


"Run by Coaches for Coaches"

AGM 2020 : Bob Gets Life



Prof. Bob Merry is presented with Life Membership of the British Academy of Fencing for all the hard work that he has put in to the Academy, as Secretary, and Editor of the Newsletter.

Academy News
Feb. 2020 : Issue 103

The logo of the British Academy of Fencing is a red shield with a silver sword in the center. The shield is flanked by two yellow circular emblems. Below the shield is a yellow banner with the text "BRITISH ACADEMY OF FENCING" and the dates "1940" and "1949".

Donald Receives Award of Merit



Maitre Donald Walker receives an Award of Merit for his services to the Academy in tirelessly administrating the Proficiency Awards system.

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

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Welcome to the Academy News

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The President 's Piece.....

Welcome to this issue of Academy News, the only publication that is meant for coaches, with news about coaching and advertising coaching courses! Thank you to all the contributors for this issue!

The Annual General Meeting was a lively affair, with much discussion around insurance, which the Committee was tasked to look at again. Your Team for this year is, myself, Prof Andy Vincent (Vice President), Prof Bob Merry (Vice President), Maitre Jackie Redikin (Secretary and Course Officer), Sally Peat (Assistant Secretary), Maitre John Worsley (Treasurer), Maitre Stefan Leonis (Members Rep), & Kevin Nelson (Editor Academy News).

Awards given out this year, the BIG ONE, Life Membership to Prof. Bob Merry, for all his years of work as a professional coach, delivering fencing and producing excellent fencers: for the years of work that he gave for the furtherance of the Academy, by being Secretary and Editor of the Academy News for many years, and the training and examination of Academy coaches. The Award of Merit to Maitre Donald Walker for his sterling work administering the Academy's Award Scheme. The following coaching awards were also presented: Maitre David Browning , Diploma Epee; Maitre Tony Middleton, Diploma Epee (accepted by Prof Liam Harrington) and Sally Peat, Level Three Epee, well done to all of them.

Two quite interesting events took place at the AGM, first at the end of the meeting, Prof David Austin, very generously offered all his accumulated fencing equipment (steam and electrics plus boxes) to anyone who could use them, plus it came with a free car (with tax and MOT)! David has done a great deal for the Academy, as a loyal and dedicated member, and more importantly as a former President of the Academy, thank you David.

Secondly, there was a CPD (Continuous Professional Development) session run by Prof Lewis McInley on Injuries to Fencers. This was a well-prepared session, well researched and very relevant. It was enjoyed by everyone and it may be that it becomes a regular feature at the AGM.

I would encourage all members to attend the AGM next year, find out what is going on, ask questions and meet your colleagues. Making contact, forming friendships, comparing work experiences and getting to know who is who, is what it's all about! I want to dispel the idea that all Masters are unapproachable, arrogant and aloof! They are willing to talk, share information and help coaches climb the coaching ladder. Just ask!

The BAF flagship course at Denstone in the summer is coming up, see the website for information and an application form. Last year was very successful, if you want a whole week of nothing but coaching, experimenting with strokes, footwork, tactics etc, plus a good laugh, think about going.

I wish you all much success in your coaching this year, you only get out what you put in; if you're lucky!

Prof Peter Northam, President, British Academy of Fencing



Formatting!

By Nick Chapman

I have, during the last few issues of the Academy News, written about games, or more exactly training opportunities that have the appearance of a game. Over the next few issues I want to change the emphasis a little. Arguably, I will be proposing the same 'playful approach' to a more competitive type of game.

I remember a time when I was young (oh yes, I have a long memory!) and attended lots of local (and some not so local) fencing competitions, and as I remember they were all a little bit different. Yes they all involved stabbing a succession of opponents whilst trying not to be stabbed, or at least if you were stabbed trying to persuade the President (that's referee to you younger readers) that their stab didn't count. Whilst all were fencing, many had different ways of being run. Whilst initially this was a little confusing I knew no different so got on with it. In time I came to understand that these different systems of organising the fights were called 'the Format'. By the second or third year of doing the rounds I was starting to know the events by how they were run. Events had a different atmosphere when run in a different way, each format represented a different approach to the sport and emphasised or rewarded a slightly different aspect of the sporting endeavour.

Enough reminiscing, that is not how things are now. More and more I perceive a homogenisation of formats. International events have become 'one round of pools, 20% cut, DE' therefore this, or an approximation of this, has become the domestic norm. The world of fencing seems to have decided that's how the FIE do it so that must be the right way to do it. There is clearly a residual understanding that it's not a very rewarding system from the point of view of mass participation or participant retention therefore many events run 'one round of pools, no cut, DE' as this makes it *'friendlier'*. Yes there are the outliers, for example the Shropshire Open who still run two rounds of pools before DE, and the excellent Crystal Open (teams of three, one at each weapon and at least one man and one woman in each team, marvellous fun), however, generally we seem to have lost the imagination that used to go into finding interesting and varied ways of determining who wins and what place everyone else gets assigned. I believe that this has been going on sufficiently long that people have forgotten what it is possible to achieve by varying the format, and are, when setting up an event, no longer asking the question 'what are we hoping to achieve with this event?', we have reached the stage of 'well that's how it's always been done', well firstly it's not, and secondly it shouldn't be, after all, in the words of Grace Murray Hopper (U.S. Navy Rear Admiral) 'The most dangerous phrase in the language is 'we've always done it that way'.

It is my intention to suggest some alternative formats. Each of which is a logical and valid way of determining winner and positions, each of which provides a different experience, emphasises a different aspect, serves a different approach to promoting participation. These formats could be used to run local competitions, however they could also be used to give structure to an evening's training, they could be used as the sparing part of a day's training. They offer variety which stimulates interest and fosters hope, hope that if it's done that way I might do better, this in turn promotes continued participation. In modern marketing speak I will suggest formats that each poses a 'USP', a unique selling point.

In the words of Henry Ford, 'If you always do what you have always done, you'll always get what you always got' **so let's try doing things differently and see if we can increase grass roots fencing, promote inclusive social participation, vary training and have a load of fun along the way.** Put your thinking caps on between now and the next issue and see if you can remember or come up with some interesting alternative format's.



Sally's Snippets

I've been tasked with introducing myself as I start my new role as Assistant Secretary for the British Academy of Fencing.

Some may already have met me through the years but for those who haven't, I live in Derbyshire and coach at a small club, 3 Blades, literally 5 minutes away from Denstone. I am the epee coach there and run a separate epee evening, where I focus my efforts on the development of 3 cadets. All fence at national competitions, and include a pentathlete, and an international fencer. I also run sessions in local schools, which I love; it is hard work but so rewarding.

I came to fencing relatively late in life and as soon as I picked up a weapon, I knew it was for me. I coach because I love it! I love the practice, the discipline, the hard work involved, the technical elements and I have the belief it takes to get a fencers from A to B. I work hard and I am highly motivated and enthusiastic about my sport. I have a positive approach and high expectations of myself and of my fencers; they are my priority.

I recognise that I am in the early stages of my coaching career and can see how much hard work and dedication is required to get to where I want to be. I really appreciate all the help I have received from the tutors at the BAF, who in my opinion, are amazing! A friend of mine once said he respected anyone who picked up a sword and I couldn't agree more. I would add to that, I have even greater respect for anyone willing to try and help others improve and reach their goals.

I'd like to end my 'snippet' (a lot of effort was involved in the alliteration of the title of this article, as Stefan had taken 'speaks') by saying if you see me, please introduce yourself. Thank you for the opportunity be a part of something so positive.

Committee Contribution

The committee met at the end of January to discuss the AGM, and the coming year, it was good to welcome a new member onto the committee.

- There were eight actions taken from the 2020 AGM, these actions were assigned to members, and reports will be made at the next AGM.
- The committee discussed financial support for members wishing to run courses, and agreed to look at them on a case by case basis. With support being offered towards venue costs.
- Examine & recommend updates to the articles of the Academy at the next AGM.



Glenn Cooper

8/03/1957 - 14/09/2019



Glenn came to fencing 'late in life', as he didn't start until he was in his thirties. He had always fancied trying it out, but didn't know where there were any clubs.

He started with Mike Winterburn at Guiseley Leisure Centre around 1994 whilst his son, Peter, learnt football skills in the next sports hall. When Mike was forced to retire (due to being employed by the Council), there was no-one else to take over and the club closed so Glenn had to find somewhere else to fence.

He fenced at Batley Sports and Tennis Centre for a few years and then joined the Royal Armouries Fencing Club. He coached at both at various times.

He had kidney transplant in March 2004, and decided to have a go at learning to be a coach. He went to Denstone for first time in April 2006 and gained his Level 1 Foil Coach award, followed by Level 2 the following year. He attended at least 4 Easter courses, but didn't always manage to gain an award.

He helped run taster sessions at the BAF Diamond Swords event at Warwick Castle in 2009... and gave his BAF baseball cap away to Prof Bob Anderson. He said he'd always be able to boast that Darth Vader stole his hat!

His fencing qualifications included gaining Level 3 Foil in April 2010, Level 1 Sabre in November 2012 and Level 2 Sabre in November 2013.

When Glenn took early retirement from a post as a Legal Adviser at Leeds Magistrates Court in November 2011 he took over some additional coaching roles – worked at Ackworth and Queen Ethelburga's schools for a while until health problems stopped him driving.

He joined Leeds Fencing Club in 2009 and worked with Tim Noble and myself in developing the beginners. He attended many Yorkshire events in support of our junior fencers. He had also been coaching regularly at the Royal Armouries.

Glenn was a regular attendee at BAF AGMs and dinners with his wife Ann from 2007 to 2019.

Whilst Glenn had many health issues his death was a great shock as he was coaching at Leeds Fencing Club just few days before. He will be sorely missed.

Maitre John Crouch



Safeguarding & Prevention

By Maitre Jacqueline Redikin

I found this online and thought it may be useful to us all who coach as it sums up the principles of safeguarding.

For more information about the below please see the site below

<https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/six-principles-adult-safeguarding/>

Six Principles of Adult Safeguarding

Learn the principles set out by The Care Act that underpin the safeguarding of adults.

The Care Act sets out the following principles that should underpin the safeguarding of adults.

Empowerment

People are supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.

"I am asked what I want as the outcomes from the safeguarding process and this directly inform what happens."

Prevention

It is better to take action before harm occurs.

"I receive clear and simple information about what abuse is. I know how to recognise the signs, and I know what I can do to seek help."

Proportionality

The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.

"I am sure that the professionals will work in my interest and they will only get involved as much as is necessary."

Protection

Support and representation for those in greatest need.

"I get help and support to report abuse and neglect. I get help so that I am able to take part in the safeguarding process to the extent to which I want."

Partnership

Services offer local solutions through working closely with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.

"I know that staff treat any personal and sensitive information in confidence, only sharing what is helpful and necessary. I am confident that professionals will work together and with me to get the best result for me."

Accountability

Accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding.

"I understand the role of everyone involved in my life and so do they."

Should you require help or information on safeguarding then please contact Jacqueline Redikin

E-mail courseofficer@baf-fencing.com

Should you need to report a Safeguarding issue then use the procedures of the organisation that you are working for. Then contact British Fencing, either through your club welfare officer, regional welfare officer, or directly.....

Equality and Safeguarding Manager, Liz Behnke for advice on 077177 40125

If you have a serious concern and you believe that a child or vulnerable adult is at immediate risk then in the first instance you must contact the Police or Children/Adult Services in your area.

Graham (Dusty) De Sainte Croix

-20th December 2019

Maitre Graeme De Sainte Croix will always be known to me and most fencers as Dusty. Like a lot of people I first met Dusty at one of his fencing competitions he was running and like a lot of people I was absolutely terrified of him. Over the years the fear slowly turned into the utmost respect.

Dusty really did have his fingers in all the fencing pies: he himself was an adept fencer, he was an outstanding coach, a reliable equipment supplier and fantastic event organiser. Dusty was a logistical genius and ran his competitions with military precision. Dusty was so determined to run his events to schedule that once when we turned up to a venue to find the door locked and the janitor unreachable, he simply broke the door open with a crowbar and announced check-in to be open. This was something I found utterly hilarious, but when the police arrived they were less than impressed with his breaking and entering act. However he was ever the sweet talker and got away with a mere slap on the wrist and a bill for door repairs.

Dusty was far from my first coach, but he certainly had the biggest impact on my fencing and has had a massive impact on me as a person. Dusty hounded me for years to come and coach at his club and the day I finally accepted his offer was one of the best decisions I had ever made. Wallace Fencing Academy, Dusty's fencing club, is a beautiful place. I had truly given up on humanity and had very negative outlooks when I first joined his club, but seeing the amazing community Dusty had built and seeing the difference he was making in the kids at his club reinstated my faith in humanity. In the first little while of working with Dusty I got to see him turn a kid that was a shy little ball of nerves into a happy and bubbly child that has a cheerful disposition with a bright future ahead of them. Dusty would commonly refer to kids in his club as "little projects" and tell me the plans he had to help them develop themselves and improve themselves as people, not just as fencers. My favourite Dusty quote will always remain this:

"I don't take people and make them good fencers, I use fencing to make good people."



Dusty had two fantastic children that he loved dearly, but he had been a sideline father and life coach to hundreds of others. I was very lucky that I got to tell Dusty how his club had reinstated my faith in humanity a matter of hours before he had the stroke that took his life and he gave me one of his "I know I'm good" smiles and I realised then that I had been one of his "little projects" all these years and didn't even know it.

I am so glad the Dusty's family managed to convince him to come on a trip to Malta with us last June, where he got to actually take part in a fencing competition and have a holiday too. Dusty pretending to have a tantrum like a petulant child to (successfully) wind up his opponent who was screaming over-dramatically at every hit will remain one of my funniest memories and I actually cried with laughter at the sight, despite the Maltese dehydration. Seeing the difference, for the better, he made in the kids we brought on that week-long trip will remain one of my most touching memories.

I have countless stories about Dusty and could talk about the man all day, but as Ian O'Connell said in his Eulogy, words can't really put justice to Dusty and the life he's lived. I can say that Dusty was taken from us far too soon, the world was a better place with him in it and he will be deeply missed by many.

Gareth Hamilton



BAF AGM 4th January 2020

A new venue for the AGM this year and quite easy to find, at least the Sat Nav thought so. A very quiet AGM, in part due other fencing events on that weekend. We had a very informal and friendly members meeting where we discussed the need for soft skills CPD (Continuous Professional Development), and the need to further clarify insurance offerings.



The main meeting started on time, with mention of the four members who are no longer with us. Then the committee reported on the past year. We stopped for lunch of sandwiches and chips, and then continued. The discussion after the full meeting being similar to that of the members meeting.

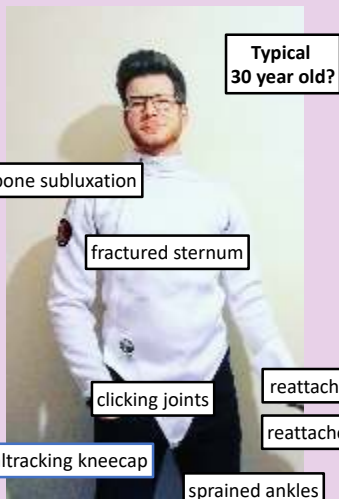
At the end of the meeting a number of awards were presented; Level 5 Foil to David Browning, Level 5 Epee to Tony Middleton, who magically appeared, and Level 3 Epee to Sally Peat. Donald Walker was presented with an Award of Merit for his administration of the award system over the last few years. Finally Bob Merry was presented with Life Membership for his continuous devotion to the Academy. The meeting then closed. After a short break Prof. Lewis McInley presented a CPD session on injury prevention (For further details see page 10 to 13).



*This space could be yours to advertise an event, a course, a service, a product, or a competition. Advertising is free to members and all you have to do is supply me with the advert in either .Docx, or .pdf format.
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Injury Prevention

Prof. Lewis McNley



Those who managed to attend the AGM will know I gave a short talk on injuries and injury prevention in fencing. I was pleasantly surprised by the turnout, it was quite a few more than I'd expected to present to. The talk was essentially a literature review of published articles from in and around the sport of fencing that I'd linked together.

I'd offered to contribute to the AGM after a request I saw in a recent Academy News. There aren't really any areas I'd consider myself a real expert, but I do have a very strong interest in the area recently. From researching around this I found myself somehow in with the zeitgeist, which is an unusual feeling for me. Injury prevent has a lot of focus in sports right now, and the FIE has even put some videos of recommended fencing related exercises on their You Tube channel (I only saw last week!).

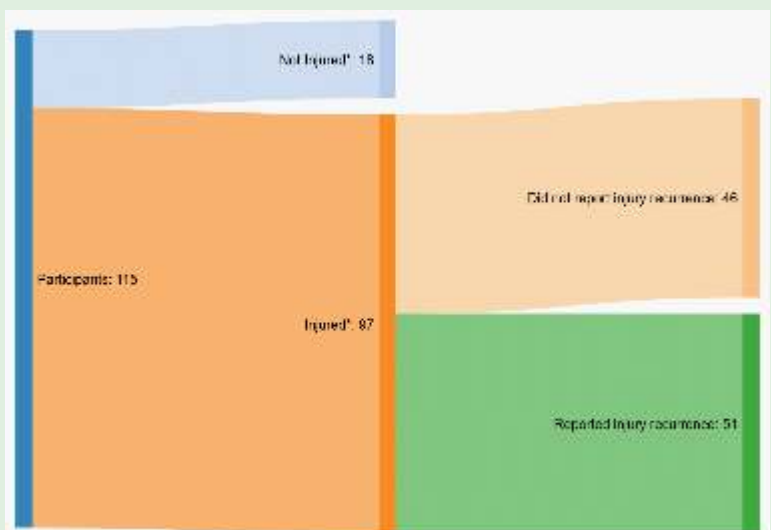
Preamble aside, what follows is essentially a crystallised version (though still a long read) of the presentation and my thoughts, it's quite brief in parts due to the format but I really do recommend looking at these open-access papers yourself:

I recently turned 30, and something magical happens around this time, as I'm sure many are aware. You start breaking down. Like a photograph negative being developed, every piece of damage and wear comes through in full, blinding colour and stark clarity. Injuries stop going away, you can't outrun them anymore.

With a fractured sternum, repeatedly sprained ankles, a mal-tracking kneecap, collarbone subluxation and a reattached thumb this topic is something close to my heart, and pretty much every other part of me. I don't attribute a lot of my bodily wear directly to fencing, but it'd definitely had some lasting effects.

The perception of fencing may be that injuries are uncommon and rarely severe, the only major accident I can remember from the past few years is a concussion at a youth competition. However, I am here to convince you otherwise and give guidance to resources on how to preserve our fencers well into later life.

A mixture of 115 beginner, intermediate and expert fencers were surveyed. The participants were across a range of ages and levels of training.



*'Injured' refers specifically to where pain was reported as a result of injury

Alekseyev K, Stoly A, Chang R, Lakdawala M, Bijlani T, & Cristian A. (2016) Identification of the most frequent injuries in a variety of fencing competitors... Phys Med Rehabil Res, 1(3), 52-55

A study¹ of fencers with a range of experience and abilities found that 97/115 (84%) had sustained a painful injury, with 242 injuries across that group! The most common site was the knee (23%) and these occurrences has a fair chance of being 'moderate' (45%) or 'severe' (17%), as rated by the fencers.

This was both surprising and comforting to me. It was nice to know I'm not alone, but it really highlighted the widespread issue to me as something that we coaches need to be aware of. Additionally, a different study² which tracked injuries at competitions over 5 years (78,223 participants, aged 8 to 70+) found 184 injuries which resulted in withdrawal.

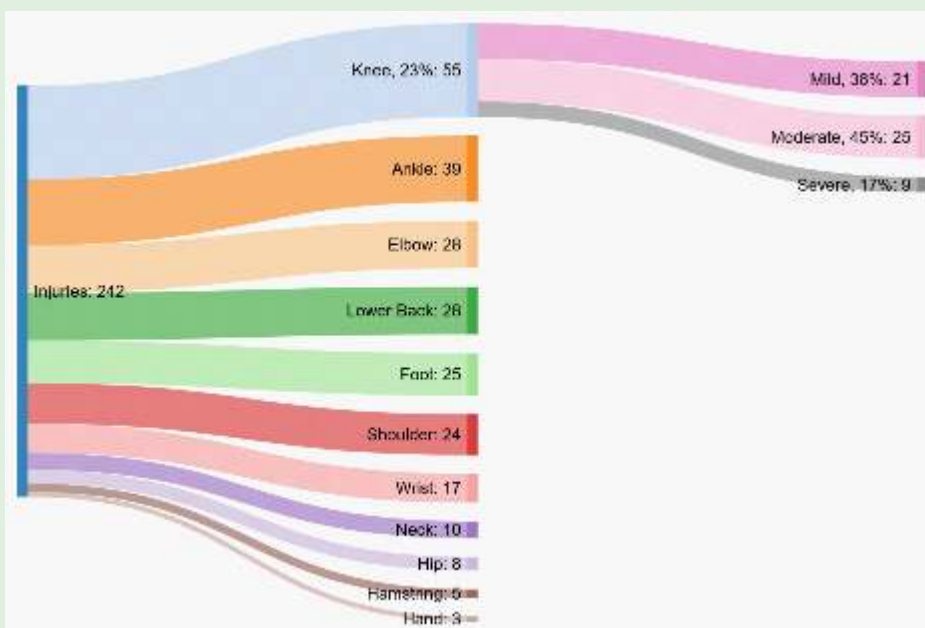
To my mind these are particularly insidious injuries, as they not only damage the fencer, but also their time spend doing the sport and their love for it. This figure is remarkably low, which is a relief, and corresponds to only 0.3 injuries per 1000 athletic exposures. Interestingly, the findings also backed up the more recent survey I was just talking about, with the knee (20%), thigh (15%) and ankle (13%) being the most frequently injured sites.

Having loosely established that fencing injuries affect the majority of fencers and many suffer multiple injuries it's worth a look at what the impact of there are.

Let's look first at the effects of severe injuries. I came across a paper³ which was a study of 30 year-olds who had competed seriously in their early 20's and I had to read it. Though the participants were from a wide range of elite sports, and so the incidence rate isn't really my main take away, it does illustrate the consequences of severe injuries on later life. The study looked at something called 'Health Related Quality of Life', which is pretty much what it says on the tin, and found that those who had suffered severe injuries continued to suffer significant negative effects to their health in a variety of areas. These were most pronounced in the categories of 'Physical Functioning' and 'Bodily Pain' where they scored worryingly low below the average, these are both things I can relate to as well.

Injuries can, and will, stay with you throughout your life and it is in part up to us to ensure the safety of those in the sport. There are 3 recommended areas to prioritise injury prevention⁴ in a paper title 'The Science of Fencing': Actions by participants; Improvements to equipment and facilities; Administration of competitions. The first two areas are where we can really make some impact as coaches. I'm a fencing coach, I have no training in biomechanics or physiotherapy, so I looked for some people who do. There is an absolutely phenomenal paper I really recommend everyone at least scans through. It's called 'Biomechanics of Fencing Sport'⁵ and gives insight into a whole host of areas which will be familiar to you. Even if you disagree with what I've written here, please read this paper. A lot of what I would look to do in these areas is taken from this work, and I'll summarise a little here.

242 injuries were reported across the 97 participants who experienced pain as a result of injury.



Alekseyev K, Stoly A, Chang R, Lakdawala M, Bijlani T, & Cristian A. (2016) Identification of the most frequent injuries in a variety of fencing competitors... *Phys Med Rehabil Res*, 1(3), 52-55

Neuromuscular Control

The unconscious trained response of a muscle to a signal regarding dynamic joint stability.

Proprioception (Joint Position Sense)

Our sense of joint / limb positioning. Joint position sense determines the ability of a person to perceive a presented joint angle and then, after the limb has been moved, to actively or passively reproduces the same joint angle (joint matching task).

As the most injured site is the knee I started looking into this in sport more widely. It turns out people frequently injure their knees in a variety of sports and settings, and it's really quite common in general life. In order to combat knee and ACL (a tendon in the knee) injuries, one paper⁶ from 2017 looked at the protective effects of supplementary exercises. They looked at things such as balance training, plyometric (jump) training, strength and resistance training and stretching, and found that neuromuscular and proprioceptive training appeared to decrease incidence of injury to the knee and ACL. The FIE videos on YouTube that I mentioned earlier are exactly the kind of thing that they may have looked at. Many of you may already incorporate this kind of exercise into your session, with coordination games like involving gloves, masks and other objects. As I said before, I have no training in this area, so unfortunately am not able to provide any advice for what to do or not do. If anyone out there has a history in physiotherapy, biomechanics or sports science I would love to hear from you.

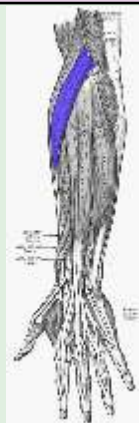
The last couple of things I'll write about relate to point two of the three areas (Improvements to equipment and facilities). That brilliant paper on biomechanics has an interesting discussion of fencing shoes and weapon grips, amongst other things.

For footwear, those expensive fencing shoes you can buy may be great for performance but may also increase injury risk due to a lack of cushioning for the ankle and knee. As with many things this is a case of finding a happy medium and what works for you, but definitely something to be aware of as coaches.

Equipment – Grip (Foil & Epee)

Pistol grips cause lower activation of *adductor pollicis* and *extensor carpi radialis* muscles compared to French grips.

Visconti style grips (Leon Paul standard) are believed to delay fatigue and improve the wrist's ability to resist motion from external forces.



Images from Wikipedia

Around grips, pistol grips cause lower activation of adductor pollicis and extensor carpi radialis muscles compared to French grips. These are the muscles that cause that weird thumb pain, and tennis elbow. Visconti style grips (Leon Paul standard) are believed to delay fatigue and improve the wrist's ability to resist motion from external forces.

It's naïve to think that all there is to fencing is practicing fencing actions, that it exists in isolation of other sports and science. That isn't to say the focus needs to shift dramatically, but we do need to be

aware of the areas outside our expertise which are useful to our fencers/ pupils/ athletes, whatever you choose to call them. To not acknowledge this is to do a disservice to the sport and those within it. I would really recommend exploring areas such as biomechanics, psychology and nutrition yourself (to name only a few) and, where you can, consulting other experts to get their input.

It was a pleasure to be able to present at the AGM and I thank everyone who got in touch afterwards. I am intending on running some coaching CPD and fencing performance events later in the year around the South East (Sussex, not London), if you're interested please get in touch!

- 1 – Alekseyev K, Stoly A, Chang R, Lakdawala M, Bijlani T, & Cristian A. (2016) Identification of the most frequent injuries in a variety of fencing competitors... *Phys Med Rehabil Res*, 1(3), 52-55
- 2 – Harmer PA. (2008) Incidence and characteristics of time-loss injuries in competitive fencing: a prospective, 5-year study of national competitions. *Clin J Sport Med*, 18(2), 137-142
- 3 – Cowee K, & Simon JE. (2019) A History of Previous Severe Injury and Health-Related Quality of Life Among Former Collegiate Athletes. *J Athl Train*, 54(1), 64-69
- 4 - Giulio S. Roi, Bianchedi D. (2008) The Science of Fencing: Implications for Performance and Injury Prevention. *Sports Medicine*, 38(6), 465-481
- 5 - Chen TL-W, Wong DW-C, Wang Y, Ren S, Yan F, Zhang M (2017). Biomechanics of fencing sport: A scoping review. *PLoS ONE*, 12(2), e0171578
- 6 - Dargo L, Robinson KJ, Games KE. (2017) Prevention of Knee and Anterior Cruciate Ligament Injuries Through the Use of Neuromuscular and Proprioceptive Training: An Evidence-Based Review. *J Athl Train*, 52(12), 1171-1172

Recommended reading:

Biomechanics of fencing sport: A scoping review

Chen TL-W, Wong DW-C, Wang Y, Ren S, Yan F, Zhang M (2017). Biomechanics of fencing sport: A scoping review. *PLoS ONE*, 12(2), e0171578

doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0171578

Injury Prevention - Defeating the Unseen Fencing Opponent

Rogers J. (2016, November 12) Better Fencer [Web log post]. Retrieved from

<https://www.betterfencer.com/articles/fencing-injury-prevention>

This CPD talk at the AGM by Lewis was engaging and challenged the traditional view that fencing injuries are extremely rare. He delivered it with the self depreciating awareness of being self taught, both through his own experience (and that of his fencers), and the reading of published papers. Even though he claimed he was no expert, he spoke with conviction, and showed data to back up his points. Challenging us to think about our own methods.

Kevin Nelson : Editor Academy News.

The Sabre Attack

By Prof. Phil Carson

The attack in sabre is quite different to the other weapons and therefore needs to be taught and coached appropriately. Most coaches use the rule t.9 as the basis for understanding the attack and apply it to all three weapons equally.

"The attack is the initial offensive action made by extending the arm and continuously threatening the opponent's target, preceding the launching of the lunge or flèche."

However, this is NOT the full definition of an attack. You have to look at a few more sections of the rules to get the full detail. In foil for example, the expansion of the definition above includes the following at t.83

"The attack with a step-forward lunge or a step-forward flèche is correctly executed when the straightening of the arm precedes the end of the step forward and the initiation of the lunge or the flèche."

For sabre though, there is a small difference in the rules, with enormous significance in that it affects the way we define both the beginning and the end of the attack. The equivalent rule for sabre is at t.101

*“An attack with a step-forward lunge is correctly carried out...when the beginning of the straightening of the arm **precedes the step-forward** and when the hit arrives at the latest when the front foot lands”*

This rule establishes two important conventions. Firstly, the initial attack in the 4 metres is clear in what is preparation - e.g. a step, followed by an attack - as opposed to an attack with a step-lunge. Secondly, the definition of the end of the attack has rendered the idea of broken-time in sabre as unlikely.

In sabre, there are three different tactical situations for attacks that a referee has to attend to in a sabre match and by extension, three different attack scenarios to be coached within the game of sabre.

1. The en guard situation (often referred to as the 4 metres). Attacking from the 4 metres is the most difficult because neither fencer is the attacker and both are vying to establish right of way, often at high speed. Where both fencers choose to attack, it is for the referee to assess at what point the attacks start and importantly, where both attacks finish. If neither is able to take the initiative and both attacks are executed correctly then the attacks are called “simultaneous”. If there is any non-correct action in the attack against a correct attack, then the correct attack will score in the simultaneous attack scenario.
2. Outside of the the 4 metres. A sabre fencer is the “attacker” if they have right of way. Long attacks in sabre usually score because with good distance management, the sabre attacker can frustrate attempted counter actions. And because you can score a hit with any side of the blade it’s pretty much always going to be threatening the target.
3. Against an opponent with point-in-line. Point-in-line establishes right of way if it is formed before the attacker starts their attack. This often causes confusion. A fencer can be the “attacker” (has right of way) and “attacking” (moving forward), but not making the attack as defined at t.101 above. At this moment, a defender can establish point-in-line. Point-in-line retains right of way until there is a meeting of the blades, point-in-line is withdrawn or a hit is scored, or any other technical issues arises, i.e. the fencer leaves the piste.

The physicality of the game of sabre is at an all time high and top class referees are pretty much attuned into the subtleties of the rules and conventions. The pressure is on us coaches to coach fencers who can demonstrate clearly that they are attacking correctly.

Please note that articles published reflect the viewpoint of the individual authors in our knowledgeable and diverse academy, and the viewpoints expressed in articles are not necessarily those held by the British Academy of Fencing SSTT.

I have a light editorial touch on all articles received. So far all of which have been published. I am aware that sometimes there may be differences of opinion between members. If you have such a difference, you are always welcome to submit your own viewpoint in an article, as long as it contains reasoned arguments in favour of your viewpoint. Learning to coach is a process of evolution for each individual, and exposure to different viewpoints should encourage self reflection. I will always welcome thought provoking articles from members.

Kevin: Editor Academy News

Members Advertise in the Academy News for Free



Bob Merry – Summary of BAF Service

At the 2006 AGM, I was approached by the then President and Treasurer and asked if I would volunteer to become the Secretary of the Academy. Apparently, they needed a full Master for the post and I was the nearest one to hand at the AGM. This was a post I was due to hold until 2019.

A year later, I once again forgot the old services maxim of “never volunteer for anything” and offered to become the Editor of Academy News, which also continued until the end of 2018.

In addition to the usual secretarial duties of announcing committee meetings and keeping the minutes, I was also allocated various other duties from time to time. I was responsible for the Academy’s Insurance and the less arduous job of receiving accident reports. These were few and far between, and none resulted in a claim on the insurance. I also maintained the records of examination results and prepared certificates for successful candidates. I served a number of years on the Disciplinary Sub-committee, including one particularly awkward case, when I managed to persuade a member to resign from the Academy, rather than be expelled. I also served for one year on the SSTT.

During my time on the committee, I can only recall missing one, or maybe two, committee meetings.

As well as my committee service, I have been a regular examiner at all levels, both at residential courses and also at other examinations in various parts of the country, something I intend to carry on doing for as long as I am able and am still wanted.

I mentioned that I broke the “golden rule” concerning volunteering. Why? Quite simply because my own education as a coach was helped enormously by other BAF members and I wouldn’t have reached the dizzy heights that I have without the aid of so many people. I felt that I owed the Academy an enormous debt and this was one way I could pay it back. There were some difficult times, when I might have been tempted to walk away, but it has, for the vast majority of the time, been an enjoyable experience, which has given great satisfaction and I am pleased that I have been of service.

Bob Merry

Only Bob’s service to the Academy doesn’t end here.....as he again forgot the services maxim, and has allowed himself to be elected Vice President at the recent AGM. He will also be running a series of coaching days leading to an examination day on 15th March.

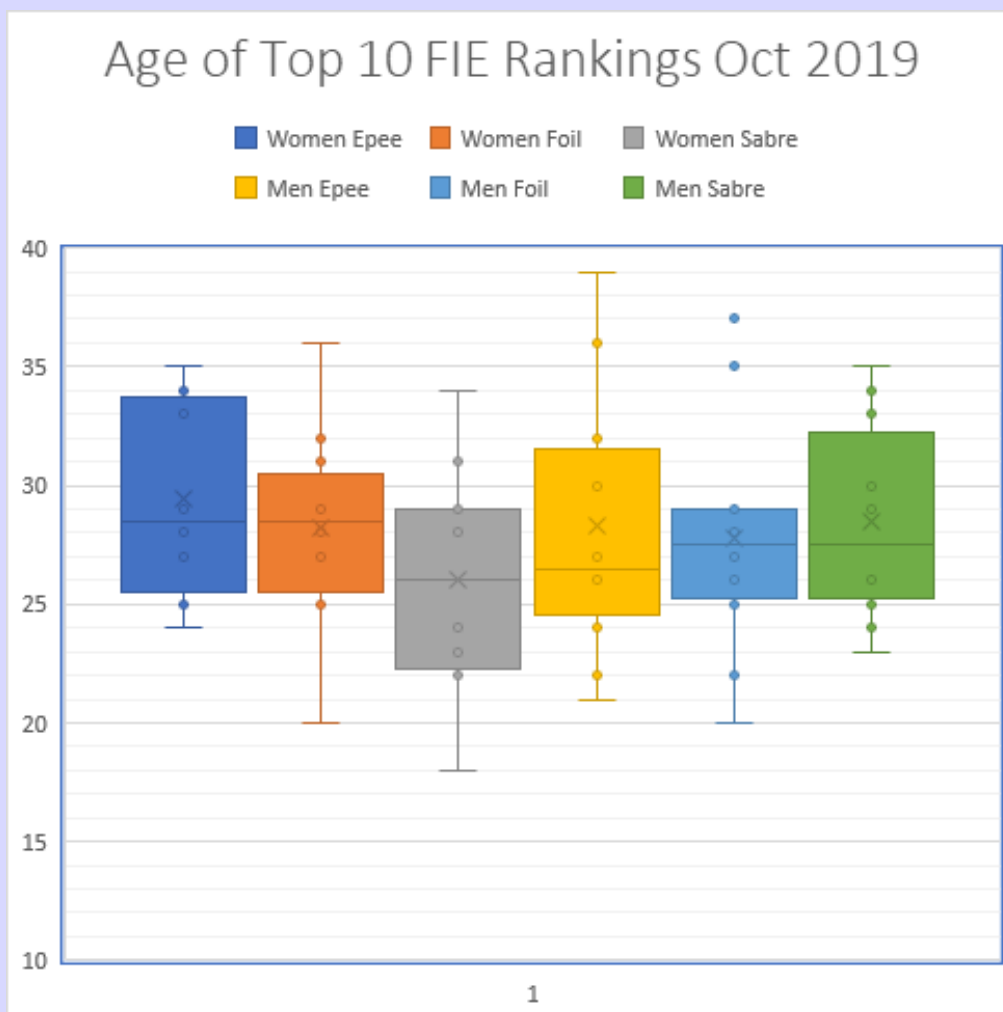
Kevin Nelson : Editor Academy News

Data Presentation is Everything?

By Kevin Nelson

In the last issue I read Stefan's article on the average age of the top 10 international competitors, and thought that the way he presented the data could be greatly improved to give a clearer picture. The plus side of Stefan's presentation is that he provided the data in a table; the downside is that he provided the data in a table (with an overall average). In one of my previous jobs I designed and ran statistical trials on laboratory instrumentation. So I tend to look at data tables slightly differently, they are something to compare using statistical tools, or draw graphs from enabling a visual representation of the data, which is easier to understand and interpret. But tables are not very useful visually in themselves, unless you happen to be trying to hide something, or to proving a point (although the same can be said of some graphs).

Looking at the data, with such a small data set the distributions are unlikely to be Gaussian (normally distributed, or when plotted the histogram will be a bell shaped curve), so the arithmetic mean (what is normally considered the average) is unlikely to give us a true picture of the real average of the results, the median (middle value) would be a better choice. There are no limits on the averages to give us an idea of the variation within each group of data. So as we wish to compare small data sets a box and whisker plot is probably the most useful. Thankfully these days excel can plot this for us, and after some adjustment of the settings excel will give a graph that becomes meaningful. From the graph (below) it can be seen that the medians are more variable than the mean (median is the line, mean is the cross). But what becomes really apparent is the spread of the data.

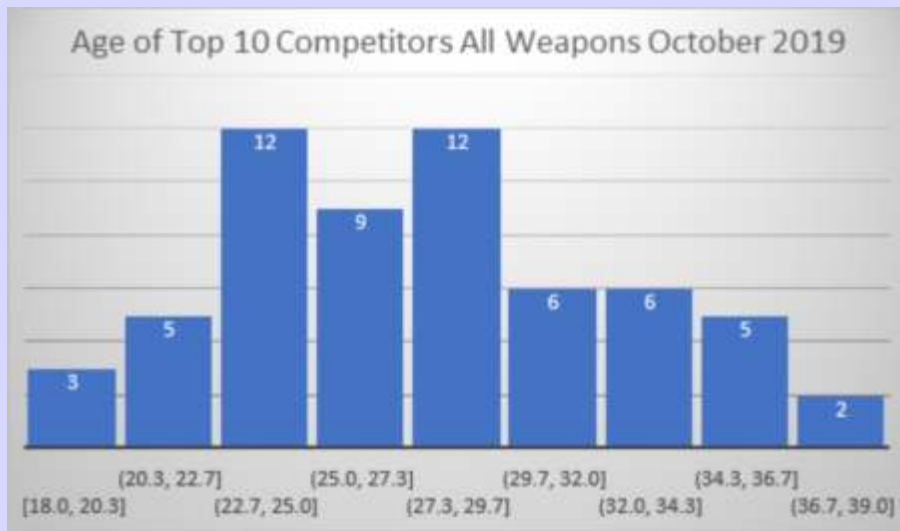


Interpreting the data: There is no significant difference in the averages of the 6 data sets. They are all contained within the individual upper and lower quartiles of every data set. As you can see from the lines drawn on the chart.

There are a couple of other interesting observations; the distribution of the women's sabre, is nearly normal, but shifted downwards when compared to the other data sets. Especially the medians of the women's epee and foil..... there is a 2 ½ year difference between them.

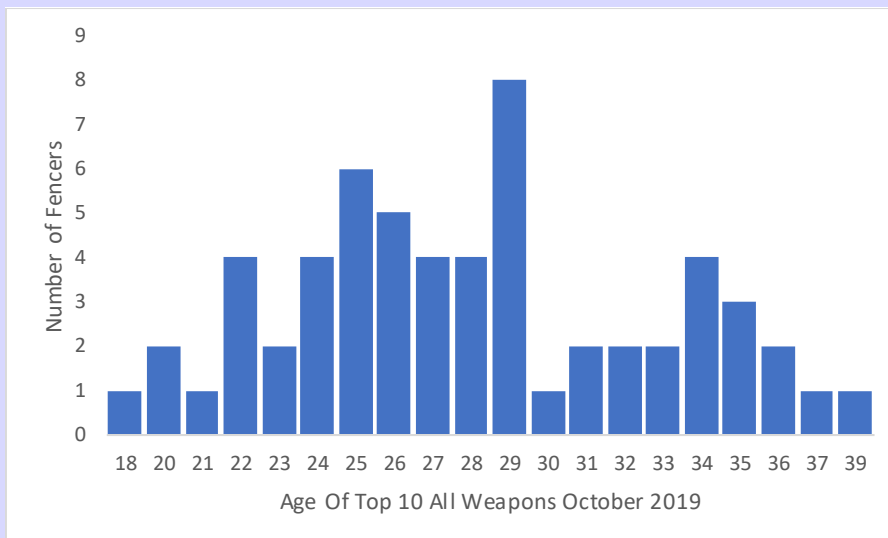
The men's foil and epee are skewed towards the younger end. With the older competitors being (almost) outliers.

If we look at the distribution of all the data put into one histogram (below) we can see that the data is skewed to the lower end, and tails as the competitors get older.



This is not a particularly important data set, but as can be seen even the use of simple statistical analysis improves the quality of information that can be extracted from the data, hence increasing the understanding. Which might include re-evaluating the whole trial. Especially when there is conflicting information. If we take the Modal average we find that the most common age is actually 29. By taking the time to manually plot the data into a

histogram (below) we can see that the data is distributed in a far more complicated fashion than originally assumed, containing a number of peaks at a 4 or 5 year difference, could this be showing the Olympic cycle? And the difference in training/dropout during parts of the cycle? This is just speculation as from the data there is nothing to connect the two, and not sufficient data to take the analysis further.



Stefan was using this data to support the point he was making, and the re-evaluation of this data will not change his conclusions. Stefan's article is a good example of conscious bias¹ The aim is good - we want more people in fencing.....

But the real question is.....was it the right data to prove the point that he was trying to make ? That starting the sport of fencing later in life is no barrier to competing at the

top level..... and that, maybe, is the starting point for another article.

As an aside, I was watching the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures (2019) as I normally do every year, and in the first program a team picture of Liverpool F.C. was shown, and the presenter (Hannah Fry) explained that 6 of the people in the photograph were mathematicians. She then invited one into the auditorium and he then explained how they collected data to analyse to build probability maps (probability of scoring a goal from that position on the field, against time through the match). To help the players better understand the decisions they made on the pitch, and how to improve those decisions. Does anyone do anything similar for fencing? If you do I would like to hear about it.

1 - Darrell Huff (1954) : (Reprinted Penguin Books 1991): How to Lie with Statistics : How to talk back a statistic 111-112



Stefan Speaks

The thought of your Members' Rep.

Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. Maybe this July some of you will be enjoying the traditional Japanese tea ceremony instead (did you know that some of the movements are purely to keep Kimono sleeves clean), whilst in Tokyo to watch the 2020 Olympics.

The fencing will be held in the Makuhari Messe centre 25 miles south east of Tokyo in Chiba City (the name Chiba is formed of two kanji characters the first meaning 'thousand' and the second 'leaves'). If you recognise the venue it is where The Prince Takamado Trophy Men's Foil World Cup 2019 was held and which acted as a dress rehearsal for the Olympic venue.

Replete with tea, clutching a stuffed toy version of the Olympic mascot Miraitowa (mirai – future, towa – eternity. The name chosen to promote a future full of eternal hope in the hearts of people all over the world) you will be cheering your country's fencers on to success and a medal. And at this Olympics there will be plenty of opportunities for a fencing medal as all weapons for both sexes individual and team will be up for grabs.

The medals designed by Junichi Kawanishi, reflect patterns of light in order to symbolise the energy of the athletes and those who support them. The designs also represent how athletes strive for victory on a daily basis. The medals are all made from metal recycled from consumer electronics. Signature yellow boxes were placed all over Japan and a total of 78,985 tons of discarded devices were deposited in them (which included 6.21 million mobile phones!). Dismantled and melted down to get 30kg gold, 4,100kg silver, and 2,700kg bronze. (gold medal is 6g gold plating on pure silver). The ribbons combine the traditional Japanese design motifs of ichimatsu moyo and Kasane no irome to reflect Japan itself.

And if you are not in Tokyo maybe you will be watching on TV or on some gizmo or gadget (remember to recycle it at the end of its life, although I guess it will not be so lucky as to become an Olympic medal) whilst enjoying a cup of tea or a glass or wine at home or maybe with a beer and your fellow pupils after a fantastic day honing your coaching skills at Denstone.

Olympics 2020 – 24th July to 9th August

25th July – women's Epee individual & men's Sabre individual

26th July – women's Foil individual & men's Epee individual

27th July – women's Sabre individual & men's Foil individual

28th July – women's Epee team

29th July – men's Sabre team

30th July – women's Foil team

31st July – men's Epee team

1st August – women's Sabre team

2nd August – men-s Foil team

Now it's 3:20 and time for me to have to make the huge decision of the day, what cake to have with my cup of cup of earl grey tea, chocolate? Or lemon?

Trafford Sword Club - Coach Development

The following Coaching course has been arranged by Trafford Sword Club starting in January 2020. This is a British Academy of Fencing course – the qualifications are accepted by British Fencing.

Weapons: Level 2 Foil and Epee
 Venue: John Alker Memorial Hall, Flixton Road Flixton M41 6QY
 Staff: Professor Bob Merry
 Times: 10am - 4:30pm
 Dates and Times: Sunday 26th January 2020, Sunday 9th February 2020, Sunday 23rd February 2020, Sunday 8th March 2020: Examination Day 15th March 2020.

If you are interested in taking the course please contact
 Gill Prideaux on: gillian.prideaux@outlook.com



Academy Examination Day

Coaching Examination Day - Manchester

Sunday March 15th 2020



The British Academy of fencing will be holding an examination day on Sunday March 15th 2020.

If you wish to take an examination please email: courseofficer@baf-fencing.com .

Note: you will not be able to turn up ad-hoc on the day and take an examination.

Proficiency Awards

BAF Members:	Approved non-Academy Coaches:
1 - 4 Awards £3.70 each	1 - 4 Awards £4.70 each
5 - 9 Awards £3.60 each	5 - 9 Awards £4.10 each
10+ Awards £3.40 each	10+ Awards £3.90 each

A4 Study Guides:

1 - 4 £2.65 (**£2.90**) each or 5+ £2.30 (**£2.65**) each (incl. p&p)

Figures in **RED** are for non-BAF members

For all the latest information on courses
 go to the Academy web site at www.baf-fencing.com

Examination Fees

Level 1 Assessment £11.00
 Level 2 to Diploma £21.00 (**£26.00**)

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

Documentation

The following documentation is available from the Course Officer Jackie Redikin.

Key Teaching Points (Weapon specific)	£7.35 (£9.4) each
Key Coaching Points (Weapon specific)	£7.35 (£9.4) each
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)
Examples of past written Papers for Advanced and Diploma examinations	FREE
All prices include p & p. Figures in RED are for non-BAF members	

B.A.F. Residential Course 2020

27th July to 1st August 2020

The next residential course will be held at Denstone College and it would be a pleasure to have you there should you wish to join us..



The British Academy of Fencing's residential course is open to all fencing coaches irrespective of whether they are members of the BAF.

British Academy of Fencing Members : £444 Non Academy Coach: £499

This fee includes full board (breakfast, lunch and evening meals), tuition and course documentation. Examination fees are extra.

For further details, contact the Course Officer,

Jacqueline Redikin

courseofficer@baf-fencing.com



Manchester Coaching Courses

Courses are being held in the Manchester area, on a monthly basis. The course is for all three weapons from levels 1 to 5. For further information, please contact Jacqueline Redikin via courseofficer@baf-fencing.com

British Academy of Fencing Level 1 Coaching Award

Start your journey to becoming a qualified Fencing Coach.

Sunday February 23rd @ 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Where: Barwick in Elmet Village Hall, Chapel Lane, Leeds LS15 4EL

The day will start with an introduction to coaching followed by opportunities to practise the basic skills. We will focus on foil, but are prepared to accommodate other weapons. If anyone already has some experience, there is the possibility of gaining the level one qualification. Depending on attendance we will look at follow up sessions. Hot and cold drinks will be provided.

Contact Maitre John Crouch for further details: johncrouch18@gmail.com