It has been my sad duty to report his death to his many friends and colleagues from around the world. Mike's funeral took place on Thursday the 10th of June and was attended by over a 100 mourners, about 30 of which were his friends and colleagues from the Academy.

I've known Mike for over thirty years and served on committee with him for nearly 20 of those years. Shortly after I became President, he phoned to offer his apologies for not making a committee meeting. I seem to remember he was on the

phone for ages. It wasn't until sometime later I discovered that this was only the second time he had missed a meeting in almost thirty years. In committee meetings he would vociferously argue his position and here is a true testament to his strength of character; when the committee decided to set policy which was opposed to his position, Mike would then defend that policy with the same passion with which he once argued against it. In my time as President I've come to think of him as the conscience of the Academy. To say that he will be missed is an understatement. All who have served with him will sadly miss his friendship, loyalty, passion, commitment and wealth of experience. Out of respect for Mike I have no intention of replacing him as Vice President until our next AGM and I know he will be a tough act to follow. At this time of sadness and sorrow, I know our thoughts and sympathies are with his widow Kay.

Russell Brown: It is with great sadness that I inform the Academy that Russell Brown, on the BAF Role of Honour List as part of the Academy's Artistic Fencing Team 2000 that won the title and gold medal, was tragically killed on Thursday 27th May in a motorcycle accident while driving to work. On behalf of the Academy our thoughts and sympathies are with his widow, family and friend.

Co-Opted to the Committee: Resulting from discussions at our Easter Course, the committee has a co-opted Andy Wilkinson, with responsibility and to represent fencing from the Stage and screen. It is not uncommon for the Academy to be approached concerning the training of fight arrangers etc., and in my opinion there's no one better qualified to represent the Academy and deal with any such issues

British Fencing Association: On the Sunday of the EYCs, Sarah Pavely and I meet with Piers Martin (CEO. BFA). The discussions centred on the Academy seeking BFA support for our submission to City & Guilds of the documentation which supports their Level 2 qualification. Sadly we were informed that the BFA could not give their support. We were informed that the principle reason for this was that the BFA are responsible for ownership and standards of such qualifications.

Fencing Master World Championships – Flawil, Switzerland: In the first week of August we have a team competing in various events and I would like to take this opportunity to wish the very best of luck to all those competing.

Philip Bruce

CHRIS'S COGITATIONS

Musings from your Members' Rep.



I am sure that most of you will be as glad as I am that summer is finally here. So far this year we have had some very hot days and I hope that the weather stays fair for some time to come!

When coaching at this time of year, it is important to remember that our environment has a huge impact on performance, and that coaches and fencers may not be able to perform to their usual maximum in hot sports halls.

In particular, athletes are especially susceptible to heat-related illness such as dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke while exercising in hot weather. However, most serious heat illness can be prevented by following some basic guidelines and paying attention to the warning signs. Remember that heat illnesses, if left unchecked, can be life threatening. If in doubt always seek medical assistance.

A number of factors can limit the body's ability to cool itself, including high temperatures or high humidity, age, obesity, fever, dehydration, illness, medications and alcohol. When an athlete develops a heat illness, it usually occurs following exertion and excessive sweating that leads, first to dehydration, and then to an electrolyte imbalance.

Coaches should ensure that their pupils:

Drink the right amount of fluids

Pupils should hydrate before, during and after training.

Wear appropriate clothing

When warming up and waiting around between bouts, ensure your pupils take off their jackets to allow sweat to evaporate and the body to cool.

If outside, use sunscreen and avoid sunburn

Sunburn decreases the body's ability to cool itself and causes fluid loss. Pupils should use sunscreen with an appropriate SPF level when outside.

Use common sense

Pupils should avoid hot or heavy foods if planning to train in hot weather. Obviously, alcohol should also be avoided! If your pupils suffer from headaches, fatigue or irritability or you notice their performance reducing or concentration wavering, ask them to take a break and cool off.

Always remember that coaches are not superhuman, despite how we like to portray ourselves to our pupils! These guidelines also apply to coaches and you should be especially aware of your own health when coaching in hot weather.

Stay safe.

Chris Eastham, Members' Representative

HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL COACH

By Zbigniew Czajkowski

Most fencing masters have strong individuality and a strong belief that the school they represent is the best that exists, and an even stronger belief that without their teaching, their student will fall apart

Andrzej Wójcikiewicz

The really good fencing master is the one who develops his pupils positive traits of personality, whose pupils achieve outstanding results in major competitions, who efficiently educates younger coaches, and whose contribution towards progress of fencing theory and methodology is considerable

Zbigniew Czajkowski



I present my ideas on a fencing master's work and coaching philosophy in short paragraphs, each paragraph opening with an appropriate quotation, motto or proverb.

Knowledge by itself is power (*Francis Bacon*)

The strikingly strange phenomenon in physical education and sport is the habit of many teachers and coaches of putting great emphasis on procedures, means and methods without analysis of their subject or given branch of sport and without clearly defining the goals of activities. It is very strange, because they choose methods and strategies not knowing enough about their sport. This is a model based on procedures. Much more sensible and useful is a model based on knowledge according to which we first collect as much information as possible on our sport (its history, structure, rules, tactics, physiological and psychological considerations, sociology etc.), then choose main goals and sub-goals, successive tasks, and objectives. Knowing our sport very well, we may choose goals and only then select right and proper methods to achieve consecutive tasks. A knowledge model is thus much more logical and sensible, and it puts emphasis more on quality of training than mere quantity. There ought to be a strong interrelationship and unity of theory and practice, knowledge and practical skills, cognition and performance.

There is nothing more practical than a good theory

This may sound paradoxical, but it is a very true statement. The knowledge of theory enables the coach to prepare sound programs, to conduct successfully the process of training, to assess the training effects, and to avoid many possible didactic and psychological mistakes. The fencing master should cultivate two approaches:

From theory to practice,

From practice to theory.

He conducts training/practice, taking advantage of his knowledge and theory; then, conducting training, he watches his pupils, assesses the effects, watches competitions carefully and draws certain conclusions, thus enriching his knowledge. His newly acquired knowledge he uses again in practice.

If names are not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language is not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success. Therefore a superior man considers it necessary that the names he uses may be spoken appropriately (*Confucius*)

To efficiently conduct training programs (lessons, assessment of training effects etc.) to communicate with pupils and other coaches, and to analyse the competitions, it is very necessary to have a clear and well-defined terminology which includes names, definitions and classifications, component parts and objects of fencing training, fencing actions and their classification, weapon forms and methods of training, didactic principles, structure of lessons, etc.

To look is not the same as to see, and to see is not the same as to perceive. We perceive really well only the objects that we know well and can name. On fast and right perception depends our speed of reaction and our tactics, hence the great significance of having and using proper terminology. The fencing master from his very first lesson must impart to his pupils correct, clearly defined terminology plus basic information on fencing, training, reaction, tactics etc.

Terms not forming a coherent system or classification, fragments of chaotic information etc, are like heaps of bricks in a brickyard: they become useful only when well-organized and put together in the form of a wall, bridge or house. The same goes for fencing terminology.

We don't select champions; they select themselves by work, passion and determination to achieve the highest results

(*Janusz Bednarski*)

Nowadays it is very fashionable to assess the most important characteristics of a champion in a given discipline of sport - to profile the "model of a champion". In fencing this is futile and a waste of time and energy: one and only one type of fencer who wins competitions simply does not exist! Among most outstanding fencers, winners of Olympic Games, World Championships etc. we may find tall and short fencers, some very fast and some rather slow, extroverts and introverts, of different types of temperament, competitors representing various fencing schools, fencers of foreseen actions and fencers who like lightning-speed improvisation, offensive types and rather defensive types, etc.

Fencers who win great competitions are not without any weak points, without faults and errors. They are competitors who are strong and win because they have developed their assets, their strong points, their possibilities to the highest degree.

So, looking for a model of champion is a sterile occupation. There are, however, certain traits characteristic of great champions: high levels of achievement motivation, assertiveness, initiative, capacity for work, resistance to stress, and quality of attentiveness.

Champions may differ very much themselves and this is why fencing offers many different roads towards victory and success.

Attempts to define one, unique model of an ideal coach are the same as trying to catch a shadow or trying to find an ideal model of a champion (*Zbigniew Czajkowski*)

After many years of active involvement in fencing, many observations, much research work and reflection, I came to the firm conclusion that one type of an ideal successful coach does not exist. Great fencing masters are people with very different dimensions of personality, different traits of temperament, various mental types and attitudes; often applying different training methods, and displaying various styles of leadership. Great masters are not, of course, devoid of certain weaknesses, shortcomings, or disadvantages. They achieve great results thanks to their strong points, their assets, and their original solutions. General conceptions, training methods, ways of programming and conducting of exercises, educational influence on pupils of great fencing masters who produce outstanding fencers - all these are varied. It is enough to watch the lessons of various famous fencing masters to see how very different they can be.

There are however, certain common traits among the best coaches: love for fencing, love and capacity for strenuous work, an open mind and ability to introduce innovations, the ability to inspire and motivate their pupils, create attitudes, and belief that their school is good and efficient.

The coach's first duty is to make his pupil a fanatic

(*Vitali Arkadyev*)

I agree with the words of the great Soviet fencing master, although I understand that using the word "fanatic" really means an "enthusiast" of fencing. Very generally speaking, the effectiveness of human activities depends on two major factors:

Motivation and its direction and level,

Abilities.

Activities, of course, take place in a given environment and in various situations which also influence the outcome and effectiveness of our

actions. In fencing training, both these factors (motivation and level of abilities/technique/tactics etc.) are strongly influenced by the fencing master. The coach should skilfully inspire and motivate his/her pupils, for without motivation one cannot expect any good results. This is why perhaps the most important duty of a coach is to motivate his pupils, trying to instil the love of fencing and the desire to learn as much as possible. In this respect, particularly important is *intrinsic motivation* - enjoying the process of training and taking part in competition while attempting to improve one's knowledge and practical skills, without thinking of rewards. One should be very careful in applying extrinsic motivation (money, rewards, privileges etc.) because in extrinsic motivation only its informative function has a positive effect: when prizes, awards etc. indicate the fencer's social status, competence, acceptance, or appreciation. The control aspect of extrinsic motivation may play a negative influence - you train and compete because you must; we pay you for this.) To achieve outstanding results, fencers must above all be lovers and connoisseurs of their sport.

The main task of a coach is teaching (*Arle Selingen*)

This statement complements Arkadyev's words. Arkadyev stresses the importance of motivation while Selingen, a very successful volleyball coach, stresses the importance of skills and abilities. Both these factors have a decisive influence on the process of training, its effectiveness, and competitive results.

Contrary to what some coaches think, conducting the process of training (coaching) is mainly a matter of teaching and, of course, learning. A fencing master teaches in practically everything he does: introducing new sensory-motor skills, demonstrations of fencing actions, verbal explanations and instructions, giving new information about tactics, developing pupils' concentration of attention, even setting goals and tasks, etc.

In fencing (and many other sports and activities), teaching often is based on creating situations in which effective learning occurs. In gymnastics and other closed-skill sports, the athletes learn mainly how correctly to execute a movement or set of movements according to a previously established pattern and program. In fencing and other open-skill sports an athlete, after having learned the basic form of various strokes, learns to choose the right stroke in constantly changing tactical situations during lessons, training bouts, and competition. So the fencing coach must constantly create situations forcing his/her pupils to react, to take decisions, to choose the appropriate action. So, "mechanical" execution of a given fencing stroke is not enough.

In teaching and perfecting pupils' technique and tactics the coach must not only explain, instruct and give lessons, but also encourage pupils to watch, observe, think, draw conclusions on their own, e.g. analysis of one's own technique and tactics, assessing the level of physical fitness, analysis of competitions, etc.

In teaching we may distinguish two main didactic forms:

Proper teaching (pupil learns new skills),

Perfecting (pupil perfects already acquired skill).

Proper teaching is connected mainly with the cognitive processes plus motivation; the perfecting is connected mainly with motivation plus cognition.

Even at the highest level of a fencer's training, the master should constantly introduce something new and interesting: not only perfecting known skills and abilities, but introducing some new skills and abilities. This is an extremely important point - training consisting only of repetition of known skills and abilities becomes boring, leads to fatigue and staleness and does not develop new possibilities. The process of training, if done with the right amount of proper teaching, new skills, new situations, new tasks - is more interesting, more emotional, more challenging, develops cognitive processes, and enhances the motor educability. It also keeps away boredom and mental fatigue.

A good teacher is always the most diligent pupil (*Maxim Gorky*)

In order to teach well, one must know a lot. A good coach must always try to increase his knowledge and improve his practical skills of teaching: keep things interesting and logical, build on a model of knowledge (program of training, present various methods of conducting exercises, set realistic and challenging goals and tasks, impart new and valuable information, etc.)

The ingenious fencing master constantly improves his methods; he learns from books, from practical experience and clinics, by talking with other coaches, by watching competitions, by analysing the process of

training. He may learn a lot too by watching his pupils, by listening to them, by trying to answer pupils' questions. A good coach may learn a lot from ... his pupils!

And the best way to learn is to teach, for by teaching we learn twice. Very wise Rabbi Yehuda said many centuries ago: "I have learned a lot from my teachers, more from my colleagues, but most from my pupils".

It is easy to be a good pupil when learning from a great Master

(*Judy O'Donnell*)

This is very true. As already stressed, the good fencing master should teach and motivate his/her pupils. The amount and depth of the fencing master's knowledge and practical skills is a very important and valuable factor, but equally - or perhaps even more - important is the ability to inspire the pupils, to choose interesting exercises, to conduct them lively and colourfully in such a way that they not only are highly instructive but also produce enthusiasm, interest, enjoyment and satisfaction. The exercises, demonstrations, explanation and lessons should stimulate a profound understanding of fencing and a desire to do more and better. It is then not only the knowledge and skills that count, but also the ability to *impart* the knowledge and skills to the fencers.

Don't throw away a weak kid: it may turn to be a lion's child (*Arab proverb*)

I have chosen this colourful Arab proverb to show the unreliability and often futility of various selective tests and attempts to select, by means of functional and motor tests, a future champion. No tests of physical fitness can guarantee the correct diagnosis and prognosis of a candidate for fencing. To begin with, at a very early stage of a fencer's career, a high level of motivation may be more important and reliable than a whole set of various tests. Many cases are known of attempts to throw away a real future champion by merely relying on the results of tests and a coach's "impression". Bednarski's previously quoted words are very apt: "We don't select champions. They select themselves".

We believe in what is pleasant to believe (*Napoleon*)

Some coaches use selection tests and do not bother with children who - judging by the test results - do not show any promise of becoming good fencers. Such coaches often choose one kid, firmly believing that he is going to be a great champion. They give him plenty of lessons and spend a lot of time, energy and effort, completely oblivious to the fact that - contrary to tests results and coach's personal fancy - the "future great champion" is rather lazy, not very talented, and does not show any remarkable results. They don't accept these facts, but work with more energy and determination believing and hoping for a sudden outburst of fantastic results. This is typical wishful thinking. It is difficult to part with our dreams.

The real measure of a coach's value is the results of his pupils

Quite often we hear such statements. In a way they are true, but this is not the whole truth. To assess the fencing master's worth - his personality, work, training methods, programs etc. - we must of course consider the competition results of his or her pupils.

Although the rivalry and drive for outstanding results in competitions constitutes the very essence of competitive fencing, one must keep winning in sensible proportions. To win is nice, pleasant, and desirable - but to lose is not an utter disaster! There are other important and valuable aspects of fencing: more social awareness, increased self-realization, satisfaction in improving one's skills and fitness, enjoyment of the very process of training and bouting, etc.

Apart from his/her pupils' competition results, one should judge efficacy and value of a coach by assessing his educational influence on pupils, efforts in developing the theory and methodology of fencing, and successes in forming young coaches.

In assessing the value, efficiency and significance of a fencing master, one should also bear in mind where and whom he is coaching. Different places of work demand various attitudes.

A fencing master coaching children must provide an optimum level of mental arousal, fun and enjoyment, a feeling of competence, all-round fitness, and basic fencing skills. Coaching young kids is typical "teaching for the future", ensuring physiological, psychological a sociological development and such fencing knowledge and skill which would be most useful and beneficial in the future.

A coach who conducts recreational fencing for adults ought to provide all-round fitness, good health, active rest, psychological relaxation, a sense of well-being, fun and pleasure, a friendly atmosphere, and such level of fencing skills as to enable the participants to enjoy exercise and participate in minor competitions.

High competitive fencing demands a very strenuous, specialized, and specific training, taking part in major tournaments, and achieving as good as possible results. Such training entails: systematic practice; resistance to stress; courage; assertiveness; a high level of specific fitness; a high level of psychological processes (perception, various qualities of attention, fast reaction, and quick thinking); achievement motivation and - above all - a wide range of fencing actions and good tactics.

To sum up: great coaches produce outstanding athletes, develop theory and methodology of their sport, form a specific school, and educate new generations of good coaches. I have never ceased to be astonished by such coaches who produce good competitors, but somehow fail to educate new young coaches!

Stressing the importance of competition results should not be too one-sided. Victory is in sport, of course, very important, but it is not everything. The athletes must develop their personality, endurance to stressful situations, desire to learn more, ability to co-operate in a team, and they must enjoy the sport (see below).

Every great coach chooses his own road (*Nicolai Ozolin*)

These words, by a well-known Russian specialist of sport science, are in a way complementary to the paragraph about the diversity of types among the best coaches. Great coaches form their own school/method and constantly try to improve it; they do not blindly copy known methods and programs. They seek and find new and efficient solutions, taking advantage of basic science and empirical experience - their own as well as other coaches'. The best coaches show the ability to inspire both public and co-workers. A really great and devoted (to his sport) coach, even in very modest conditions, is able to produce good results and can extract maximum effort, improvement and results even from a not very talented pupil. As Napoleon remarked: "*A lion commanding even a herd of sheep can perform miracles*".

It is easier to put a thousand cities into ruins than to abolish a firmly established myth (*Ignacy Paderewski*)

A good coach appreciates and takes advantage of everything which is good, efficacious and progressive: that which brings results in the old methods but at the same time tries always to look forward, to improve, to find new ways, to be more efficient. An outstanding fencing master has enough common sense and courage to give up out-dated ideas and views. He takes advantage of recent advancement in theory and draws practical conclusions from research, observations, and the documentation of training and competitions.

In our activities we are often prejudiced, and it takes a lot of courage to reject certain views and practical methods firmly established by force of tradition and routine. It is often difficult to give up such ideas like "weightlifting is good for a fencer's strength", "a fencer's results in competition depend to a large degree on the level of all-round fitness", "to produce a champion we must first find a model of champion", "in fencing the best and only efficient form of training is the individual lesson", "to develop endurance one must run long distances at a moderate pace" etc. (the last advice is, of course, valid for long-distance runners but not for fencers!)

It takes a lot of common sense and an independent turn of mind to properly, justly and logically assess the real value and significance of the individual lesson, which for hundreds of years has been practically the only form of the fencer's training. It stands to reason that the individual lesson is not a panacea ("good for everything and everybody") but is one - and not the only! - form of training. It *is* highly efficient, but only when:

It is conducted in a modern, rational, logical and realistic manner

It is supported by other forms of training: group lessons, working on one's own, drills against the wall, drills with mirrors, pair exercises, exercises in line, training bouts etc.

One should firmly reject the old fashioned, mechanical, totally unrealistic manner of giving an individual lesson; it may do more harm than good. Such a stereotyped kind of lesson was described vividly and sarcastically by the great Molière in his "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" of 1670.

It is unbelievable, but when one watches dozens of individual lessons at great international competitions, one must conclude that large portions

of these lessons are totally unrealistic, full of ridiculous mannerisms, or "mechanical"; they do not improve concentration, choice of stroke, or perception. If a fencer wins after such lessons, it is not because of them but in spite of them.

A great fencing master sees the individual lesson in proportion to all other forms of the fencer's training and conducts them in a coherent, rational, and realistic way. He also takes full advantage of a well-organized and lively-conducted group lesson... in fact, I am inclined to think that the real value of a coach - his ingeniousness, knowledge of fencing, ability to keep interest and inspire the pupils, correct choice of exercises, eye-catching demonstrations, his ability to develop pupils' initiative may really be shown in his interesting, lively and colourful conducting of group lessons.

Coaches generally want their pupils to identify with them; it is much better when the coach and athlete identify a common goal

(*James Counsilman*)

In sport, as in other spheres of human activity, a group (club, section, team, national squad etc.) is strong, stable, coherent and efficient in action when all members of the group work together, co-operate in trying to achieve a common goal, and co-operate with detailed tasks necessary to attain that goal. The goals and subsequent tasks ought to be attractive and yet sufficiently difficult; a group whose goals and tasks are very easy is unstable and not efficient. The goals should be maximal, difficult but realistic, and possible to achieve - but with great effort and determination. Maximum plan and programs stimulate intense efforts, and even if 100% of the tasks have not been fully achieved, a lot will have been done. Minimal tasks and goals simply do not motivate one to great effort, and even when goals are achieved they are not worth much.

In trying to achieve common goals, the main coach tries to create and keep in the team a friendly, family-like atmosphere - at the same time ensuring discipline, mutual respect and a sense of responsibility.

Nothing is more destructive than a coach's self-complacency and conceit.

A prominent coach must be sure of himself and must believe that he is able to produce very successful fencers. But every extremity may lead to absurdity! So a conceited, sure of himself, uncritical coach is not likely to be really successful. Too great assertiveness, conceit and/or rejecting all thoughts of possible mistakes may have various reasons. Quite common is a deep sense of inferiority and attempts to compensate for it by glorifying one's own knowledge, boldness and attitude: "I never make mistakes". Oddly enough, it may also be caused by the fencing master's assets, good work and long string of successes; a very successful coach may come to the conclusion that everything he does is good and will bring further achievements. Such a master ceases to analyse his methods of coaching, does not watch competitions, does not see new changes in fencing training and in styles of fencing, competitions rules, ways of refereeing. He has no doubts about himself and his methods, and rejects all critical remarks. Such an attitude sooner or later leads to failure and defeat, which the conceited coach cannot understand.

A fencing master should constantly analyse his ways of coaching, trying to find the sources of his successes and defeats. This will enable him to introduce necessary changes and improvement into his/her system of coaching.

To a coach who shows a tendency to conceit and who is uncritically sure that everything he does is perfect, I would offer this advice; "Such a fool does not exist from whom a wise man could not learn something useful".

A good coach has his favourite pupils and does not conceal it

(*Vitaly Arkadyev*)

This is, of course, true - but this principle ought to be properly understood and very tactfully applied in practice. The good fencing master *should* have his/her favourite pupils - but this means only that he supports and shows special interest in talented, hard working, highly motivated fencers who are able to fight and win. This is in accordance with the needs of highly competitive sport and the principle of individualization; it is not so, of course, in physical recreation or recreational fencing.

Supporting the most talented and enthusiastic pupils must be tactful and subtle when dealing with women and girls. Women, as we know only too well, very often do not take very kindly to other women being praised. If a male fencing master says, for example, "Mary has long and beautiful legs" in order to encourage her to make longer lunges, the other girls will

not be very pleased. Or if he says "Jean works very hard and has made really big progress", the comment might be "She must have seduced him". Be careful!

An ass knows seven styles of swimming, but when he sees water he forgets all of them (*Armenian proverb*)

Probably no coach exists who does not experience a great sense of disappointment when a pupil who learns various fencing strokes very quickly and correctly, and who does extremely well in the process of training, gives performances in competition which are poor - far below his/her abilities and possibilities, and far below the coach's expectations. It happens quite often that this fencer's movements in exercises and training bouts are correct, smooth, and efficient but in competition become bad, wide, chaotic and inefficient. This happens in fencing (and other sports) where there are many motor skills, technique is complicated, the motor skills are of the open character, and one has to make very fast decisions.

In the process of acquiring the technique and tactics of fencing one may distinguish three levels, three "thresholds of difficulty":

Acquisition of many, various movements and strokes (fencing stance, lunge, flèche, basic strokes, parries, ripostes, beats, feints etc.);

Application of various strokes and abilities in a training bout with an active opponent;

Application of these strokes and abilities in a competition where arousal, emotions, fears, and sense of responsibility for the result all play an important role.

It is mainly the fencing master who is responsible for the successful achievement of the first level, the first "threshold of difficulty". By using proper methods and forms of training, the coach helps the pupils to learn various elements of fencing technique and tactics. Here, of course, the pupil's motivation and effort are very important too.

The second stage - how to apply in training bouts the strokes learned in the process of training lessons and exercises - depend on the fencer himself, although the fencing master may help by giving advice, pointing out technical and tactical mistakes, etc.

In the last stage, the third level of difficulty - the application of fencing strokes in a competition - the responsibility lies nearly exclusively on the fencers themselves. This is the most important stage, and at the same time a stage in which the fencing master can offer only a little help. A competitor stands face to face with his opponent and tries to win. Only after a bout (or after the entire competition) can a coach analyse the bout, the pupil's good points and errors, successful and unsuccessful tactical solutions, level of specific fitness etc. Results of competition bouts depend nearly exclusively on the pupil's form, technique, tactics, psychological processes motivation and resistance to stress. But, of course, the coach's presence at the strip, his attitude, interest, his remarks before and after the bout are very important.

We must bear in mind that the third stage (fencer's effectiveness in competition) is the most important it is the very essence of competitive fencing. So the fencing master should not be unduly fascinated with a pupil who learns quickly and with ease the various skills of fencing technique (although, of course, this is very important) but has difficulties in successfully applying in competition the strokes acquired in the process of training.

The ability to transfer the skills from training (first stage) to training bouts (second stage), and from training bouts to competitive bouts (third stage) is in a way a measure of the fencer's talent, a base of assessment, and a prognosis of his future achievements. Pupils with such ability ought to be the object of the fencing master's interest, care and work. As I quoted before: "A good coach has his favourite pupils and does not conceal it."

A person is a reflection of his imagination; one is what one thinks one is (*Muhammed Ali*)

One should not take this too literally, but there is a lot of truth in it. Of course, it is not always exactly so, and the number of Napoleons in psychiatric hospitals show it.

A coach in his/her activities must often assess not only his pupils and co-workers, but also his own personality, assets, weak points, knowledge, practical skills, programs of training, standards of lessons, results etc.

Some people, contrary to Muhammed Ali's opinion, think that a person is as others think of him. The truth is that our perception of ourselves is different from other people's opinions of us... also, we

perceive differently other people's views of us. Naturally, we ought to take into consideration other people's opinions, especially those of our fellow coaches, but one should do it with a pinch of salt. The fellow coaches' opinions may be very misleading, especially when, as it often happens, they are tinged with a slight hint of professional jealousy.

One of the leading Polish coaches (Vinnie Bradford, Jason Sheridan and Michael Marx will probably know whom I have in mind) has heard the most fantastic and improbable opinions about himself! According to some of his colleagues he is a diamond smuggler, vindictive and vengeful, a drug user whose arms are covered with pus due to dirty syringes, and has no earthly idea how to teach foil, sabre or épée. In reality the only "smuggling" in which he was involved was bringing to Poland, when under Communist rule, Solzhenitsyn's books - and to the Soviet Union, Ilya Erenburg's "Adventurous life of Lejzorek Rojtszwanitz"; as to his vindictiveness, he very often reproaches himself for stupidly being too nice and helpful to people who wronged him. The poor soul is so sensitive that the mere thought of an injection makes him feel faint! And lastly, judging by the results of his pupils in all weapons at the World Championships and the Olympic Games, he does seem to know something about fencing, which reminds us of one of the previous maxims that "the measure of a coach's quality is the success of his pupils".

Personally, I came to the conclusion that fencers assess a fencing master's value, knowledge and practical abilities better, more precisely and objectively than do fellow coaches. This resembles a little bit the theatre where the critics (and above all the public) appreciate an actor more objectively than fellow actors. In fencing, even quite young children notice and appreciate a coach's work, punctuality, devotion, and teaching skills. I have also noticed that what impresses the pupils most is the fencing master's own fitness, speed of execution, dexterity and all-round fencing skillfulness.

A coach's work begins and finishes at the desk

(*Zbigniew Czajkowski*)

The work of a coach is usually associated with the fencing salle, gym, swimming pool or soccer field. This is the most important, spectacular and practical part of the coach's work; however, practical teaching is preceded by learning, gathering knowledge, programming etc. Every training session, training period, and competition ought to be followed by careful analysis and drawing of conclusions which would facilitate further training.

These remarks show many aspects of a fencing master's job, underlining its creativity, its theoretical and practical aspects. It is very demanding and may offer plenty of satisfaction. Molière's fencing master in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" was not exaggerating when he said:

"In this way, it is evident with what consideration we should be regarded in the State, and how far the science of fencing excels all other useless sciences such as dancing, music"... and "You are scarcely serious when you seek to compare your sciences with mine!"

Athletes first, winning second (*Rainer Martens*)

This is simple to state, but not so simple to implement, yet the successful coach must strive to secure not only his pupils' good results in competitions, but also - and above all - take good care of his pupils' personality, their health, sport enjoyment, self-confidence, self-efficacy, resistance to stress to situations, feeling of independence etc. So - very shortly - one may say that coach's most important tasks are:

To help them to develop physically (good health, energy abilities, co-ordination), psychologically and socially,

To teach technique, tactics and psychomotor capabilities,

To help them to achieve high results in competitions,

Optimum level of achievement motivation and arousal,

To help athletes to secure sport enjoyment.

As Rainer Martens aptly remarks, "there is more to being an athlete than just having motor skills" and "if winning is your first and only goal, you are far less-likely to be a successful coach".

To fulfill these tasks, most suitable is co-operative and friendly style of leadership.

I could hardly finish these remarks better than by quoting George Silver who wrote in 1599 in his famous "Paradoxes of Defence" in his quaint old English: "The exercising of weapons putt away aches, griefs and diseases; it expelleth melancholic, cholericke and evil conceits; it keepeth a man in breath, perfect health and long life".

Russell D. Brown BAF British Academy of Fencing Role of Honour (1974 – 2010)

Russell Brown was a Renaissance man; an accomplished mountaineer, skier both on snow and water, motorcyclist, dancer, actor, high rigger and of course a fencer and theatrical swordsman, a member of the Academy winning world championship team.

I, along with over 350 people including Mrs Jane Simons (née Pye) and Mr Simon Flowerdew, both team mates, and Professor's Roy and Angela Goodall attended the funeral service for Russell, in Hastings on June 14th.

The service was an emotional occasion as you would expect for a man dying so tragically young at 36 years of age, however it was often punctuated with many smiles and laughter at the tributes paid to him by his family and friends.



I first met Russell in a small training room high up in the roof of the Millennium Dome (O2 Arena) in 2000.

The first thing you would notice about Russell was his broad cheeky smile. Every training session, whatever the time of day, whatever the weather or his own personal tiredness or niggling injury, Russell was up for training, his smile beaming out from behind a mask.

Russell was already a man of action when I met him. His role in The Millennium Show in the main arena was to bungee jump 50m from the interior roof whilst wearing 2m high stilts, unclip on landing and then continue on with the show's performance.

When I was invited to put a team together for the Academy's very first entry into the World Artistic Fencing Championships, I knew that not only did I need great fencers but performers too. I immediately looked to my class at the Dome.

Russell was by now an excellent fencer and a brilliant slap-stick performer and with a hand-picked team (see Academy Role of Honour) I started work on choreographing a routine.

I think you know the rest of the story, but there are two memories that have pleasantly stayed in my mind from that very late, hot night in the Opera House in Vichy, France.

The first is of my dear friend Professor Mike Joseph, who sadly passed away on May 29th 2010 after a long illness.

Mike and I, on hearing Great Britain had won the World Title, jumping around in circles like children in our small opera box, shouting our heads off as we hugged each other.

The other is of Russ.

Like most of these events when it came to getting the team onto the stage to collect the trophy and Gold Medal not all of the team were on time. Russell was however, and for a brief moment he was the lone figure standing on the highest podium on the stage with nothing in his hand save for a paint roller we used as a prop (you need to see the routine).

As Mike and I looked up at him from our box, we could see that broad cheeky smile of his slowly break out across his face and in a dramatic raising of the roller, high into the air as if it were Excalibur, the entire auditorium roared into life and cheered, stamping their feet in joyous approval and excitement. It was a magical moment.

Russ was killed while riding his motorcycle to work on May 27th 2010.

Russell Brown was a unique and special man and the world is a sadder place without him.

Our deepest sympathy and love go to Russell's family and friends at this sad time.

*Andy Wilkinson
BAF Committee Theatrical Fencing
Artistic Fencing Team Coach 2000*

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**EXAMINATION
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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	}	
Key Teaching Points Epee		
Key Teaching Points Sabre		
Key Coaching Points Foil	£7.35 (£9.45)
Key Coaching Points Epee		
Key Coaching Points Sabre		
Glossary of Terms.....		£7.35 (£9.45)
Translation of Fencing Terms in Four Languages.....		£7.35 (£9.45)
Teaching/ Coaching Tactics (2nd Edition).....		£16.80 (£21)
CD-Rom Issue 5 – this contains all the syllabuses and current questions for BAF examinations, as well as other examination material.....		£10.00
Examples of past written Papers – for the Advanced and Diploma examinations -		FREE - apply to Course Officer

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COURSES

BAF RESIDENTIAL COURSES 2010

Autumn Course - 25th to 30th October 2010

Fees for the Course

Residential (Single room): £378 (BAF Member) £434 (Non-member) £298 (Performer)

Non-residential £276 (BAF Member) £317 (Non-member) £180 (Performer)

Course to be held at Denstone College, Staffordshire.

Places on this course are in demand, so don't delay!

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

Contact details are on page 3 and further details can be found on our web site.

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 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, Epée and Sabre (levels 1 to 4) to come along. E-mail Andrew via www.sowerbyfencing.com

Hemel Hempstead: We are glad to report that this monthly course has restarted. Normally held on the second Sunday of each month. Venue: Hemel Sports Centre, Park Road, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 1JS. Contact Liam Harrington at harringtonliam@hotmail.com for details.

Cambridgeshire: A new series of weekend coach education courses are planned at Linton Village College, near Cambridge. They will be conducted by Professor Mike Law. Full details can be obtained from Sarah Paveley, Rutherford Lodge, Wixoe, Stoke by Clare, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 8UE. Tel: 01440 785600 or 07837 933603. email: sarah.fencing@jacobiteltd.com

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

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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