British Academy of Fencing

ACADEMY NEWS

September 2016 Issue 87

"Run by coaches for coaches"



FENCING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The gallant efforts of the GB Men's Foil Team at the Olympics in Rio have given our sport an enormous boost. Whilst most of those reading this will have sought out the various extra BBC channels and other sources of streaming on the internet, in order to follow the fencing, millions were able to watch Richard Kruse coming within two hits of a medal on the BBC's main coverage and, later in the games, the progress of the Foil Team in their event was also given prominent coverage. This was followed, the following day, by further extensive reporting on the sports pages of the national newspapers; The Times, for



example, devoted half of their back page to a photograph of Richard in action.

The Foil Team also acquitted themselves well, in spite of a narrow defeat in the quarter-finals, again by just two points. Overall, this has been the best British performance at the Olympics for 52 years and James-Andrew Davis, Laurence Halstead, Richard Kruse and Marcus Mepstead can feel proud of how they have generated so much interest in our sport, as can all those who have been involved in coaching and supporting them to reach this standard. As our President notes in his column on page four, particular mention should be made of Ziemowit Wojciechowski (Ziemek), who has coached Richard all his fencing life.

Judging by emails that have been received, this has already resulted in an upsurge in interest in the sport. To quote one, "I'm 15 and recently decided that I'd like to try fencing after watching Richard Kruse at the Olympics on TV... Billy". And yes, Billy is already fencing.

It is now up to the clubs and their coaches to foster this interest and help our sport to grow and produce the next generation of champions. And this applies to coaches of every level. Whilst most of our top fencers move on to a select band of elite coaches, they all had to start somewhere. It is often the coach they encountered at school, or in their first club, who inspired them to continue in the sport and to strive for success.

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NEXT ISSUE: November 2016

Contributions by October 10th, please.



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

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A5 Study Guides:

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A3 Sized Wallcharts:

65p (75p) each

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DOCUMENTATION

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

Key Teaching Points Foil

Key Teaching Points Epée

Key Teaching Points Sabre

Key Coaching Points Foil

Key Coaching Points Epée

Key Coaching Points Sabre

Glossary of Terms (including Translation of Fencing Terms).....£7.35 (£9.45) Employment Guidelines.....£7.35 (£9.45)

Teaching/ Coaching Tactics (2nd Edition).....£16.80 (£21)

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British Academy of Fencing

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THE PRESIDENT WRITES.....



At a time when there seems to be so much to worry about when it comes to fencing in this country – competitions folding through lack of support, old faces and once great clubs vanishing and numbers of referees declining – it is fantastic for once to be able to sit down to write about something as positive and refreshing as our GB fencing team's performance in the Olympics.

It would have been great to see our fencers in Rio come away with a medal but that disappointment should not take away from the superb performance they all put in. Our GB fencers stood up against the best in the world in a way that was an absolute credit to themselves and their coaches. I'm sure everyone in the BAF will want to join in offering them our heartfelt congratulations for making GB look like a credible force in world fencing again. On a personal level, I was very pleased to see Ziemek Wojciechowski in the coaches' box. After so many years of hard work, he deserved to be there to see it coming to fruition.

It is common, and easy, for performers to overlook the contribution coaches make to their success and far too few give their coach the credit and loyalty they deserve. In that context, one cannot help but notice what has been going on with the Italian foil team. In 2012, with Stefano Cerioni as their coach, they carried all before them with blistering results all round. Shortly after that, Cerioni was refused the recognition and pay rise he felt he deserved and, as a result, there was a parting of the ways. Cerioni went off to Russia, and in 2016 he is back with the Russian team and . . . well the Russian foil results speak for themselves, with foil being pretty much a disaster for the Italians. Perhaps Cerioni was more of an asset than the Italians realised.

I am, of course, biased, but I believe countries should cherish and hold on to the coaches who bring them results. Fencer loyalty too, has always been a big part of success. I am not saying that a fencer's coaching needs do not change over time. Sometimes moving on to a new coach is a wise step, but 'shopping around' for a new coach every time results dip, or, worse, being told by your Federation that you must have a particular coach in order to be selected, is, in my opinion, a quick route to failure. A heart-warming example of getting it right is Kat Holmes (USA WE), who attended with her team coach but had the coach who taught her to fence and the coach who oversaw her early competitive career in the audience, also cheering her along. I strongly believe the emotional bond between fencers and their coaches is too much overlooked. Hence, my pleasure that Ziemek was there when Kruse went on the piste. As most of you will know, he has coached Richard Kruse since Richard was 7 years old and the mutual loyalty and hard work together must have been well rewarded by seeing him come so close to a medal.

I understand that Adam Blight has organised a coaching course led by Ziemek which will take place shortly and I hope plenty of BAF members will be supporting that. Unfortunately it conflicts with one of my club events but I hope it goes well and that Ziemek has plenty of insights to offer!

As I work full time and coach every evening, I haven't had time to see all the Olympic coverage. However, from what I have seen, I am struck by how much of it is basic technical fencing. Since 2012, we have been under a lot of pressure to include material to address all the fads that showed up then, in particular the 'Korean' approach. We decided to stand firm on our material and for that I am glad, because as with so many fads, that one has passed. It was striking how conventional so much of the foil and épée was – lots of ripostes, counter ripostes and renewals. It should encourage all our coaches that the hard technical work is worth it! We saw, in these Olympics, technical fencing, timing, tactical application and applied footwork at the highest level, based on a rigorous foundation of detailed training.

This brings me to the other end of the scale, which is grassroots and beginner fencing. It is all too often overlooked, with children and beginner fencers traditionally, in this country, being the preserve of the beginner coach. However, the great fencing nations can do what they do because of the extensive foundation of well trained young people ready to form the next generation. It is perhaps something we do not do well enough in this country.

In response to that, and to many requests over the years, the BAF will be holding a course on Grassroots and Club coaching, with a view to working on some ideas about effective club development and coaching. We will also be offering a Level 1 coaching course and qualification in tandem with this. I hope all our members will consider supporting this and take a look in their own clubs for potential new coaches to be a part of this. We all have a duty to help to develop the next generation and I ask as many members as possible to participate and to support Prof. Andrew Norris and Lewis McIntyre who are taking on the organisation of this event. People like them are the future of the Academy and I trust they will have your full support.

Philip Bruce

DEN OF VICE

Contributions from the Academy's two Vice-Presidents



A few years ago, back when I was still a novice coach, an occasional pupil of mine, we'll call her Alice, asked for a lesson on low line parries. Alice said that she kept getting hit by low-line attacks at foil, and that although she knew how to do Octave and Septime parries, she didn't seem to be able to use them effectively when actually fencing.

Alice was still a beginner at that stage, she had been fencing less than a year, and so my first thought was to check that she could actually execute low line parries. I made her do a few, and it turned out she could. Alice's technique was at least good enough to be able to beat the people she normally fenced. So what was the problem?

Next I put us both on our respective On-Guard lines. I told Alice that on the command play I would advance and perform a low line attack. Her task would be take an Octave parry, then riposte and hit me.

That was the theory anyway. What actually happened was that my attack hit, and Alice had barely started to perform her parry by the time my attack finished.

I asked Alice if that was what happened when she was fencing. She agreed it was. When put under any kind of competitive pressure Alice's ability to parry vanished for all practical purposes.

Knowing what the problem was made the rest of the lesson fairly straight forward, even for a novice coach. We took the difficulty level of the exercise back down to something Alice could cope with, then gradually increased it, improving as we went. Eventually we were back to where we started: on our On-Guard lines with me attempting to hit Alice with low-line attacks. By the end of the lesson however Alice was able to parry them effectively. Her ability to parry when under pressure had improved. She went away from the lesson with far more confidence in herself.

Why does this lesson, out of all the lessons I've given over the years, stick in my mind? It wasn't because Alice was a particularly favoured pupil of mine. She only had lessons from me occasionally.

I think this was because it was one of the first times that I had put a pupil's actions under competitive pressure as a way of improving their ability. Nowadays with many more years of experience behind me doing something like that seems obvious, but back then it was a bit of revelation.

At some point fencers need to practice their actions under realistic conditions. Either in controlled training bouts, or in competitive/adversarial lessons with their coach. The trick is to do it well, so that the pupil maintains a high success rate, but is constantly pushing themselves. That takes a degree of skill from the coach, and is just one of the things the BAF teach on our courses

Liam Harrington, Vice President



The FIE have made great in-roads over the last few years with online streaming of World Cup events, which has been fantastic for die-hard fencing fans like me. The Olympics, though, is a unique window when fencing (along with many other smaller sports) becomes as important to the general public as any of the big sporting players. During opportunities like this we need to communicate the sport well to convert viewers' interest into participation.

Listening to the BBC commentary, I'm struck by how often the pundits feel the need to explain fencing basics to the viewers, particularly the apparent intricacies of right-of-way. Is our sport really that complicated? Does this, for want of a better phrase, "dumbing down" make the experience better for the viewer? Personally I don't think so. I'm not trying to slam the fencing commentators; I think many of us are guilty of this way of talking about fencing to the uninitiated.

The drama of a tactical battle between closely matched athletes or teams, and the human aspect of sport are the things that hold people's attention. Kruse's bronze medal bout against Safin had both these things in abundance. To spend more than a few seconds describing the rules is a wasted opportunity when there is so much else to talk about.

Fencing becomes much more exciting when you know who is behind the mask and something about their journey. Empathising with an athlete makes you feel more invested in their success or failure. You might be motivated enough to follow that person's future progress... or try and emulate their success!

We should use our expertise to help others get more out of the fencing itself. Help them understand what is going on, but at the same time make the tactics used by these elite athletes sound accessible. People are more likely to get involved in something they feel they might actually be able to do. But don't shy away from fencing terminology! Nobody likes to feel they are being patronised.

I encourage all of you to find out about the athletes' back stories and get your understanding of tactics and technique up to scratch, so you can talk confidently about world class fencing. In short, be the most effective ambassador you can possibly be.

Andrew Norris, Vice President

SWORDSMEN OF THE SILVER SCREEN

By Andy Wilkinson

Dear Friends, how are we all doing?

Sir Bob Merry, (I say it as it should be) called me up the other day and said, "Andy, while you're waiting for Hollywood to discover you (30 years and still counting – AW), why don't you pen something for me? It will also keep you off the streets and annoying people"...So, Bob is the one to blame for this.

So, I sat down with my laptop wondering what would I bore you with this month.

I am often asked what it is I actually do, and I say I wait around a lot. I mean a lot! Here I am in August and I've had a project in Hollywood since May, waiting on a green light. I started this project in January, 2015. I optioned it in September of that year and I am still waiting. Why? Well as the Oscar winning screenwriter, William Goldman said...

"The trouble with Hollywood is that no one wants to make a movie there"

This got me thinking. How hard would it be to get a true, full body Swashbuckler made, in the sequel rich, Super Hero mindset that is awash in Hollywood today?

I believe the answer is a very complicated one, which would involve looking behind the scenes at the 'Backroom' of a studio set up, the accountants and producers - all very dull.

So I thought of looking back over five decades of films to see if there was an answer, starting with the 1930s and ending in the 1970s. As a producer, I found it all very interesting, so I thought I would share my findings with you.

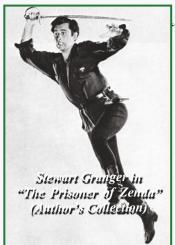
1930s

The main film genre in the 1930s was, of course, the Gangster picture, starring more often than not, James Cagney, closely followed by the MGM Musicals with Fred Astaire, and the Screw-Ball comedies of Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn.

The 1930s is of course the decade that saw the Wall Street Crash hit hardest, the Depression looming and the rise of fascist Germany and Hitler, so Hollywood's output during that decade was understandable.

The audiences were telling the Studios to – "Take me away from the real world" therefore, Gangster films fit that bill, and " make me laugh, damn you!", hence the Screw-Ball comedies.





However, there were, for me, three outstanding swordplay films which came out of Hollywood in the 1930s. "Captain Blood" (1935), "The Prisoner of Zenda" (1937), and The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex" (1939).

So, the Swashbuckler was alive and well in the 1930s. Even I might have been able to produce one back then.

1940s

Obviously, World War II dominated this decade. 1944 saw Laurence Olivier's "Henry V" come to the screen. A spectacular telling of Shakespeare's classic, but without question a film produced, directed and starring Olivier to boost morale in England's darkest hour.

Looking back, I am surprised that any Swashbuckler was produced at all during the 1940s, but then again, why not? People still needed heroes, perhaps more so back then than ever before!

So, the best of Hollywood raised the game and produced two of my favourite swordplay films. The first "The Mark of Zorro" (1940) has in it one of the very best Sabre duels I have ever seen. To this day, I can say, with my hand over my heart, a duel that has yet to be bested

on screen. If you want pure fun and joyful swordplay, then we have "The Sea Hawk" 1940.

The film that won best film in 1948 was "Hamlet" with Olivier again. Although not technically a Swashbuckler, there is a good fight scene.

Yes, the swashbuckler was still holding its own. Maybe I could have done something. Getting tricky though.

1950s

After the horrors of World War II, it was time in Hollywood for the Biblical Epics. Now we would need to look to these films to find a swordfight or two. The stories had moved away from individuals with swords carrying the day, as the writers in Hollywood had moved on to bigger themes, in films such as "The Robe" (1953), "The Ten Commandments" (1956), and "Ben Hur" (1959).

There is an element of stage fighting that is not swordplay and that is "Unarmed Combat". Fisticuffs! It would be amiss of me not to mention one of the best, if not *the* best, fist fight in film history. "Shane" (1953) is brutal, brilliantly choreographed and filmed. I tell all my unarmed students to watch this film if they can.

Hollywood, after the restrictions of the 1940s was exploring itself. There was an eclectic mix of releases in this decade, and I can see the writing is on the wall for the Swashbuckler, as we knew it. Could I have got a green light and produced a Swashbuckler in the 1950s? Only Kirk Douglas produced a film close to what we would call a Swashbuckler, "The Vikings" (1958). This film has a score that is a real ear worm, once heard never forgotten and of course one classic scene – the axes thrown against a castle gate, then scaled by the attacking Vikings! But not a swashbuckler, not really.

I would have loved the chance to direct the 2nd Unit on many of these epics, but produce a swashbuckler, no.

1960s

In this decade we see the birth of the Westerns, Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll, not forgetting Bond, James Bond too. This decade in Hollywood has often been referred as the, 'Me, Myself and I', era. This includes, Writers, Directors, Producers and Actors.

Eastwood was shooting them up as the 'Man with no Name', Wayne was wearing an eye patch and winning his only Oscar as Rooster Cogburn (my hero). "Dr No" was introducing Sean Connery as Bond and there was an awful lot of sex. No further comment on that, as I am not qualified to do so!

Once again you will need to look into the depths of films to find any swordplay, usually those where Yakima Canutt was working as 2nd Unit director. He would have his two sons, Tap and Joe beat hell of each other with broadswords, as in "El Cid" (1961), or race in the "Ben Hur" (1959/1960) chariot race.

You could find swordplay in films such as "Far From the Madding Crowd" (1967), where Terence Stamp and Julie Christie have a memorable scene together with a drawn sword.

I fear the writing is on the wall for our beloved Swashbuckler, and it says "Exit this way"...

1970s

A Long Time Ago, In a Galaxy Far Far Away....

The end of my search for the fall of the Swashbuckler ends and begins here, in the 1970s, and in my humble opinion, the best decade for film making, period.

The 1970s were a turning point in Hollywood. The mega stars of today, directors, producers and actors, cut their teeth in Hollywood at this time. For better or worse and I could go on and on, page after page about this (No Andy, please don't, I have a life, no more)...Okay. If you want to know more, read 'Easy Rider, Raging Bulls' by Peter Biskind.

Although "Star Wars" (1977) was not a swashbuckler, at its heart is the Lightsabre. Obi Wan Kenobi says of the Lightsabre, "An elegant weapon for a more civilized age"... Don't get me started on all this martial art nonsense they have got going on with the fights now, but our own Professor Bob Anderson, held the flame high for the swashbuckler to continue in Hollywood. For, if you didn't know, Bob was Darth Vader for he fight scenes and sword master on the first three films, under the stunt coordinator Peter Diamond. Bob's work was the reason I first got into fencing! I wanted to be a stuntman and I needed fencing as one of my skills. I had the great privilege to thank Bob, personally, at the Warwick Castle performance of 'Diamond Swords' in 2009.

Mark Hamill and Bob Anderson in rehearsal for "The Empire Strikes Back" Copyright Lucas Films (Author's Collection)

In conclusion, I feel the Swashbuckler is not dead, but hibernating, wrapped in the warmth of other films. It has become a tool for a writer to help define a character. If they fence, it tells the audience who they are in deed rather than words.

Does the decade in which a film is made matter now? I don't think it does. The cinema has huge problems, ticket prices, noise, food, mobiles to name a few and film makers have a choice of how they release their products today. Digitally, DVD, streaming and onto different platforms, phone, iPad, television; the distribution of films and TV has changed. Hollywood still remains all things to all people and the swashbuckler may have gone the way of the Galleon, sailing off over the sun kissed horizon to destinations and adventures unknown.

I can say this, however. It lives and thrives within me. I have a little swashbuckler in me still. I hope you do too!

LETTERS FROM LEWIS

Correspondence from your Members' Rep.



It's the Summer holidays (or the back end at least) and most of us will have seen a few quiet weeks whilst their pupils and coaches disappear to various places. In the time I've not been fencing, I've been thinking about why I do fence. With the extensive Olympic coverage a lot of my work colleagues have seen the fencing and been asking me how and why I got into it. "I've never met a fencer before" remarked at least one, which is at least a little bit disappointing.

We've all found our way into this sport in a whole host of different ways (mine was seeing a flyer at age 14 on a local youth centre promising that I could *actually* hit people with swords, real bits of metal, *and* get away with it), and there'll be a whole load more why we continue to support it. Can I ask that when you read the following you give some serious thought to writing in to contribute to Academy News (either anonymously or named): What got you started and what keeps that fire going, through the highs of success, and more importantly through the lows of defeat? It's important that we keep that with us.

At the time of writing the Olympics are all but concluded. Richard Kruse was painfully close to achieving a medal, and whilst it was disappointing that he didn't, it was inspiring that a British fencer succeeded through to such a late stage of the competition. The Men's Team didn't do half bad either, just missing out to Russia for another medal match. I would have liked to have seen more British female fencers in this highest tier. For a few days it seemed the entire country was talking about our sport. If you still haven't seen any of the Men's Foil (or your preferred event) then shame on you, the quality of fencing is fantastic.

From the quarter finals onwards, across all events, the bouts are well worth watching (even already knowing the outcomes); there is some spectacular fencing. The fencing that was displayed will define many people's understanding and practice of the sport for at least the next year. While I'm no fencing master, I reckon it will likely be useful to your pupils if you can act on the changes to the meta-game as they attend competitions this coming season. I'm expecting to see a lot of referees unable to see or unwilling to call attacks on preparation...

If you didn't manage to catch the events at the time, they're available on BBC iPlayer until 1 month after, and I hope the FIE will post the videos to their channel on YouTube so it's possible to view them after that.

As I mentioned earlier, it'd be great to have emails or letters to me or Bob about why you fence, why you coach, and how you keep that spirit alive.

On a completely separate note, please provide nominations for our various awards (when you inevitably write in). I don't believe for a minute that there are no coaches in the Academy who are deserving of our recognition and praise.

Lewis McIntyre, Members' Representative

Editor's reply:

Well, Lewis, since you have left at bit of space at the end of your page, I will set the ball rolling by telling how I came into fencing.

At school, I was not a great fan of sport, being rather small (the third smallest of over 400 at one time!), weedy and very short-sighted (I still am, but have swapped spectacles for contact lenses). Team sports, like rugby and football, were not my thing. If I was ever picked for the house team at rugby (usually when half the pupils were down with flu), the only positions I played in were second row of the scrum, with my head stuck firmly between the backsides of the front row, or on the wing. The latter was basically a "suicide" mission, since, if I caught the small, blurry, brown blob (the ball) as it came towards me, I knew it wasn't going back and I had to run. I'd then be confronted by a larger, blurry, brown blob (the opposing full back, chosen for his size) and would then end up heading for an even bigger, blurry, brown blob (a very muddy field). Not my idea of fun, three or four times a week.

When I joined the RAF, as an Apprentice on a three year course, I was soon informed that I would have to partake in a sport every Tuesday afternoon. I asked, "What if I can't pick one?". "We send you cross-country running." It was January and the hills were covered in snow, so I asked if they could suggest something warm and indoors. "You could try fencing" came the reply, so I did. It was a revelation to me. A sport where I could see, wearing my glasses under the mask! A sport where people weren't shouting at me for dropping the ball! I enjoyed it and began to get better. After a while, I not only attended the compulsory Tuesday sessions, but also went along to the fencing salle on a Friday evening, where I was able to take lessons from Professor John Sanders, for the princely sum of sixpence (2½p in new money). His lessons really increased my enjoyment of the sport. My weapon of choice became épée, although I was given a rapid introduction to sabre, when one of our team found himself on a charge and got "jankers". I had to fill his place in the station team in the Apprentice and Boy Entrants Championships. A quick lesson on the Friday night and the next day I won a bronze medal! After that, I would represent the station at either épée or sabre (sometimes both) in team matches in the local league.

Plan A had been to tolerate sport for the three years as an apprentice and then go back to my normal lazy, non sport playing self. That fell by the wayside, as I continued to fence at other RAF stations and local clubs. Then came coaching and here I am, over 58 years later, still enjoying the sport of fencing and will continue to do so, until the Grim Reaper puts his name down for a lesson.

Well, that's my story - who's next?

BLIND FAITH

By Bob Merry

Some years ago, I received a phone call from a woman wanting to take up fencing. Nothing unusual about that, of course, except that she went on to say that she was blind. She had gone blind in her thirties and now had changed from a mild-mannered housewife into someone who wanted to have a go at as many things as possible, especially ones that other people might say were actually impossible. At the time I was an Intermediate (Level 3) coach and might have baulked at the challenges this might present. However, I had a personal reason for wanting to give it a go; my mother had been blind since her twenties and, as a result, had been virtually housebound for many years. Then she had been deemed suitable for having a guide dog, which gave her a whole new independence. She joined a local sports and social club, which catered for all abilities, and learnt some new sports, such as bowls and archery. She later went on to win medals in archery at the Stoke Mandeville Games, the forerunner of the Paralympics. So, knowing what a difference sport had made to my mother's enjoyment of life, I agreed to take on my new pupil.

I was really glad I did, as I learnt so much from the experience; for example, the importance of posture and balance in maintaining a straight line when moving and lunging, and the use of other senses in the absence of sight, particularly touch ("sentiment de fer" or "feeling the blade"). We couldn't offer her much in the way of competition, although we did arrange bouts against other club fencers, who were blindfolded (a full jury of referee and judges was always used for safety reasons). Instead, our target was the joint AFA/BAF proficiency awards. Although I could examine these myself, I decided that we would use an independent assessor and Prof. Leon Hill was kind enough to help out in this respect. She eventually gained Bronze and Silver Awards. The award scheme at that time allowed assessors to adjust the requirements to cope with any disabilities, but the only concession we made was to omit the flèche.

This experience led me to realise the importance of "sentiment de fer" and the use of lessons where the pupil performs actions with their eyes closed. If you haven't tried this before, I would recommend adding it to your repertoire of coaching skills. Let us take, as an example, a lesson on indirect ripostes, suitable for foil and épée. An opponent (or coach) attacks and the fencer (pupil) parries. The opponent expects a direct riposte and instinctively covers against this, so the fencer hits with an indirect riposte. In order to know which riposte to choose and to time it correctly, the fencer should use "sentiment de fer" to gauge the opponent's reaction to being parried. Let us start with the example of the fencer parrying quarte and the opponent covering to close his quarte line; the riposte chosen by the fencer in this case could be a disengage to hit in the high line over the opponent's sword arm. After the parry, the fencer should maintain a light contact with the opponent's blade, using it as a virtual "aerial" to connect to the opponent's mind, so that the fencer can feel the moment the opponent starts to cover. To be effective, this contact should be light; this is fencing, not arm wrestling, after all.

Of course, the opponent may not cover to quarte, but may choose to return to sixte. Now the fencer does not feel the pressure of the blade covering to quarte, but, instead, their blade being released as the opponent starts to go around the blade and into sixte. The riposte of choice here could be a counter-disengage. The coach's job is to coach the pupil into recognising the different feel of the two actions and this is where the closed-eyes exercise helps to develop "sentiment de fer". The coach could start with doing the actions separately, eyes open, concentrating on the light opposition at the end of the parry and asking the pupil to feel the coach's covering action. Then the coach would alternate the two covering actions and their respective ripostes. The pupil knows which action to expect and can concentrate on the difference in feel of the two actions. The coach now asks for the pupil to close the eyes. The pupil will parry on a cue from the coach; for example, the coach says "now!" as the attack starts (this may need practising with the eyes open, to establish the timing). The alternate lines of cover and the ripostes are repeated until the coach is happy, when the pupil is told that the two actions will be changed at random and they must choose. This can be quite stressful for a fencer coming to this type of lesson for the first time, so the coach should be fulsome in their praise for every correct choice and good hit. This exercise will also highlight faults in the delivery in the hit, such as a tendency to "punch" from the shoulder, rather than extending the arm smoothly. There may also be some disorientation, so the coach may need to allow the pupil to open their eyes occasionally to be sure of where the coach actually is.

This type of lesson can be extended into other areas. My blind fencer relied a lot on her sense of touch (and also, at times, her hearing, attacking the spot where she had heard her opponent's reply, when the referee asked "Are you ready?"). Many of her attacks were made by finding her opponent's blade with an engagement and using the reaction to choose her attack. Incidentally, she usually won these "blindfold" fights, even against quite experienced fencers. Many of us use a lesson which stems from a step and engage preparation, followed by a choice of actions. Why not try adapting this into a closed-eyes lesson? Once the pupil has to move and lunge, many technical problems with balance and posture will become apparent and give you something to work on.

I said earlier that we omitted the flèche from the proficiency awards, deeming it unsafe for someone with limited experience. However, in later years, one of my young pupils, who later went on to become an international épéeist, came to me and confessed to being a bit unsure of committing himself in a flèche attack. We worked on it for a while, before I set him the challenge of doing a beat attack to arm, en flèche, with his eyes closed. He rose to the challenge, completing many flat out attacks in this manner, and the flèche became a strong part of his repertoire. I believe the lesson here is that we should not be afraid to experiment with the unconventional approach in our lessons. Also, if you are offered the chance to coach someone with particular problems, jump at it. You will learn as much as, if not more than, your pupil.

BRIEFS

More ideas from our members shared for all of you to consider. You may or may not agree with them, but all ideas are welcome, so why not share a few of your own.

Firstly, one for those whose club caters mainly for social fencers.

Many youngsters and social fencers come to the club mainly to fence and not necessarily to learn. Start the evening with "fencing for fun", rather than the traditional footwork session, but encourage the fencers to concentrate on trying to some part of their fencing better.

Putting a footwork session a bit later in the evening can also allow you to "catch" the late comer, who might be trying to avoid it. Here are few ideas to make your footwork session a bit different. They include some challenges, that children in particular often find to be fun.

These are distance control exercises, with pupils working in pairs:

The fencers come on guard with a mask supported between them by putting the open hands against the sides (they do NOT hold the mask with the fingers!). One person is designated as the "leader" and the other the "follower". As the "leader" moves, the other fencer follows, maintaining sufficient pressure to prevent the mask falling. If it does fall, it is, of course, the fault of the "follower". The "leader" should start slowly and build up the pace and changes of size and direction as the skill level improves.

The same exercise can be done, at a greater distance, by using a foil held against the palms of the open hands. Masks and gloves should be worn for this exercise.

Another distance exercise could be done using a length of cord, held by the two fencers. This should be kept reasonably taut, as the leader moves. You can attach a light object, such as a pen or pencil on a length of string, from the centre of the cord, which must not touch the ground (or else it is the "follower's fault!)

An alternative to the cord is an item, which used to be commercially available from Sports Coach UK. It does not appear to be available from that source, but could easily be replicated by your club's 'handyman' (see photo below). It consists of two lengths of material, formed into clip-on belts at one end and with Velcro attachments at the other. The overall length is adjustable, so that the fencers can be placed at an appropriate distance for their size and weapon. Again, some form of "droop detector" can be hung from the centre, but now, if the fencers get too far away, the Velcro bond will break.





Send your ideas for this series to the Editor (see page 3 for contact details). Remember, items can be exercises, coaching tips, motivational sayings, or anything that you would like to pass on to your fellow coaches. If you've got something helpful, don't keep it to yourself!

Letters

Dear Editor

It is now two issues of the Academy News that Philip Bruce has had a dig at UK domestic referees. I am not going to defend the referees and their remarks that Philip Bruce mentioned, but to try and balance the book a little and put the referees' side of the story.

Firstly, were the referees that Philip quoted British Fencing qualified? We do have shortage of qualified referees. Qualified referees would have sat a written exam, answering questions on fencing, rules and refereeing. There are 20 general questions plus 10 per weapon. British Fencing recommend that you should attend a referee course, which is normally a day long and at the end of which there is a written exam. To qualify you must also pass a practical assessment, which is at a competition. Refereeing courses would cover all the points that Philip has mentioned.

Issue 85 mentioned that a referee stated you cannot hit your opponent when they have passed you. I had the same told to me by a coach at this year's EYC. I gave a hit to a defender who hit their opponent in the back after they passed. Immediately I had the coach on my back saying "but they were past"; my reply, "totally correct, suggest you read your rule book".

I would agree that coaches are no longer the guardian of the rules; some are the complete opposite, ignoring the rules to suit their needs. Examples include coaching off piste, warning fencers when they get close to their back line and intimidating referees. Many coaches earn their living from fencing and it seems some are desperate to get results. This shows by their attitude, body language and actual language at piste side. This does not send out a good message to young fencers or to their parents. What has happen to sportsmanship?

In issue 86, Philip quoted some referees saying you should be looking at the feet for right of way. He refers to t.56 which is correct but it is not always that simple. See t.56.2.c, in foil with a step lunge/flèche attack the straightening of the arm must proceed the end of the step forward, ie before the rear foot lands. So it is also important to watch the feet as well, as many attacks are with step lunges. This rule does not apply to sabre.

Philip also talks about run and jab fencers. My experience is they do have some success in the early rounds, but the better fencers generally prevail and they are not always big and strong as suggested.

Why has foil fencing changed so much over the decades? I have three thoughts: 1) the flick hit, which has changed what is a threat, 2) not giving your blade to the opponent when attacking, so holding the arm back, and 3) box timing changes have meant the remise could time out the riposte. These are not just restricted to UK fencing but are very clear in international fencing.

Should a coach get involved when they disagree with a referee? The easy answer is no; a decision made by the referee on timing is not subject to appeal, see t.122.1 and 2. The coach tends to be at the end of the piste and the referee in the middle. Viewing actions from different positions can mean different interpretation. If the referee breaks the rules, then it is subject to appeal to the DT. With young inexperienced fencers, the coach could make that appeal on their behalf. Refereeing by committee (issue 85) would be one example. I have come across this once and immediately intervened and put a stop to it without the help of DT.

Referees are easy targets being the person in the middle. Fencers, coaches and touch line parents like to blame the referee. My coach when I was young was Steve Boston, who said there are two other people on the piste and you must fence to both. If the referee cannot see what you are doing and is giving it against you, stop doing it. Good fencers should be able to adapt their game to meet differing situations and different referees.

With all this flack coming at the referee, why does anyone do it? Giving up your weekends, up early in the morning, nearly always one of the last to leave. It's not for money, you are lucky if you get more than your expenses paid. A fencer has six bouts in a poule of seven, but the referee has twenty-one with very little break between each. Nearly two hours of concentration. Most competitions are short of referees, so they work you hard. Over a long competition, a referee may have forty to fifty bouts to adjudicate. So why do it? I can only speak for myself and I love it, regardless of the moans and groans. Meeting up with old and new friends, many are coaches who I have good relationships with. My main reason is that I am giving back to the sport I love.

We have also had some of our young referees accepted by FIE to referee at European youth age group events. One has been put forward to take his level "B" foil FIE exam in December. So, as with all things in life, we have good, average and not so good. Same as with fencers and coaches. The challenge is how do we make our referees better? When you qualify this is only the start.

Where can you practise? Well of course, there is your club, but you want to fence. There might not be anyone to help you with refereeing, unlike actual fencing where you will have the club coach. So competitions are where you end up practising and possibly getting yourself into trouble. Maybe, after a bad experience at an event, you say, "why should I bother?", and we lose another referee. Fencers need competition experience and so do referees but we are not so forgiving with our referees.

I could ramble on a lot more on this subject but will close by saying that yes, there are challenges within our sport, but there are also many good things, such as just the amount of people now fencing, compared to when I first started. The larger the base the higher we can build. The base must be sound, but that is up to all of us to have a positive attitude working hard in all disciplines of fencing to make it so.

Mike Ellis

56 years in fencing, BAF Coach since early 90s, 3 weapons. Referee for 20 + years, average of 25 events per year, 3 weapons, 10 open finals plus many others. Eastern Region Chair.

(Thank you, Mike, for your interesting letter. Academy News particularly welcomes feedback from our members and discussion of topics of interest. Editor)

MORE USEFUL BITS......

BAF RESIDENTIAL COURSE

Autumn Course

24th October to 29th October 2016

Course to be held at Denstone College, Staffordshire.

Fees: £440 (members) £492 (non-members)

Please contact our Course Officer, Dave Jerry, for more information

Contact details on page 3

Coaching From the Ground Up

New Approaches to Grassroots and Club Coaching

Following from the requests of the membership at the most recent AGM, we are running a 2-day Coaching Course on 17-18th September.

The course will be in Warrington and will focus on grassroots coaching and proven ways of running a successful fencing club, with emphasis on practical, sword in hand skills. This course is suitable for coaches at all levels and all participants should bring full fencing or coaching kit.

This course will include:

- Using BAF curriculum as a class and lesson planning resource.
- Developing pupils' ability to work constructively together.
- Motivation and goal setting.
- Using the proficiency awards.
- Maximising coaching efficiency.
- Developing and building on strong technical skills

A BAF Level One coach education course and Level One assessments will be held on Sunday Afternoon.

For more information please contact

Lewis McIntyre (Members' Rep) at LewisMcIntyre365@gmail.com

OR Prof. Andrew Norris (Vice President) at Andrew@Southampton-Epee.co.uk