



## **Paralympic Gold: Epee Cat A at Tokyo for Wheelchair Fencer Piers Gilliver.**

Piers Gilliver has taken the gold medal at Tokyo to add to his Silver from Rio. This is the first GBparalympic wheelchair Epee gold medal for 33 years, and then he went on to take a team Epee Bronze medal the (first GBparalympic Epee team medal for 41 years), then also went on to win team Foil Silver, with teammates Dimitri Coutya, and Oliver Lam-Watson. The result is well deserved and is due to all the hard work he has put in over the last 12 years and the support from his parents, especially Jo his mother, who has been behind him all the way.



A difficult year to watch the Olympics with virtually no fencing televised. Especially considering how well our wheelchair fencers have performed. I was reduced to watching live feeds of scores, and social media to find out how Piers had done.



## **Proficiency Awards**

Are you ready to restart?  
Will you consider using the Academy Proficiency awards system when you do?

Remember its not just for kids!



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## The President 's Piece.....

Thank you to all our contributors for this issue of our eagerly anticipated magazine.

My focus will be on the start of the September Term as a more realistic time to begin to plan long term. By then, most of the country will have been 'double jabbed' and out of restrictions (hopefully). Also, we will all have a better picture of what effect the pandemic has had on our sport regarding numbers of Fencers, Coaches and Clubs, I expect a sobering result.

So, how do we recover and move forward? Where do we put the emphasis and our resources? Who do we invest our time and effort into? My answer is THE COACHES.

It has been said before, 'Because of a Fencing Coach there is a fencer, because of a Fencing Coach there is a fencing club, because of a Fencing Coach there is fencing competition'. It is extremely unwise, in my opinion, to under-estimate and undervalue the contribution fencing coaches make to our sport. They are thoughtful, flexible, adaptable, experimental, determined and long-suffering! Every coach is important! How many fencers does a fencing coach work with? We have gifted coaches that excel in introducing new people into our sport and keeping them. We have gifted coaches that excel in taking fencers to another level. We have gifted coaches who excel in training other coaches. We have gifted coaches who specialise in a single weapon.

When I ran my own fencing club and Centre of Excellence, I could handle 10/15 fencers, by training another coach to assist, we could handle 20/25, and my assistant usually coached for free; another coach and numbers began to really increase (as did my income). There were eventually 3 coaches and myself on a working night and the place was really buzzing!! I would encourage all members to begin to train an assistant coach because it shares the workload and you have a replacement if ever you yourself move on.

We have begun to run our coach training sessions. Maître Tony Middleton is running sessions in St. Albans, Prof Andy Vincent and myself ran a session in Bromsgrove, others are in the pipeline, so come along and have fun! Let us know if you intend to run coach training courses, we can support and even advertise your course in Academy News and on our website.

Invest in your training, and enjoy the journey. The Academy committee wants all levels and weapons developed in both quantity AND quality.

Any member of the Committee is available to help or advise, just drop us an email, you will get an immediate response.

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# In Theory, We Need a New Theory

By Prof. Phil. Carson

That's a second lockdown over and done with thank goodness! I can't wait to get back to real coaching and also to remove this COVID stone from around my waistline. You see I spent the last year in the kitchen honing my culinary skills and in the study, seeking out the best thinking and ways to improve my coaching once we get back on piste. I discovered two things. Firstly, the more you eat and the less you do, the more weight you put on. But the second issue was much more revelatory, that there is pretty much unanimous agreement, by both scientists and practitioners, that whereas best practice in coaching has moved on, traditional coaching education systems have not.

But do we need a theory in the first place? Well, there is an old adage that I like and that is that "Knowledge without practice is useless, practice without knowledge is dangerous". It's easy to believe our coaching is good enough, despite the results of our fencers. This could have something to do with the Dunning-Kruger delusional effect, where we tend to overestimate our ability despite what the data says. We need something more than our own opinion of our abilities to help keep our feet on the ground and on the right road. An evidence based, scientifically robust theory can give you a strong foundation on which to base your own coaching methods and perhaps propel them to even greater heights. It's worth noting here that a theory is not the same as a methodology. This isn't about telling you how to coach, it's more about providing tools to reflect on your own coaching practice with a view to understanding why some things work and how to make them even better.

In the theoretical world of skill acquisition, Constraints-Led Coaching has been around since the 1990's and is a solid piece of sport science, but is now being posited as a potential unifying theory for how to develop performance (Towards a Grand Unifying Theory of Sport Performance, Glazier, 2017). The problem has been in convincing people like me who have been steeped in the Academy methodology for over 25 years, that it is more relevant to the modern game. But I am curious about the findings of the many studies, especially those where high speed elements are a feature of the sport, like the cricket ball, tennis ball and fastest of all, the point of a sword, where high levels of anticipation and perception are required. These studies consistently challenge the basis for coach education. For example, when you look at "reaction time" what human beings are capable of just isn't possible if you apply the traditional theory of perceive-process-act. Bruce Abernethy, a behavioural scientist at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia explains. "If you did the chronometry, it suddenly looked impossible." It takes about a quarter of a second to respond to a blade presentation, but in a fight, it is a fraction of that time. "Perception-action coupling is continuous and sophisticated" says Keith Davids, a sports scientist at Sheffield Hallam University suggesting that this is the key to understanding why some coaching methods are more functional, resulting in higher levels of performance, than others.

Theorising, like cooking, is all well and good, but the proof is in the pudding. For those of you who don't know me, I have put a fencer on the GB team for the World and European Championships every year for the past 16 years and that currently half the GB WS team come from our tiny club in the north of Scotland. But that is not to brag (all rights reserved!) but rather to let you know that having adopted a stronger theoretical and evidence based approach to what we do, we have never before seen the levels of performance that our next generation fencers are producing. And the prospect of that pudding is very appetising indeed.

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## From the Collection of Porthos



This is an unusual type of German Schläger (pronounced Sh-lay-ger). Most have bigger guards. The blade is 34" (about 86cm). Sabre duels took place as early as 1650 and were unregulated, with freedom of movement. By 1850 the practice was strictly regulated. They were used by duelling societies, the military, and the universities. A Swiss friend told me, about 1998, that they are still used in German universities. It isn't so much a duel or competition between two students. There was no winner and no loser. Its simply to

prove how brave you are and show great stoicism under stress and injury. The participants wore a large, heavily padded garment covering the torso, thighs, throat, and neck. A glove was worn. The head – the target – was unprotected, though they wore steel rimmed goggles, some with a nose guard. Cuts were at the head, especially the cheeks. The scars were like a badge of honour, proving courage and determination. Two doctors and a referee were present. The combatants were expected to show no fear or dodge and had to stand still on one spot.

Schläger's have no point: the tip of the blade is squared off. Blades may be straight, like mine or curved. Mine weighs 2lb's (900g). Imagine that slamming into your face!! It has seen a lot of use, and there are so many nicks on the cutting edge its almost like a saw. The coloured panels – gold, green and purple – denote the university, but I havn't been able to trace which one. The blade is stamped with a knights helmet, the Kirschbaum company. More details, plus enactments can be seen on YouTube.



Note the word Schlager (no umlaut over the a), pronounced 'Sh-lah-ger', 'which means a type of music with a catchy tune'.

Further Note : Don't try this at home !

# Restarting After COVID

How many of you are managing to restart your clubs after covid? What are the issues that you face? Do you need help? How can you encourage fencers to return? Or new people to take up fencing?



- Remember to re-write your Risk Assessment, include the covid elements.
- Clearly state what your covid policies are for the fencers on a club night, and what you are doing about shared equipment.
- Work with your venue, talk to them find out what they require from you.
- Be very clear about your face mask policy.
- Communicate with your fencers.
- If you are a BF registered club, have you appointed a covid officer?
- If you are a BF registered coach, check the dates on your DBS, Safeguarding and First Aid, are they in date?
- Check with your Safeguarding Officer, is their paperwork up to date?
- Are all your members details up to date.
- Have you checked over all your equipment (both shared and personal) - especially if its not been in use for over a year.
- Plan your first month with care, some of your fencers may not have performed any strenuous exercise in the last year. Think about your warm-up's.



- Find out how the wider community can help you, are there any local initiatives that you can take advantage of. (In Gloucester City each councillor has a pot of cash that you can apply for).
- Enjoy reopening.

## Proficiency Awards

### BAF Members:

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

### Approved non-Academy Coaches:

1 - 4 Awards **£4.70** each  
5 - 9 Awards **£4.10** each  
10+ Awards **£3.90** each

During the current crisis, the study guides are being reviewed and re-written, so they will not be available for the next few months.

The Foil Study Guide will be out soon.





# Time for Teams?

By Nick Chapman

We have looked at teams in one form or another a couple of times over this series of articles, 'Doubles' (Academy News 106) 'What Makes a Team' (Academy News 108). Now I want to consider some other options relating to how we run team events.

One of the problems with team competitions can be the length of time they take (obvious exception being Sabre as they spend more time plugging and un plugging than they do actually fencing). Forty-five hit matches (which can of course be anything up to eighty-nine hits long) require a significant investment of time. This is one of the main reasons many team competitions are a simple direct elimination format with team seeding based on an aggregate of the results achieved by individual members of the team in the previous days individual competition, or in the case of FIE events, based on a rolling ranking list, and as discussed in my article 'Lousing the E!' (Academy News 105) these FIE events are expanded to include fighting off all the places (which provided you have the pistes to run the event doesn't extend the length of time needed it just uses all the pistes all the way to the end rather than using a diminishing amount of pistes).

Over the years I have seen various attempts to speed up the team match process. There are a few notable examples that I think are worth of mention.

The first was at a Junior Quad (as it was called back in the day). Each match was assigned two pistes, first bout of the match was fenced on one piste whilst the second pair of fencers plugged in on the other piste. When the first bout ended the referee simply turned around to face the other piste and began refereeing the second bout. Meanwhile the fencers on the first piste un plugged and the third bout fencers plugged in ready for the referee to turn back and begin their bout etc etc. Whilst this is an elegant idea it was slow to get going as the fencers hadn't seen it done before and didn't really realise what was required of them or understand the motivation behind the system. This is not a criticism of the system, but rather the organisers poor presentation/communication on the day. Given this, the slow start stands as a cautionary tale reminding us of the importance of ensuring people understand what's happening especially when we are introducing something new. As the early delays represented a lack of understanding rather than a functional flaw in the system it's important to acknowledge that the process improved as the event progressed.

This system does indeed reduce the time necessary for team matches, and I have certainly used it for school matches where I know I am working to a tight timetable. It can also be good from a spectator point of view as it keeps the action going, however, it has the obvious draw back that it is resource heavy, you need double the number of pistes and therefore double the quantity of equipment, space, set up time, pack up time. If you were running a stand-alone team event this may well be an issue (depending on format it might be possible to introduce part way through an event, example, if you were running a system of direct elimination, you have a diminishing number of teams each round therefore there will come a point where you have the resources to introduce this system and speed up the later stage of the event (though you do have to question the wisdom of changing the way things are being run part way through an event). If you were running a stand-alone team event you probably wouldn't have the resources to do this from the beginning, however, if you were running an individual event the day before, you may well have exactly what is needed. All in all, this idea represents is a useful trick to have up your sleeve that may save a little time but isn't going to revolutionise team fencing.

There is a variation on this idea that can also save a little time and isn't as resource heavy. Rather than having a full second piste just have a second set of spools at each piste. It's much quicker to unplug a ground lead from a spool and plug it into the next spool than it is to disconnect a fencer from a spool and re connect the next fencer. The gain in time is fractionally less but the drain on resources (space, boxes, set up/ pack up time) is negligible (providing you have access to the spools).

A couple of words of caution about these systems. In the first case the referee needs to be paying attention. When using two pistes a necessary result of keeping the teams separate whilst not fighting is that each time the referee turns round for the next bout the teams have effectively changed ends, the team that was on the referees left is now on their right, trust me it can get a little confusing if you're not paying full attention (but that's ok because we know the referee always gives the fight the benefit of undivided attention). Next problem with both systems is that the fencers need to be paying full attention to who is on next fight, they can get into a rhythm of just swapping the fencer who is coming off without actually looking to see who should be on next, there will be times when a fencer doesn't need to disconnect from the spool at all as they only have a one fight rest. If everyone is paying enough attention these systems save time, if anyone isn't the mistakes can cost you all the time you might otherwise have saved.

Next is a simple idea. Don't fence 45 hits in your 45 hit match! Shorten each bout, fence four hits or even three hits. This is a solution I would only contemplate when working with very young fencers. When there are worries about attention span or simply exhaustion, or where there are exceptional time constraints. You could fence three hits in each bout and fence to 27, but that's a bit confusing for referees, and teaches the participants the wrong changeover points. I prefer giving teams a 'plugging in bonus'. One or two points every time the next fencer plugs in. This achieves the same result of reducing each bout by one or two hits therefore speeding up the match but keeps the changeover points constant. It also has the added advantage of making sure that even the worst team in the room can report a reasonable score (please don't underestimate the psychological benefit of this little and totally obvious sleight of hand).

This system of plug-in bonus can also be used when practicing team fencing on club nights or training camps to make otherwise uneven matches feel competitive, after all there is no reason why (in training) you have to give the same plug-in bonus to both teams.

The FIE have experimented with various ways of running team events without the massive time commitment they require. Some years ago, at the World Cadet Championships they had a test event with teams of six, one at each weapon and sex, at the beginning of each match they draw lots as to which order to fence the weapons. The matches were fenced relay, first to 30. As the result is just one team event rather than six separate events, I can see why they as organisers considered this an attractive idea. Whilst this created an event (and I'm sure it was a lot of fun) I do not consider it to be a format for serious events such as World Championships (and as we haven't seen it since, I can only assume that the ground swell of opinion persuaded the FIE of the same), there is simply too much left to chance in the drawing of the lots to determine the order of fencing, however that's not to say there isn't a place for this kind of approach.

I have used this multi weapon team system during club nights (sometimes having to twist a few arms to get the right number of people to do the necessary weapons (Sabre!), I can see it having a value on a squad training camp where you want to promote mixing of the weapons to enhance squad cohesion and team spirit prior to a major event. There have even been some successful local fun events (yes many of us still fence for fun) run using this system, a good example being the Crystal Open.



If you include three weapons there are conveniently six possible orders in which to fight (see below). All you need is dice (simpler with a die by each box) and a legend (no, not an Olympic medallist, not that kind of legend! A Key, a list of how to interpret the die role).

1 = Foil, Epee, Sabre

2 = Foil, Sabre, Epee

3 = Epee, Sabre, Foil

4 = Epee, Foil, Sabre

5 = Sabre, Foil, Epee

6 = Sabre, Epee, Foil

I believe the Crystal open further mix's things up by insisting every team has at least one male and one female fencer.

I believe one of the main reasons we don't do much team fencing in this country is because of the time it takes. If so, I hope the ideas in this article help you to realise it doesn't need to be so slow. Team fencing can be massively rewarding so give some of these ideas a try and see if we can speed things up and as a result do more teams.

As an aside to the article above, specific to our times and the disruption caused by Covid-19. I would like to point out the virtues of team fencing as a stepping stone in the route back to competition.

A team competition would allow you to bubble fencers by team, avoiding mixing with other clubs, years, school etc apart from the once each on the piste, and yet allowing for a full and competitive format. If doing this, I would recommend issuing a spool (or better still two, see above) to a team and that team moving the spool around from piste to piste with them thus minimise the touching of equipment handled by other teams.

I am certainly going to offer my fencers a number of inter school matches to help compensate for the season of lost competitions. I will aim to have four team on two pistes and operate a round robin format, running separate events (on separate days) for different year groups. Why not try the same, who knows if we all did it we might reignite an interest in team fencing.

## Members Advertise in the Academy News for Free

Academy News is a service to our members and we offer the chance to advertise on its pages, whether it be for an **event, a course, your club, or indeed anything.**

There is **no charge to members.**

It would be very helpful if you could supply with me the artwork that you would like to see published . Simply send me (Kevin Nelson) the details and I'll see you get a mention.

**[editor@baf-fencing.com](mailto:editor@baf-fencing.com)**

# PROFESSOR LEONARD (LEON) WAREING HILL M.B.E.

23rd April 1936 - 22nd June 2021



## A Tribute by Professor Andrew Vincent

My first encounter with Leon was in September 1976, when as a fresh 1st year pupil, I stood in the small hall at West Hill Secondary School with 700 other boys, ready for the morning's assembly.

Six hundred boys stood crammed into the space of a badminton court which also acted as the schools only sports hall. Suddenly there was total silence, all eyes fixed on the left-hand side of the stage. Mr. Hill, the Deputy Head had taken his position.

Those who came into contact with Mr Hill, would talk about his imposing presence, his serious nature. For those who really got to know Leon, he was a warm, highly knowledgeable, friendly, funny, immensely loyal, giving individual, firm but fair. The following are a few of the many messages from a book of condolences

*firm, fair an outstanding leader*

*Overwhelmingly, his sense of fairness and devotion to the school created an atmosphere where you were inspired*

*You were firm but fair, it's basically what you were known for, but you had a very dry sense of humour. The look that could inspire fear could have me in stitches, when the circumstances were appropriate.*

*Len was one of those rare people, a genuine gentleman*

*As well as a great educator you gave me skills to use in later life which is a rare gift, I must mention the hours of fencing training enabling myself to compete at international level, for which I am ever so grateful and which would have been unachievable without your dedication.*

*You will always be remembered by me and so many others with a positive influence in their lives.*

*Always remember him looking down at us in morning assembly and just a look would make you sing louder!*

*The deputy, the German teacher, the professor, the fastest typist on the planet, the guardian of the amazing tape copying machine and the fastest tape erasing device too, the headmaster, the saviour of retrieving data from corrupt 5 1/4" floppy disks! My fencing coach, my friend.*

Leon started fencing at the age of 17, in 1953. He was a very competitive foilist and became the North West Foil Champion in 1965. In 1963 he was selected to represent England in the annual Home International quadrangular event against Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

During the late 1960s, Leon undertook National Service, initially serving with the Royal Army Service Corps and then in a Police and Military Intelligence Officers Unit working with the Special Branch of the Cypriot Police investigating the activities of the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) during the Cyprus Emergency (Greek Cypriot War of Independence).

On completion of his National Service, Leon took up a teaching position in 1961 at West Hill Boys School in Stalybridge until moving for a brief period to become the Head of the Technical Department at Flowery Field School in Hyde in 1965.

In 1966, he relinquished his amateur status in order to devote his time to achieving coaching qualifications. These were obtained initially through the National Training Scheme and then through the Academy, passing the BAF Diploma examination in 1968 having worked alongside his lifelong friend Prof. Geoff Hawksworth.

In 1967, at the age of 31, he was appointed as the 2nd National Coach to assist Prof. Bob Anderson. His remit was to run courses for coaching awards, personal performance and presiding. He also served as Great Britain Foil Coach at two World Championships.

In 1969, he resigned his position as National Coach to return to teaching back at West Hill. Here he remained, holding the positions of Head of Science, Deputy Head, Acting Head until, in 1983, he was appointed Headmaster, a position he held until his eventual retirement from teaching in 1994.

Alongside his teaching career Leon continued with his love of fencing.

In 1961 he jointly formed Hydra Fencing Club, which was at the time one of a very small number of clubs outside London to own its own facilities. A school fencing club was started followed by the successful Hydra U-20s fencing club from which a plethora of competitive fencers came; Paul Wedge, Steven Glaister, Graham Kay, Greg and Glen Jones to name but a few.

In the mid-70s, Leon started an U-20s team competition that later became recognised as a national event.

During Leon's long service with the Academy he held many committee posts such as Chairman of the SSTT, Secretary, Vice-President. He became President in 1975, succeeding his great friend and mentor Prof. Bob Anderson.

In 1970, the BAF organised the Fencing Masters World Championships (FMWC) at Crystal Palace in London. Leon competed in the Foil and Sabre individual and team events.



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Grèce Greece	D. KEMITTOUDIS A. DONTIS J. COSTAKIS	D. KEMITTOUDIS A. DONTIS J. COSTAKIS	D. KEMITTOUDIS A. DONTIS J. COSTAKIS
Italie Italy	G. LODETTI A. DEGANI S. LIMONE A. CRISCI	A. MAESTRI O. BONATO V. PALLERNO L. MISLORINI	A. MARFETI B. STRIPANELLI B. ARDIZIOLARO
Pays Bas Holland	A. SPITZER C. van der VALK C. WOLFFERS	O. KRUISE A. NIEL C. WOLFFERS	A. SONGKORNER C. van der VALK
Suisse Switzerland	E. STARZBERGI P. CHAVERRON C. BLANC	G. DROZELLARD E. STARZBERGI F. ROMPFA	F. ROMPFA C. BLANC



Leon standing alongside George Ganchev

During his tenure as President the Academy went from strength to strength. Academy and Amateur Fencing Association coaching awards were administered jointly in a highly successful scheme. In the mid-70s he was part of joint BAF/AFA Working Party investigating the establishment of closer links between the two organisations.

Leon relinquished the Presidency of the Academy in 1995, but continued to serve as the Chairman of the SSTT for many more years. This period saw the introduction of the coaching system that exists today. He oversaw the writing of new syllabi, examination procedures, Glossary of Terminology, Key Teaching and Coaching documents amongst others.

In 2012, Leon was awarded an MBE for services to fencing. The Manchester Evening News reported this as "En Garde - Fencing Guru awarded MBE". The full article can be viewed at

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/local-news/en-garde-fencing-guru-awarded-678873>

Surprisingly to many, Leon took up golf and had professional lessons. Not surprisingly, he threw himself fully into this and studied their coaching methods and technologies, looking a ways in which good aspects might be transferred to fencing.

For more than 20 years Leon had Parkinsons Disease. He tried not to let this debilitating illness hold him back. He continued to Chair the SSTT and take an active interest in fencing until, in later life, the disease worsened.

Leon passed away on the 21st June.

He had pre-planned every detail of his funeral which took place on the 9th July. His coffin was driven slowly past West Hill School, where current and former pupils, teaching colleagues, parents, friends and family assembled to pay their final respects. It was uplifting to hear nothing but praise, appreciation and heartfelt words being spoken. Fond memories were shared, stories recounted and thank-yous expressed. It was a fitting send-off in the circumstances for such a giant of a man.

A video of the drive past can be seen at <https://www.westhillschool.co.uk/news/2021-07-09-the-funeral-of-headteacher-mr-len-hill>

On a personal basis Leon was my teacher, my fencing coach, my mentor, my President, my colleague on the SSTT, my friend, an honorary uncle to my children. He gave unconditionally and freely of his time, knowledge, advice and skills.

All Academy members will have benefited in some way from all the hard work that Leon has done in his long years of service to fencing in general and the Academy in particular. Under his chairmanship of the SSTT, we now have a coach education system that is admired internationally and support documentation that is unequalled. His legacy will live on for many years I am sure.

He will be fondly remembered but sadly missed by all who knew him.





# Circular Catch

By Kevin Nelson.

**Apparatus** : Several Tennis balls or Juggling balls  
 : Hoodie with front pocket or big pockets for leader.  
*Note : Juggling balls don't roll as far when they are dropped*

## Activity

- Everyone stands in a circle including the leader.
- All throws are underarm, thrown to be caught, at the right height, distance, & not too hard.  
*Note : So there is no such thing as a bad catch, but there is a bad throw (Build confidence).*
- You may not throw to the people directly either side of you in the circle
- You call out the name of the person that you are going to throw to, **before** you throw the ball.
- On the first round only, once the person has thrown they put their hand up, and must remember who they have thrown to, because they are only going to throw to that person.
- The final person will then throw back to the leader, and all the hands can go down.
- The second and subsequent rounds, the names are still called, before you throw, but as confidence grows the leader slowly adds more balls into the ring until several are passing round the group.
- When it collapses, collect the balls in and start again.
- If a player is already holding a ball, you may not throw to them until they have thrown that ball onto the next person.

Variation 1 : Have different size/weight balls

Variation 2 : Randomly throw to someone within the circle - but do call their name first.

**Purpose** : Getting to know your fencers names  
 : Co-ordination / distance judgement  
 : Attention span  
 : Paying attention to what is important, and not worrying about what is going on around you.

**covid** : Get them to wash/sanitise hands before and afterwards  
 : Quarantine the balls afterwards.

*If you have a game that you can share, please do so, as I am always looking for new games.  
 Kevin : Editor Academy News.*

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

E-mail [courseofficer@baf-fencing.com](mailto: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.



# Risk Taking - Is it worth the Risk?

By David Kirby

*Article submitted to the BAF Academy News Oct 2020*

We have all done risk assessments. And very useful things they are when they are done properly and with thought. But this is not about that sort of risk. This article is about the pedagogic risks you take, and the risks your fencers take on the piste.

Matthew Syed recently wrote a column in his paper on how the risk takers of the Premier League were often vilified for losing possession of the ball if they missed the target of their pass. But sometimes these passes did come off, and the results were often devastating for the opposing team. Syed quotes his colleague Gheerbrant, who says "being unafraid to mess up is incredibly important because it liberates them to try the sort of high-tariff [strokes]".

Syed goes on, "In our education system there is often too great an emphasis on giving "correct" answers to closed questions." This would apply to our coach education system as well.

So are we actually teaching coaches to pass the exam with a 'correct' answer, or are we allowing freedom of expression? Are we permitting the attainment of the goal? Or is it just the 'stroke' that has to be correct? How many points do you get on the piste for a good stroke?

Several young fencers have shown their confusion when presented with an action from their coach without spoken instruction. They show no understanding about what to do, because they have (by their own admission) always been told what to do with this next action. The stroke has always been verbalised.

The late GBR national coach, Mike Matthews, when giving a coaching master class, questioned the pupil coach with, "Why do you always tell the fencer what to do?" and went on, very tellingly, "Does their opponent tell them what to do?" So from then on it became a challenge for the coach to be able to give a meaningful routine lesson without saying a word. Although we didn't know it at the time, this was a classic example of Constraints Theory I described in Issue 100 .

So how do you know if your constraint will work? It's not like giving the context for a circular sixte parry with indirect riposte where there is a way to deliver that. Here there is no written guide - except your session planning and your own reflection afterwards. Which, of course, is worth far more than all the books together, except maybe this one - *The Coach as Reflective Practitioner* (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006) .

You need to have the courage to take (safe) pedagogic risk: basically, try it and see what happens. Try it with the small people, with plastic or foam weapons, try it with the teenagers, try it with the adults, the novices, the elite fencers. What happens? Experience, and most importantly of course, reflect.

So there you are. Be prepared to take pedagogic risk, see what happens, and reflect on the experience. Don't blindly follow the so-called expert, go and discover yourself, but reflect on the outcome and be prepared to make mistakes. Use constraints and skill in your lessons, not descriptive words. Make your athletes competitive.

### References, Books and Articles

Syed, M. (2020, Wed 30 Sep 2020). Distrust of creative talent runs through British sport – it is time for a rethink. The Times. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/allergy-to-creative-talent-runs-through-british-sport-it-is-time-for-a-rethink-jgr6m2hnp>

Kirby, D. (2019, April 2019). Extra Tools for the Fencing Coach. BAF Academy News, 2019(100), 4-5. <https://baf-fencing.com/academy-news-archive/>

Gilbert, W., & Trudel, P. (2006). The Coach as a Reflective Practitioner. In R. Jones (Ed.), *The Sports Coach as Educator: Re-conceptualising sports coaching* (pp. ch9 113-127). Routledge

This is the last article that I received from David, just before he was taken ill.

## Committee Contribution

The committee has met several times via zoom since the last issue, and each time spent most of each meeting discussing the effect of Professor Peter Stewart's Motion, on the articles of the Academy, and taking legal advice on the procedures of a limited company (and the redrafting of the same for the Academy). This has been a period of immense learning for the committee, as we have all had to become familiar with the articles of the Academy, and understand the implications of each of the carefully worded articles. There is still a great deal of work to do to bring the articles up to date. The committee being formed of volunteers, has put a great deal of time and energy into bringing them thus far.

It is essential that all activities that are undertaken by members (coaches) are risked assessed and the risk assessments are written down and dated. In order to comply with our insurers requirements, Academy members must ensure that they follow the NGB's (British Fencing's) guidelines when coaching and specifically those relating to health and safety. All equipment used must conform to the standards and specifications set by British Fencing.

## Everyone Has Something to Give!

We all go stale from time to time, and need freshening up with new ideas.

I believe that all members of the Academy have the ability to write an article for Academy News. Many of the articles published in the Academy News are **not** written by Professors, but by ordinary Members sharing their experiences. So PLEASE if you are doing something well, or have an alternative viewpoint, share it with the rest of us. Freedom of speech is important, and we all need to respect other peoples viewpoints, but before we can do that we need some viewpoints.



# Who Plans Their Lessons?

By Kevin Nelson

How many of you actually sit down and plan your lessons before you give them? Although maybe this is the wrong question. Perhaps we need to look at what is a lesson plan? And why should we use them? I hope the following will help those starting out on their coaching career to understand why planning is important.

***<sup>1</sup>First, provide novelty and variety to sustain attention, both within and between lessons.***

My experience of lesson plans started when I trained to be a science teacher (thankfully I gave that up) we were told which lesson plan format to use, and within that framework had to refer back to an imposed syllabus and timeframe. The lessons then had to be planned meticulously with learning objectives and outcomes for different levels with timings being assigned to each part of the lesson, so that all of the required lesson material was covered.

So who was this plan for? Me? the kids? or the examiners & ofsted?

I could use this style of plan only by constantly referring back to it, and it satisfied the examiners, it didn't allow for learner comprehension, and so very often failed within the classroom. Even modifying it for fencing, it just didn't work for me. So I stopped formally planning. Instead using the award syllabuses to give me an idea of what to teach - that wasn't successful either, as all my groups were mixed ability and at different levels, so I became confused at what I should be teaching to whom.

*<sup>2</sup>"I know all about practising procedures for emergencies," said Lu-Tze. "And there's always something missing."*

*"Ridiculous! We take great pains-"*  
***"You always leave out the emergency."***

Then I returned to simplified planning, where I would select a weekly topic. This admittedly worked better, but in times of stress or overwork, planning is the first thing to go. There were no overriding objectives, which meant that there was no ongoing cohesion between my lessons.

But... Lockdown gave me an opportunity to review and plan my planning!

The basic lesson format remains the same whichever system I used, and has developed throughout my planning journey. Its purpose is to provide variety, novelty, and to compartmentalise each section of the lesson into easily manageable chunks, of no more than 10-15 minutes each, It also encourages less repetition

Beginning with a **Starter** : This is typically a game for the kids, and footwork or exercise for the adults, its always good to have more than one (games for me always have to have a reason - normally a tenuous link to what your lesson objectives are).

Next comes the **Main**, this can be split into 2 or 3 items, tied to the objectives of the lesson, usually one action moving onto the next, but scenario's have their place here too.

Penultimately comes the **Plenary**, where you watch and review the fencers actions... have they understood what you've been trying to teach/coach them.

The final thing you must do is **Review** the lesson, did it work? what were its good points? where could it be improved? and write down your thoughts (this is the bit we all forget).

If you are really brave, and get on well with your learners, then the review session can involve them.



This year I have tried something slightly different, finding a planning format that actually works for me. In consultation with one of my coaches Craig Jinks ; Ch-Ch-Changes<sup>4</sup>. So rather than planning for a single week, I now plan for a whole month. With a series of connected lessons. Reviewed against the month end objective by my volunteers (coaches & referees), after watching the fencers in our club competition.

We also look for new opportunities for improvement, where appropriate feedback from fencers is also included. These opportunities are discussed and the objective for the month is chosen by mutual consent . It is no more than 6 words long, and reasonably open ended The topic for July was "Distance & Point Control"

By following this process my planning is now informed by a feedback system which hopefully provides the learners with what they need, rather than what I think they need.

### So where do I start?

With a title - which is my objective for the month (KISS).

Then I select the starters, which is usually two games, taken from my <sup>3</sup>games list. These are used for body and mind warm-up purposes.

***<sup>1</sup>Third, the "Big Picture". If the students understand the purpose of the lesson or scheme Then their Reticular Activating System will begin to open. If they accept that this purpose is personally important - in other words they want it, they take ownership of it.***

Next the Introduction, or "what we are going to learn today?" Let them understand where you wish to take their learning experience, and try and take them along with you.

The main part of the lesson, for the first couple of weeks of the month is written as a series of questions which relate back to the objective. Each question builds on the last one. During these questions, the coaches will be actively helping and demonstrating. Below is an example of one of these questions, each question has a number of subsections, activity being the most familiar, this is then followed by the constraints, i.e. what are they allowed to do in this exercise. Followed by suggestions of what the coach might be looking for.

### **Question : How far should we lunge?**

Activity : Lunge at a stooge with the stooge changing the distance each time.

#### **Constraints:**

*Each pair needs to determine the minimum, and maximum distance for a lunge.*

*The person lunging needs to set up every time with their back foot on a specified line.*

*The stooge changes the distance each time, and makes sure that the attackers arm is straight as it hits, and that the blade does not bend too much, but bends enough for a hit to register.*

#### **What is the coach looking for:**

*Encourage placement of the point, straight arm as you hit, and accuracy.*

*Encourage supinated hand, discourage twisting the wrist to hit pronated, unless suitable for the chosen target.*

*Consider speed and acceleration (But get them to start slowly).*

*Consider height of the point relative to the height of the attacker.*

*Remind them to take the point to the target, and not lift their arm up as they attack.*

*Make sure that the arm moves first, and that the arm is straight when it hits the target.*

*Remind them about the ideal bend in their blade when they hit their opponent.*

*Make sure that they bend their back leg, otherwise they will not be able to perform their longest lunge, or have any power in it when they wish to do an explosive lunge.*

On the penultimate week, the main becomes a scenario, or series of scenario's. Where the fencers are given an exercise with constraints and told to get on with it. They are encouraged to talk to one another, determining a working solution together. During the scenario's the coaches are told to answer questions, with questions, so that the answers are drawn out of the fencers. Demonstration by the coach is a last resort for the scenario - we need to produce fencers that can think independently on the piste.

The plenary is where the fencers try and put into practice what they have learned, this is usually done using a modified form of the step lunge game, or free fencing.

Finally, and in some ways the most important part - review your lesson, if you work as a team, then talk to your fellow coaches (we all talk too much anyway), find out how your lesson went from another perspective. How can you improve it for next time? Then capture those improvements as soon as possible, by adding them to your lesson plan.

### **The advantages of this approach.**

Having a plan means that you know what you are doing, and so does the rest of your team.

An advantage of compartmentalising the lesson is that you have periods of activity, followed by a natural break, but don't allow them to rest for too long, otherwise they will just sit and chat. Sometimes in these stops, add something completely different, to freshen up their minds before they return to the activity.

***<sup>1</sup> Second, understand that the brain will, give first priority to basic needs - If a student is hungry, thirsty, cold, or dying to go to the loo, they are not going to pay attention.***

Another advantage of compartmentalising a lesson is... if you are working as a team, it makes the assignment of work between the team so much easier, especially if they have read the lesson plan beforehand, as everyone is working with manageable chunks.

The fencers get continuity from this lesson style, and it makes setting and monitoring personal objectives easier.

### **Bibliography**

- 1: Five implications for teaching and learning : P32 The Teachers Toolkit : Paul Ginnis : 2007 : ISBN 1899836764
- 2: Emergencies: Thief of Time: Sir Terry Pratchett: 2001 : ISBN 0385601883
- 3: Games List: A5 booklet, used as a games reference at Cotswold Fencing Club.
- 4 : Ch-Ch-Changes: Craig Jinks: Academy News issue 108: March 2021

### **Anacronyms**

**KISS - Keep It Simple (Stupid)**

# Last Surviving Liberator of Auschwitz Dies at 98

Most of us may not have heard of David Dushman, nor why his death on June 4th in Munich should hold any interest for us.



Dushman was born on the 1st April 1923 in Danzig, the son of a military doctor in the Red Army. He himself volunteered to be a tank driver in the Red Army during the Second World War and saw action at the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, receiving more than forty decorations. In January 1945, he drove his tank over the electrified fence of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, liberating the survivors and witnessing the inhumane conditions there, without, at that time, fully knowing the purpose that these camps served. He was to say later that, “we threw them all our canned food and immediately went on to

hunt down the fascists”. During the war he suffered injury three times and was one of only 69 out of his division of 12,000 to survive.

After the war he rose through the ranks of Soviet fencers to reach international standard. He was adjudged to be the best fencer in the USSR in 1951. He then turned to coaching and was a world class coach. He coached the Soviet women’s team from 1952 to 1988. At the Munich Olympics in 1972, his fencers won two gold, two silver and three bronze medals, but it was also there that he was a witness of the terrorist attack on Israeli athletes.

In later life he moved out of Russia, first to Austria, and then to Munich in 1996. He continued to coach at a local club, attending nearly every day to give lessons, up to the age of 94. His wife, Zoja, died in Munich several years ago.



Thomas Bach, the President of the IOC and himself a former Olympic fencing champion for West

German, met Dushman in 1970 and recalled that, “he immediately offered me friendship and counsel, despite his experience of WW2 and Auschwitz, and he being a man of Jewish origin”, adding that he thought the act was “such a deep human gesture that I will never ever forget it.”

Certainly a long and interesting life, with, perhaps, some inspiration for us all.

# Don't Giggle...

By Kevin Nelson

So you are teaching a new class and getting them to put fencing kit on for the first time. Have you noticed how everyone starts giggling when you pull out the Ladies Chest protectors. The giggling usually stops when you get out your own chest protector, put it on, and show them what it does... then they ask for one that protects the tummy as well. But... the real issue is when you have a young lady who will just not fit into the largest size available; because they only go up to 38D. What do you do then? How do we comply with the rules?



This past year I have had such an opportunity, the young lady in question was a size H, and she had been fencing for a number of years. A previous coach had tried to tackle the problem and had modified a chest protector, but this hadn't worked particularly well. So she has given up wearing them when fencing, and just said "I'm used to it" but now she wanted to compete.

So reading the rules...

***"At all weapons, the use of a breast/chest protector (made of metal or some rigid material) is compulsory for women and optional for men. At foil, this breast/chest protector must be worn below the protective plastron. At foil, the protector will have the following characteristics: The entire outside of the chest protector (the side facing the opponent) must be covered with a soft material such as E.V.A. (Ethylene-vinyl acetate) of four mm thickness and density of 22kg/m<sup>3</sup>. (The material can be attached to the current plastic models or incorporated into the manufacture of new chest protectors). The material must have the SEMI technical mark at the center of the upper edge."***

*December 2019 FIE Material Rules Chapter 2 : Rule M.25, 4 (c).*

The old fashioned way putting the "soup bowls" in pockets inside the jacket, was no good at all. The pockets are in the wrong place so the protection doesn't go where it should, or stay in the same place when it is fitted, and so is useless - Over the years I have heard so many women complain about these.

Next she looked at a custom made chest protector, but the price was prohibitive, due to the necessity of making moulds. Although she did suggest throwing herself into a vacuum former to get the right size. Although as a joke we did discuss going to an armourer, and getting them to make her a chest plate, as this would probably have been cheaper. Plus having the Kudos at competitions of making her look like a Valkyrie.

So we went back to the soup bowls, and put them between two sports bra's, but this didn't work either, because the bowls were not moulded or big enough to fit the young lady and so while she was fencing they migrated round, became uncomfortable, and no longer protected what they were supposed to. The final iteration was to modify the sports bra, so that the cups were sown into the cups of the bra. She was good with a sewing needle, being used to making her own costumes for conventions. The first test of this worked surprisingly well, but then we had to break for summer.



So how many of you have had similar experiences? And what have you done about it? It does state in the rules that ladies must wear chest protectors (see above), but what is the point of wearing protection if it doesn't work, or do the job that its designed to do or actually hurts to wear it? **Please write to Academy News with your solutions to this issue**, as a coach working in the community I am aware of the growing physical size of our population and how people are being encouraged to take up sport/activity. **But if we cannot provide comfortable equipment how can we expect beginner fencers to keep fencing?**

## Awards of the Academy

By Prof. Peter Northam.

It is not common knowledge (and it should be), that the Academy has in its gift the following awards. Some are awarded by the Committee and others can be nominated by fellow members. I have given a brief outline of the reasons why an award can be bestowed; more information can be obtained from the Secretary. These awards are over and above the Academy coaching awards of Levels 1-5, Foil, Epee and Sabre, Maître d'Escrime and Maître d'Armes.

### **The Gautier Trophy.**

The highest award that the Academy can bestow, it is held for a period of four years. It is awarded to a Fencing Master who, in the opinion of the Committee, has made a great contribution to the sport of fencing.

### **Honorary Diploma**

Awarded to a member who has shown outstanding success in producing fencers at World level.

### **Life Membership**

Awarded to a member who has demonstrated loyalty, long and devoted service to the Academy.

### **Honorary Membership**

Awarded to a non-member who has been instrumental in furthering the Academy and its aims.

### **Long Service and Outstanding Service**

Awarded to a member who falls into the category of 'un-sung hero'. Quietly gets on.

### **Distinguished Service**

Awarded to a member who has contributed to the service of the Academy

### **Brian Pitman Memorial Award**

An award presented at the discretion of the Committee to a member of the Academy who has demonstrated particular skill in the promotion and/or development of Fencing for groups of young people under the age of 18.

### **Dave Jerry Bursary**

Awarded to a newly started fencing coach to help with their coach training.

**Award of Merit** (pupil's success)

**Award of Merit** (coaches success)

# Personal Memories of Leon Hill

By Bob Merry

When I became involved in fencing in the North West Region in the early 1970s, it soon became apparent that Leon had a great influence on coaching there. We were able to obtain grants from the AFA to subsidise coach education courses under the joint AFA/BAF Scheme and Leon agreed to run these courses. As a result, we were able to run two or three courses, culminating in examination boards, per year, and, by the time the joint scheme came to an end, there had been Basic (Level 2) and Intermediate (Level 3) courses in all three weapons.

Leon's forward thinking and high standards became apparent in these courses. During my first course, Basic Foil, I had given a practice lesson which I felt was quite good. I settled back waiting for Leon to confirm this, but, instead, he gave a fairly long list of notes about things that needed improvement. Sensing my dismay, he then said, "Oh, don't worry, Bob. You would have passed your Basic exam easily, but we want you to go on to Diploma". This style of encouragement continued throughout my climb up the coaching ladder. During my training for my final Diploma at Sabre, a practice board was arranged with Leon as chairman. Afterwards, he remarked, "Yes, that was a pass, but we don't just want a bare pass; we want you to smash it". His pleasure when I emerged from getting my result at the actual exam was apparent, as he gave me a massive hug.

Leon was also generous with his time in other ways. At one point, when still an Intermediate coach, I was teaching a blind woman to fence. With the lack of competitive opportunities, we concentrated on the Proficiency Award scheme then run as a joint AFA/BAF system. I could have carried out the assessment myself, but felt that I was too involved in the coaching to make an unbiased judgement, so asked Leon if he would help. He readily agreed and we successfully ran both Bronze and Silver assessments. Leon was also able to show some techniques for achieving some actions, which I had felt to be not really possible with a blind pupil.

I found Leon's own coaching style to be both inspiring and intimidating. The effortless ease with which he gave lessons, achieved through many hours of hard work and practice, was something to be admired, yet it was also off-putting as it made me wonder if I could ever reach a similar standard. (The answer, of course, is "no", but it gives a reason to continue to learn).

It was a privilege to know and to be trained by Leon and he will be missed. Through BAF courses nationally and regionally, Leon has influenced a large number of coaches. It is to be expected that his ideas and skills will be passed on by these coaches to future generations and, in this way, Leon's legacy will live on. Thank you, Professor, and R.I.P.



# Stefan Speaks

The thought of your Members' Rep.

## Where now? Who now? When now?

Over the last 18 months I was unable to meet members on B.A.F. courses or at fencing competitions, so as Members Representative I felt the only way to stay in touch was by phone. So on the nights when I was not working late, I have phoned many members and had some very interesting chats.

I discovered what they loved about B.A.F., time and again the following came out

- Quality of syllabus;
- Credibility of exams;
- Usefulness of insurance cover note;
- Not bureaucratic;
- A concentration on the fencing.
- Things we are not doing that they would like included
- More coach education in their vicinity;
- How to set up and run a club.

Members talked to me about their ideas and what they do in their clubs, yet as soon as I say how interesting that is and how other B.A.F. members would love to read about it, why not write an article in the Academy News they retreat so fast it makes an Olympic sabreur's frantic defensive back-peddalling look like it's in slow motion.

The conclusion I have come to is that members really care about B.A.F. and whilst I understand they might not have the time to take on a committee role, it **deeply saddens and frustrates me intensely** that members don't/won't turn up to a zoom meeting (no travel time/costs) especially when the changes are going to have a profound effect on B.A.F. membership and how B.A.F. will work in the future. (thus impacting the very things about B.A.F. they say they love) B.A.F. belongs to you, don't assume it will be here forever.

Stefan Leponis : Your Members Rep

Tel: 07816 423 809

Email: [membersrep@baf-fencing.com](mailto:membersrep@baf-fencing.com)

# Examination Days



Unfortunately, this year's residential coaching course at Denstone had to be cancelled due to the unavailability of the venue caused by ongoing Covid restrictions. The course would normally have provided an opportunity for many coaches to take examinations.

In light of this and the lifting of lockdown restrictions, the Academy is looking to hold a number of 'Examination Only' days. These days would provide an opportunity for individuals to take coaching examinations without the need to attend a course. There would be no organised training immediately prior to the examination days. The days would be for coaching examinations only, with examination boards and the running of the sessions being organised by the Academy.

The dates, locations and cost have yet to be finalised.

In the first instance we would like to hear from any coach who would be interested in taking an examination. This will then help inform as to demand, geographic location and weapons/levels.

If you would be interested in taking a coaching award at such an event please contact Jackie Redikin (secretary@baf-fencing.com) with the following information:

## Examination Day - Expression of Interest

Name:

Contact Email:

Contact Phone no:

Address:

Level of Examination being sought (Level 1, 2, 3, Advanced or Diploma)

Nature of Exam: Full or Part (Individual / Class\* resit)

Weapon: Foil / Sabre / Epee\*

Geographic Location: How far would you be prepared to travel for an examination?

Are you aware of a venue that may be available to hold an examination day? Yes/No\*

### 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 ( <del>£9.4</del> ) each
Key Coaching Points (Weapon specific)	£7.35 ( <del>£9.4</del> ) each
Glossary of Terms (including Translation of Fencing Terms)	£7.35 ( <del>£9.45</del> )
Employment Guidelines	£7.35 ( <del>£9.45</del> )
Teaching/ Coaching Tactics (2nd Edition)	£16.80 ( <del>£21</del> )
Examples of past written Papers for Advanced and Diploma examinations - <b>FREE</b>	
All prices include p & p. Figures in <b>RED</b> are for non-BAF members	

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