

British Academy of Fencing **ACADEMY NEWS**

**May 2014
Issue 75**

"Run by coaches for coaches"



WHERE ARE WE GOING?

**A SPECIAL EDITORIAL BY OUR
PRESIDENT**

Professor Philip Bruce

Like many companies and organisations large or small, there should periodically be a review and I think we are well overdue for taking a good look at ourselves. To not do so, in my opinion, leads to complacency and if you can't change with the changing times etc. then you're not even standing still, you're more likely to be losing ground and slipping backwards.

The primary reason for the existence of our Academy is to both train and qualify fencing coaches. During the last ten years or so we have not only trained and qualified coaches from all over Britain but indeed from all over the world. Despite requests from the membership, we do not deliver training or attempt to train and qualify those who wish to learn about other disciplines (e.g. fitness (strength and conditioning) and psychology etc.) as we believe those subjects are best left to the experts in those disciplines. However times are changing and since the turn of the century times are changing increasingly faster with each passing year.

Our Academy has a particularly well structured and well supported system of training and our system of examination is very transparent. Our current system has been in place for a little over ten years. Though, whilst the questions are revised every couple of years or so, little else changes.

The biggest change in my time however, is the shrinking number of people who are willing to shoulder the hard work of keeping the Academy going. Whether it be apathy or financial constraints, the fact remains that fewer and fewer people are willing to put time into the Academy, or to prioritise Academy events over other personal interests, holidays or commitments. The days of such members as Leon Hill who could always be relied on to be there when needed or Mike Joseph who only missed one or two meetings in a little over 30 years of service, have passed.

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Academy News is edited by Bob Merry, 6 Birkdale Close, Bramhall, Stockport, Cheshire SK7 2LN.

Tel: 0161 440 9613 or 07836 764026. Email: bobmerrybaf@aol.com.

Articles and other material are welcome and should be sent to the Editor

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YOUR COMMITTEE**President:**

Prof. Philip Bruce
190 Ashurst Road
Peel Hall, Manchester M22 5AZ
Tel: 0161 498 6625
Email: pbruce.baf@btinternet.com

Vice-President:

Prof. Peter Northam
28 Dorset Road
Edgbaston, Birmingham B17 8EN
Tel: 0121 429 9717
Email: prof.pnortham.baf@btinternet.com

Vice-President:

Prof. Louisa Miller
84 Avon Street
Warwick, Warwickshire CV34 4PX
Tel: 01926 494 145
Email: louisajmiller@hotmail.com

Secretary:

Prof. Bob Merry
6 Birkdale Close, Bramhall
Stockport, Cheshire SK7 2LN
Tel: 0161 440 9613
email: bobmerrybaf@aol.com

Treasurer:

Stuart Clough
1 Yew Tree Cottages
Brown Street
Old Newton, Stowmarket IP14 4QB
Tel: 07886 708392
Email: baf@stuartclough.co.uk

Assistant Secretary and Course Officer:

Provost Dave Jerry
Orchard Rise, Churchtown
Belton, Doncaster DN9 1PE
Tel: 01427 874109
email: david.jerry@free.newsurf.net

Members' Representative:

John Worsley
8 Mosedale Close
Astley
Manchester M29 7JW
Tel: 01942 888 935
Email: worsleyja@aol.com

Proficiency Awards Administrator:

Maitre Donald Walker
4 The Aviaries
Castle Howard
York YO60 7BU
email: maitredcwalker@aol.com

Additional Committee Appointments:**Chairman, SSTT:**

Prof. Tom Etchells
24 Honeysuckle Drive
Stalybridge
Cheshire SK15 2PS
0161 330 3262
email: T_ETCHELLS@sky.com

International Secretary:

Prof. Philip Bruce

Child Protection Officer, Welfare Officer:

Prof. Louisa Miller

Chairman, Disciplinary Sub-Committee

Prof. Peter Northam

Editor - Academy News, Insurance, Examination Results Coordinator:

Prof. Bob Merry

Membership Secretary:

Stuart Clough

Film & Theatre Representative:

Andy Wilkinson
The Cottage, The Common
Kinsbourne Green
Harpenden, Herts. AL5 3NT
Tel: 01582 713052
email: andywilkinsonbaf@hotmail.com

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Company No. 8540066
A Company registered in England and Wales
Registered Office:
190 Ashurst Road
Peel Hall
Manchester M22 5AZ

THE PRESIDENT WRITES.....



Denstone March 2014

First of all, may I congratulate all those who achieved success in the recent examinations. Whilst I sympathise with those who chose not to take an examination, I applaud their courage in coming to that decision. I would like, on behalf of both the staff and the Committee, to offer my congratulations to Isobel for a job well done in her capacity as Course Director

Sadly, there were a number of candidates who came to our course having done little or no preparation, though I do understand that not everyone can easily access the necessary training. What worried me more was the evidence of a distinct lack of knowledge of the basic (FIE) rules governing the weapons. What is worse, this lack of knowledge was not limited to the lower levels and I found a woeful ignorance of the rules even at the Advanced and Diploma levels.

Whilst I would be the first to accept that not all candidates can put in the necessary practice prior to the course, there is no excuse for candidates coming to the course with little or no knowledge of fencing theory and or the basic rules governing each of the weapons. So I urge all candidates to at least come prepared having ready the fencing theory (key teaching/coaching points etc.) and the FIE rules for the weapon in which you are training. If you don't then you will find the course more difficult than it should be and you're letting down those you are current teaching/coaching.

I would like once again to thank the examiners who gave up their time to examine candidates on Saturday. They did a fantastic job as usual, despite the challenge of a more noisy than usual environment. Owing to the unavailability of the Sports Hall on the day, we were forced to allow candidates to warm up in the drill hall while exams were going on. This made things somewhat more difficult for examiners although many candidates commented on how much less intimidating the resulting setup was, so perhaps it was a blessing in disguise.

BAF Course in Scotland – Strathallen – Cancelled!

In late December I was approached (by email) with a proposal by Prof. Phil Carson to host a residential coach education course in Scotland. Needless to say I was delighted with the initiative and offered Phil the backing of the Academy. At our February committee meeting, we agreed to support the course to the value of £1000.

Coincidentally, in early January I received an email from Alan Martin (the newly appointed National Development Officer for Scottish Fencing), who expressed a wish to work together in terms of developing coaches in Scotland. During further email exchanges it was clear to me that he very much wanted the Academy's support and that there was a genuine desire to see a residential coach education in Scotland.

Needless to say I put Phil in touch with Alan and everything seemed on track for the Scotland to host a course staffed by Scottish masters at Strathallen School. Sadly, at the beginning of April, I received an email from Phil informing me that the course had been cancelled - the implication being that he did not have the support of Scottish Fencing.

Since becoming President of the Academy I have tried, and failed, on a number of occasions to stage a residential course in Scotland. Over the years I have received a number of emails from Scottish based fencers all with the common thread that coach education in Scotland is anything but healthy.

This time I really thought we were going to succeed. However there are those who continue to conspire against the development of our sport, preferring instead to score points in accordance with their own agenda. To quote one eminent fencing coach "Fencing happens in this country despite the efforts of the National Governing Body". Let's not forget that fencing is such a small community with a finite amount of funding available. Isn't it time we all started working together for the greater good of the sport? To do otherwise is insane.

Philip Bruce

DEN OF VICE

Contributions from the Academy's two Vice-Presidents



I am a BAF member through and through and have been for over 40 years. I am aware that what I say, what I do and how I behave, reflects not only on me but also on the Academy, whether I like it or not!

I am proud to be a member and count as my friends the best coaches this country has produced. I am on speaking terms with all of them and will always help and support where I can. That's why, when an Academy member contacts me by phone or email, I get back, usually on the same day.

Without being too pushy, I will promote and advance the standing and reputation of the Academy whenever I can. I will do this without denigrating the 'amateur coach'; after all, I was one once. An important role of the Academy is to help and support the 'amateur coach' when they ask, and we should resist forming a 'them and us' relationship. I have had quite a few very interesting conversations with coaches at competitions, introducing myself as Peter Northam, not Prof Northam.

I am continually amazed at how much I learn from coaches at all levels of experience and qualification; by their turn of phrase, blade actions or control of pupil. I know a lot, have done much but I still have an open mind. I can see how my coaching has developed and it has developed by experience and many mistakes! It takes a long time to train and become a Fencing Master, but this is only a basic qualification. It's the next twenty to thirty years that puts meat on the bone.

They say that to travel is better than to arrive. Coaching, particularly full time, is a journey. My advice to you all is to listen, watch, compare, reflect often, but most of all, maintain a good relationship with your fellow passengers.

Prof P Northam (still training), British Academy of Fencing

In the previous edition of Academy News, I wrote about the importance of preparing for coaching examinations. Preparation for examination success is only part of the bigger picture of coach education involving the life-long development of coaching skills and techniques. You never stop learning. With this in mind it is worth considering how you will embed and enhance these skills.



One of the most obvious ways is to work with a coaching partner, someone who is working at a similar level to you and is ideally coaching in the same club as you. However, I realise that this is often not practical, as many of our members coach alone in more remote locations or in those areas with very few fencing clubs. Unless we live in and around the London area, where some fencing clubs are open up to 4 or 5 times a week, most coaches spend many hours a week travelling to their clubs and classes.

Although this is a challenging situation, it should not become a barrier to your development as a coach. There are a range of options available, such as the weekend and one-day coach education sessions which are hosted near enough on a monthly basis. As well as providing a day of training with coach educators on hand to guide you through and offer help and advice, these courses also enable you to make contacts and network with other coaches. This can lead to you visiting their club and making local arrangements to get together and train.

Give and receive as many lessons as possible. Regardless of your ability and your pupils you should get into the habit of working with a range of abilities, styles and characters. The quality of your lessons will undoubtedly improve if you open yourself up to a variety of experiences because from this will come new challenges and problems, which require solutions through practical application.

Make time for yourself on a club night, even if for 10 minutes, to try out something new or to work on a skill that you have been meaning to focus on. This could be carried out with your coaching partner either by giving the lesson to them or asking them to watch you as you give the lesson to a pupil. The benefit of having a coaching partner is that they know what you are trying to achieve and they are someone who is committed to developing their skills.

Coaching is a practical business, so get in the business of being practical.

Louisa Miller

PROFESSOR MIKE LAW

May 17, 1940 (Wellington, New Zealand) – December 8, 2013 (Torrevieja, Spain)

Academy News reported the death of Professor Mike Law in our previous issue, together with a tribute from Professor David Austin. Since then, we have received further tributes from his son, Dr Chris M Law, and a former pupil, Sarah Paveley.



From Dr Chris M Law

Above all else, my father taught us the pursuit of excellence, and the value of contribution.

It wasn't like him to dabble. Instead, he had the ability to choose to become an expert, and then follow through with the necessary work ethic. At his funeral, we displayed the naval red ensign, symbolic of his love for the sea. He was a highly qualified sailor and sailing instructor, as well as an expert naval model maker. There were many other sports and leisure activities in which he chose to excel, but in his working life he defined himself as a Fencing Master.

He understood that many would come to fencing classes just to dabble or to get some fun exercise, and that was okay by him. But, he could also see who might be a winner, and he would take the time and effort to nurture that. He wouldn't stop, and he wouldn't let you stop, until you had it right. He would push his fencers through exercises again, and again, and again, after which he would take his mask off and, with a big smile, shake your hand and say "See, you *could* do it, couldn't you?"

What I and many others learned from him we applied on the piste, but more importantly in our daily lives. Doing it right, doing it well, doing it with enthusiasm and passion. I look at my fencing trophy cabinet now, and I don't see what I did; I see what he gave me. The greatest lesson I took from him is that your contribution to others is what really defines you.

In his later years, arthritis made it difficult for him to hold a weapon, but he continued to contribute his time and effort by coaching coaches. He passed on his skills, expertise and passion to new and experienced coaches and convinced Sarah (who writes below) that coaching was the way to continue his legacy.

In his contribution as a loving husband, father, grandfather and friend, he was striving to excel here too. His funeral in the south of Spain was attended by family and hundreds of friends dressed in bright colours. He chose not to wear a suit, but to wear his BAF jersey.

His spiritual belief was that there was life after life. If there is a heaven, then he has already started to teach fencing again. I was proud to pick up the sword laid on his coffin, and give my father, Professor Mike Law, a final salute in thanks for all he has given us in this life.

Memories of Mike Law from Sarah Paveley (née Kellett)

"To Sir, with love!" that's cheesy enough to make Mike grin but I think he'd understand. He didn't take me from "crayons to perfume" but he did take me from french grip to pistol though he didn't really approve of the latter. He gave me fencing and he gave me his love and friendship; for all three I will always be grateful.

I was 9 years old when I first met Mike; he'd said it was OK to come fencing if I was tall and I joined Stevenage 72. Horrified by my slippers with blue bunnies, he recommended green flash shoes. I didn't realise it, but Mike was studying for his BAF exams. When he got his Provost award my father explained that it was important but I wondered what all the fuss was about. When he got his professorship, he was elated but I still didn't "get it" – I took him and his skills for granted. Only when he encouraged me to coach did I have an inkling of what he went through. Bert Bracewell remembers his work ethic and wishes that we had another 200 like him.

Mike was frustrated by my initial inability to give openings for any move whatsoever. I can still see him looking at me with a disappointed expression as he said "didn't you listen or notice anything I said or did?" This wasn't quite fair and later on, he was

nearer the truth when he said sadly “I’ve made you into a machine!” and the fencer’s brain he had so carefully set about building had to be dismantled, straightened (I see a bowl of spaghetti here) and then re-stirred into a coach’s format. I was an instinctive not a thoughtful fencer, something I disguised (or thought I did) until coaching undid me. You can’t “wing” it when you’re coaching. Well, you can but you wouldn’t make Mike Law proud!

My relationship with Mike wasn’t all about fencing although that was what brought us together, it went far deeper than that, he was a mentor, guide and a loving friend, for all the years I knew him. He was quiet, solid, dependable and always there. He loved me unconditionally and gave me his faith and support in many ways that I didn’t see or appreciate until long afterwards. He had a knack of being able to pick an activity, exercise or even topic of conversation that brought you to where you needed to be and yet at the outset it would seem totally unconnected. An example would be a lesson where you go horribly wrong at the beginning, he’d change tack completely and then at the end, he’d ask you to go back to the original and you would do it perfectly! It was the same in the ways he helped in my life. When my sister died and things were desperately difficult, he asked me if I’d help him with some coaching. He used coaching as the metaphor for restoring and helping me – he and Jean sent me a glass ornament with the words “the world is your oyster” and I knew what they meant.

He always called me “kid”. I always called him “Mr Law” (not Sir.) and didn’t stop until he commanded it about 25 years later. He had a brilliant smile and used it at the end of lessons “there you are, kid!” he’d say as he shook my hand! Or as my mother and I both remember, “do you know what this kid has done?” when I was third in the eastern region U14 at age 11. He took me everywhere to competitions, to clubs in the evening, to training camps etc., smoking his awful roll-ups through fog and snowstorm.

His mantra was “fencing is timing, technique and distance” – I’m afraid I only fully appreciated this concept as a coach. He chortled over an old memory when I last saw him although he was clearly ill and unable to walk far. It was at a competition in the 70s, I was losing and for weeks he’d been telling me to “go backwards” or at least, all I heard was “go backwards”. I couldn’t understand it, why would I go backwards? A young man came up to me, long hair, flared tracksuit and he said, “You know, kid, you need to ‘groove more!’” I got back on the piste and I grooved or rather I went backwards and I played with distance. I won my next fights. When Mike asked me what the advice had been and I answered “Groove more” he couldn’t get over it, never got over it! It was one of our favourite examples of how, in coaching, you have to try all sorts of ways to get an idea over to your pupils.

And some ideas Mike regretted, like teaching me broken time! And yet in me he did create a reluctant purist for I think of him whenever I’m coaching whether it’s with a wry guilty smile as I pick up my pistol grip (an “abomination”) or a sly one when I make my beginners use French! Or when I say, as I’m known to say every week, “that’s the cry of the lesser spotted fencer!” just as Mike used to say to me. Teaching my favourite class of adult beginners, I let my inner fencing geek out and whose words and phrases appear? “Timing, technique and distance – that’s fencing” – I did listen after-all Mike!

“If you love something let it go” At 14, I wanted to fence in London at Salle Paul with the new coach Ziemowit. My parents agreed to support it but with the proviso that I discussed my plans with Mike, which I was reluctant to do. Mike did what I realise now was completely predictable, he listened, he said “Good on you, kid” and asked me to tell him about it. I continued having lessons from Mike until I left home for University and then he dropped out of fencing for a while but we never lost touch. He was at my BAF exams, my club, All For One, for master-class sessions, my wedding, my 40th birthday, alas he was in Spain for my 50th, but there in spirit as he always will be. Mike was always my coach, I had lessons from Ziemowit and Tomek and they are wonderful coaches who helped me develop as a fencer, building on what Mike had given me but I am proud to say I was coached by Professor Mike Law for over 40 years and I and fencing will miss him.

Thank you Mr Law!

WHERE ARE WE GOING? ...from Page 1

There used to be an unspoken tradition that when you received your Diploma, you also received an obligation to pay off your debt to your teachers and the Academy by giving your time to training and supporting the next generation. For many, this no longer seems to be the case, save in the most superficial manner.

Without sitting in judgement over this, the fact remains that the Academy has always relied on people who are willing to put its needs very high on their list of personal priorities. There are fewer and fewer people doing this and we have to ask whether an organisation like the Academy can really survive on the spare time people have between work, social events and holidays.

The alternative would be to have a paid staff – but then how would this be paid for, other than by drastically raising membership fees, which no one wants?

My major concern regarding the Academy is what happens in the short term. Specifically where are the next generation of fencing masters going to come from, where are the next generation of senior Academy officials going to come from? And the list goes on.

We need to take a long hard look at ourselves and if necessary make changes which in the very short term may not be very popular but in the longer term will make the Academy stronger. If you have any ideas, then please approach any member of our Committee and make your view known. Even better, if you are willing to put some time into implementing ideas, it might make all the difference.

WE NEED THE ABILITY TO CHANGE

By Scott McMenemy

"To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often"

Sir Winston Churchill

In light of recent requests from the BAF committee for more contribution to Academy News from "rank and file" members, I thought I would take some time to give account of my recent attendance at a junior épée World Cup, my first international outing as an accompanying personal coach to a GB team member.

Having very recently been asked to take over the training of a GB junior women's épée (WE) squad fencer, I was well aware of the task in front of me. Already being coach to a male GB junior épéeist has allowed me to spend a considerable amount of time in fencing halls across the UK, observing the repertoire and skill set of our youth fencers. However, when I was requested to attend a recent junior WE World Cup in Mödling, Austria, I knew that it would be an excellent opportunity to see first-hand how our youth teams are dealing with and fairing against their international opponents.

My own experience as a GB Cadet team member can be summed up with one anecdote:

On my very first World Cup, I entered a fencing hall in Pisa, Italy, with my team mates, only to be confronted with the finals' piste adorned with the eventual winner's prize, a brand new cream and teal coloured Vespa moped. Fully appreciating the luggage restrictions of our return flights, we quickly understood the confidence of our Italian hosts.



More than a decade later, the dominance of our international counterparts is stronger than ever.

Having had almost no "sword-in hand" time with my new fencer prior to departing for Austria, I was under no illusions that my task at this competition would be to analyse my fencer and formulate an entire physical, technical, tactical and psychological profile of her and of the fencers she would be facing at this competition and in the future. At the same time I would need to offer a warm-up and piste-side coaching that would assist in maximising the outcome of the day for my fencer. It is by no means an understatement that a British fencer who can

dominate in domestic competition is not guaranteed the same success at an international event, as the opponents are very often far better drilled and decidedly more experienced and so the day offered a veritable treasure trove of insight on the differences between GB fencers and those of other nations.

On entering the venue, the first face I saw was that of our friend and colleague, Prof. Franco Ceruti (Switzerland). One of the many benefits to being a member of the BAF and continually participating in the many coaching courses run by the academy, is having the opportunity to meet and learn from our colleagues from around the world.

I was primed to be sure that nothing on the day of the competition should be left to chance, ensuring that the fencer could focus on themselves and their preparation and performance. I took several minutes to identify the layout of the venue, as the pistes were split over two halls, the smaller of which was situated across the street! It was then time to warm-up my fencer. Having made sure my fencer was mentally and physically ready for the poule, I took some time to observe the "warm up routines" of the many nationalities of fencers in the hall.

The first and most striking thing was the easily identifiable and impressive national "uniforms" of the Russian, Italian, French and Polish teams, a stark contrast to the almost non-existent and dull branding of the GB team (a point well made by Prof Philip Bruce on his summer coaching course). I cannot stress how psychologically imposing a bright and clear national uniform is on one's opponents, not to mention the ability of competitors and officials to easily identify individuals.

Whilst some nations' coaches gave warm-up lessons, others did not. Those that did, it was simple actions, affording the fencer the opportunity to affirm distance and timing, whilst offering success in correctly executed actions, building confidence going into the initial round of the competition. By no means was there any "coaching" in these warm up lessons, but well-practiced and perfected actions.

Very few of the foreign fencers appeared to be undertaking any form of personal physical warm beyond simple cardiovascular priming e.g. jogging. One got the impression that it served more intent for wearing off nervous energy



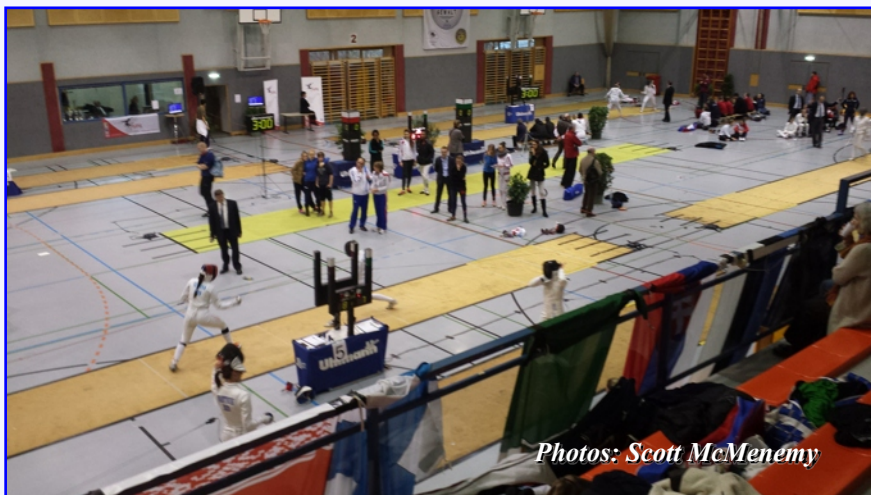
than anything else, a far cry from the side-stepping, sprinting, windmill arm athletics events I have witnessed at the start of every UK domestic competition.

The poules were efficiently presented on an array of well-located TV screens around the venue, allowing everyone easily to identify their seeding and piste. This contributed to a very efficient "two wave" poule system over 12 pistes. With each nation bringing at least one qualified referee, the competition ran like clockwork.

It became apparent during the poules that British fencers have a high rate of success for taking an early lead in the

majority of fights. I would attribute this, based on my observations, to the high level of mental arousal in British fencers compared to foreign counterparts who appear far more relaxed and contemplative, indeed almost exploratory in the initial minute of a poule fight. Ultimately, and I speak generally, any 2 or 3 hit lead held by a British fencer was lost devastatingly, often with no further points to the British fencer, by virtue of the tactical change which the foreign fencers would adopt. This highlights, in my mind, a better tactical appreciation of the fight than that instilled in British fencers in general. I give, as an example, a fight between a British and a French fencer. The French fencer was approximately 6 feet and 2 inches tall and fencing with a French grip.

It came as no surprise that the French fencer relied on her height in order to deliver long, but not particularly fast, direct attacks en flèche. The British fencer took advantage of this fact (observed earlier in the poule) and was able to draw and parry this attack on a small step back, delivering the riposte either direct or by disengage. After being hit with 3 consecutive ripostes at the British on guard line (and with some significant vocal input from the French coach), the French fencer immediately stopped attacking, showing no worry in waiting at the French end of the piste for the opportunity to attack the British fencer on preparation with a direct attack en flèche. The British fencer, now apoplectic at leading the fight, appeared happy to oblige in pursuing into French territory. The French fencer was able to recognise that the Brit was unable to deal with the same attack delivered in a different place in the fencing phrase, after being drawn to a different area of the piste. Extremely successful, but, as I am sure you will agree, supremely simple.



Photos: Scott McMenemy

As one can therefore imagine, this lack of tactical appreciation or understanding in the British fencers led to a predictable defeat in the initial rounds of direct elimination, resulting in no British fencer progressing out of the last 64. All too recognisable frustration set in when the British fencers were unable to use their speed or power to drive home unchanging and predictable attacks or defence. The ability of the foreign fencers to not only change once but continually change their tactical approach during bouts led me to the conclusion that we have much to change in the way many British fencers are trained. However not to be the harbinger of doom, we have, within the Academy's senior masters, a wealth of understanding and experience that, if "tapped into", can offer enlightenment in the process of training true tactical and technical understanding for success.

So, as the quote at the head of my article alludes to, the ability to change would be an improvement, and further, if we could train our fencers to keep changing, that would be perfect. This ability to understand, use and change tactics to manipulate and defeat our opponents would ultimately remedy the all too familiar situation of one medal wonders that we currently rely on as our source of success. Whilst I agree that fitness (although I consider this to be a prerequisite) and technical ability are important, it is, in my opinion, an appreciation of tactical fencing e.g. placing an action in a different area of the fencing phrase, or on a different place on the piste, or fencing differently in the last 3 minutes compared to the first 3, that will ultimately raise our game to a higher level.

WORSLEY'S WORDS

Musings from your Members' Rep.



As I sit down to write my article for the Academy News, I have just returned from another Denstone residential course. I would like to congratulate those candidates who passed their coaching exams at the end of what was an intensive week of training. For those that weren't so fortunate with their results, I offer my commiserations and some words of advice. Don't give up! Keep going! Yes it can be demoralising when all the hard work and effort you put in seems to count for nothing and despite all the blood sweat and tears, the end result is failure not success. But that's all part of the learning process, it's only by trying and failing and trying again that we improve. It's all too easy to get caught up in seeing the goal as passing an exam and getting a bit of paper that tells us how good we

are; not the acquisition of new skills, or the development or improvement of existing ones. After all, what is the reason for attending a coach education course if not to improve our ability to coach, to find different ways of doing the same thing, to explore new ideas for lessons, to further our knowledge and understanding of the sport? Surely the experiences we go through on the Denstone courses are similar to the experiences of our fencers at competitions? Try hard and win or try hard and lose. I'd like to leave you with a couple of quotations that might be helpful in describing the sort of mental attitude required in order to be successful in both learning any new skills or in applying those skills in real world practice.

"Ever tried, ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail Better!" – *Samuel Beckett (Novelist and Playwright)*

"I may win and I may lose, but I will never be defeated." – *Emmitt Smith (Running Back for the Dallas Cowboys)*

On the subject of the residential courses, it was mentioned that several of the candidates on the course had applied at the last minute. Although this can cause more than a few headaches for the course officer whilst trying to organise everything, my concern is whether these people are really doing themselves justice? After all, the earlier you apply to go on the course the sooner you get the questions that you will have to answer and the sooner you get all the other course information you need. And for those of you who are looking to take examinations you can't have the questions soon enough. I would recommend that anyone who wants to attend a residential course like Denstone gets their application in early; do it as soon as you can. I know there will always be doubts about getting the time off work, of being able to organise it around holidays, or the cost of the course. That's all the more reason to pick one of the courses and to get your application in. You pay your deposit, get your questions and then have time to get the money together and plenty of time to book the days off work, which means less chance of being refused the days off. More importantly, it will give you a lot of time to look at the questions and get help at one of the coach education Sunday clubs that are advertised in the back of the Academy News and on the BAF website. The more prepared you are, the more you will get from the course. Even if you are not interested in taking coaching exams, you will be able to focus on the raw skills of coaching, rather than trying to learn answers to the questions.

For anyone interested there are two books that probably worth having a look at. They are:

The Talent cCode by Daniel Coyle ISBN 978-1-8479-4510-5

Bounce by Matthew Syed ISBN 978-0-00-735054-4

Both these books reinforce the importance and power of preparation and practice in the process of learning new skills in both the sporting and academic arenas. You may find that they not only influence the way you prepare for coaching courses or competitions, but they may influence the way you conduct your fencing lessons. (*The Talent Code* has been reviewed in the May 2010 edition of the Academy News by Prof. Phil Carson. Past editions of Academy News are available from the BAF web site)

John Worsley, Members' Representative

COURSE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

by Prof. Isobel Bruce Combes



Like, possibly, all candidates who have been on Denstone courses, I have at times thought about what I might like to change if I were the Course Director. I came up with lots of brilliant ideas, but oddly enough, when I found myself being asked to actually step up and take on that role, they were nowhere to be seen!

As everyone involved agrees, it is very important that each Course Director make the course their own and stamp their own approach on it but it is hard to do so when we already have such an effective and well respected formula. However, any formula can go stale if it keeps being presented in the same way year after year. I would say that for me the hardest part of the course was the months of thought that went into creating a new timetable which kept the same material but presented it with a different approach.

I have long felt that an increasing difficulty of the course is the fact that more and more candidates are arriving without having done any effective preparation. This is not always their fault – there are simply not enough fencing masters running training in between courses for everyone to have access to the help they need. I therefore worked hard to see where I could prune any dead time out of the timetable and maximise the amount of time candidates would be on their feet learning the material.



In recent years, the timetable has been moving steadily closer to a subject rather than question oriented formula and I accelerated that by asking that questions be practised in the context of the subject being taught rather than numerically. We blitzed the material over the first three days and even managed to eradicate most of the 'stand about reading the question' time wasting, by having the tutors reading out the questions and making the candidates run with them. It was exhausting for the tutors but so effective that, by Friday, most candidates had all the work in hand and were able to spend the day with final polishing up.

Traditionally, coaches work in pairs at Denstone and alternate the roles of coach and pupil. However, at Advanced and Diploma level, the relentless pace of the course often results in coaches who are simply too physically tired to play the role of a pupil receiving a competitive lesson. I therefore invited some fencers from my own club, who have experience of competing at the top levels within their age groups, to attend in the evenings so that those who wished to had the opportunity to work with a fresh and energetic pupil. This seemed to be much appreciated and I thank the pupils for giving their time for this, especially William Gallimore-Tallen, who also attended on Saturday to act as stooge for two candidates at Advanced and at Diploma level.



Photos: Isobel Combes

The slightly unintended consequence of all the hard work was that some of the candidates made such tremendous progress in ability and confidence that we found them now feeling ready to try the exams despite having arrived on the course with no intention of doing so. Sadly, for some, that proved a step too far, but I hope they were encouraged by how close many of them came to going home with an unexpected pass!

One of the most important jobs of the Course Director is to keep the staff happy so they can give of their best – I hope I succeeded by plying them with cocktails every night and champagne at the end. It must have worked because they all did a fantastic job and achieved some outright miracles on the course. I am very grateful to them all for their support and for letting me have a go at

the job after all these years. Still wondering where all those brilliant ideas went though . . .

EXAMINATION SUCCESS

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

Advanced Foil

Laura Delany
Stefan Leponis

Level 3 Foil

Tamia John

Level 3 Epée

Gerad Harmer
Laura Jamieson

Level 3 Sabre

Anne Stewart
Cindy Rudin (Part Pass - Individual)

Level 2 Foil

Gavin Rudge (Part Pass - Individual)

Level 1 Foil

Claire Edgson
Tamia John

We send our congratulations to all these successful candidates and wish them well in their future coaching.

MORE USEFUL BITS.....**BAF RESIDENTIAL COURSE****Autumn Course - 27th October to 1st November 2014****Course to be held at Denstone College, Staffordshire.****Fees: £430 (members) £499 (non-members)****Contact Dave Jerry, the Course Officer for full details.****Contact details are on page 3 and further details can be found on our web site.****Sharpening the Edge****Prof. Philip Bruce***Coaching the Competitive Fencer from Junior Competitions
to World Championships*

Presented by Four of Clubs in Association with the British Academy of Fencing

**14/15 June 2014****10:30 am – 4:30 pm Saturday and 10:30 am – 4:30 pm Sunday****Sir Stanley Matthews Spots Centre
Leek Road
Stoke on Trent
ST4 2DF**

On this latest instalment in our series of competitive coaching sessions, Prof. Philip Bruce will be considering the problem of taking a competitive fencer to a successful level as quickly as possible despite the realities of fencing in the UK with the limited amount of coach/pupil training time that is usually available.

This course will help you to improve your/your pupil's:

Footwork and speed of action.

Attention span and concentration.

Ability to dominate a bout.

Ability to cope with mental demands of a fight – such as breaks, unexpected actions and erratic opponents.

Understanding of opponent's actions.

Use of tactical actions in a fight.

**For details of Prices and Booking
contact**

Prof Isobel Bruce Combes

190 Ashurst Road

Peel Hall, Manchester M22 5AZ

Tel: 0161 498 6625

e-mail: iacombes@btinternet.com**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.