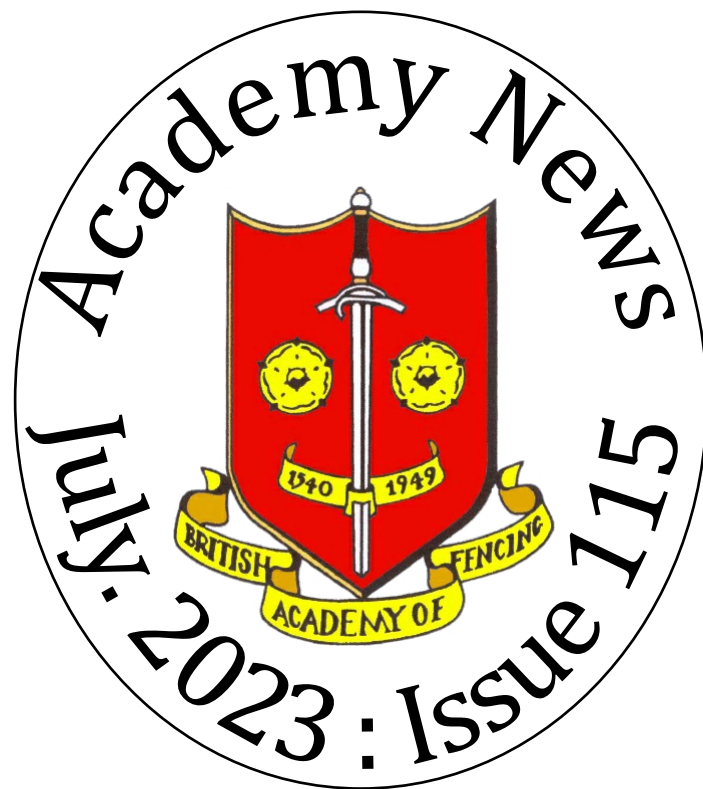


Level One Foil Course: Terrington, North Yorkshire.

By Maitre Donald Walker



From the 17th to the 21st of July I ran a level one Foil course in Terrington. I was ably assisted in this by Jack Stockdale and Robin Stevens. We also had the pleasure of Professor Peter Northam's help on the Thursday. This was particularly helpful to me as I wanted to illustrate the differences between coaching and teaching, and the level two coaching question is on footwork. I'm still awaiting a new hip, so cannot demonstrate footwork.

The course was partially sponsored by ACTT (Actors Combat Theatrical Training) and the chairperson of the equity fight director register (Andrew Ashenden) and eight of the fourteen attendees are Equity apprentices.

All of the attendees were incredibly hard working and showed a thorough commitment to passing their level one.

As I believe in setting a high bar, we were looking at level two questions as well as introducing the concept of the routine lesson.

Eleven of the group gained their level one foil and eight also gained their gold foil award.



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Welcome to the Academy News

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Contributions to Kevin Nelson by 31st October 2023

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British Academy of Fencing



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The President 's Piece.....

This Academy News is the most important issue of my Presidency.

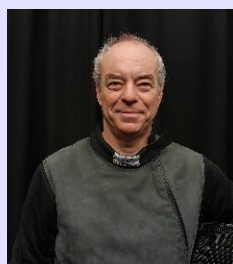
I can announce that the President of England Fencing, (recently elected in November 2022 for a four year term) Peter Howes and the Committee, are working together and exploring ways of making high quality coach education and development available throughout the country and supporting existing coaches with continuing professional development in a structured manner.

We have already had phone calls, emails, a zoom meeting and a face-to-face meeting. The Committee is now fully informed and now its time to tell you. We are still in the development phase and discussions are on-going but there is an excellent relationship forming. We have had an explorative meeting which was very constructive.

This coach education training will be using the British Academy of Fencing syllabus which will include class lessons and individual lessons at all three weapons. The emphasis will be sword in hand skills to include footwork, bladework, timing, distance, speed and tactics; in fact, all that is needed to produce an all-round effective fencer. And it will all be done in an enjoyable environment. All coaches have three brains; one in their head, the other in their hand and the last one in their feet! Coaches will be expected to improve all three.

We will be working at all levels and at three weapons, providing training for coaches at Levels 1-5 not forgetting welcoming new coaches on the team. We on the Committee are very excited about this development and look forward very much to this joint co-operation.

Prof. Peter Northam,
President: British Academy of Fencing
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I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the Academy News, your efforts are always appreciated. It is good to see new perspectives.

Kevin: Editor



Is It Time to Put Away Childish Things?

By Alan Grafton

The aphorism about “learning from the past” has provided many Philosophers, Wits, and Public Speakers the chance to coin a memorable phrase; Edmund Burke (18th Cent British Philosopher/Politician) said (in ‘Reflections on the Revolution in France’) “People who never look back to their ancestors will not look forward to posterity”, George Santayana (Spanish

Philosopher/Novelist – I had to look him up) said (in ‘The Life of Reason: Vol. I, Reason in Common Sense’) “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” and Sir Winston Churchill (him I knew about) is reported to have said (in a 1948 Speech to the House of Commons) “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it”.

So what has this got to do with fencing? Well, I like history; I am not very good at it but I have always been interested in it and so as a fencer I became interested in the History of Fencing. An elderly fencer I know was aware of my interest and offered me their collection of The Sword, stretching back to the late 50’s, and they are a fascinating read.

Looking at the Summer 1963 edition (Vol. XVI, No 2) there is an article by J.D. Aylwood. Aylwood was a prolific writer, enthusiastic swordsman and historian and a founding member of our Academy. His article is entitled “As You Were” and begins thus:

“During the last fifty or sixty years the art of arms has become increasingly the art of dodging reality. The hidden hand has piled Pelion upon Ossa in the matter of absurdities” [I had to look this up, too. It means to add difficulty to difficulty, a more modern phrase might be “add insult to injury”.] “and what was once the most manly of exercises has been emasculated until it has been debased to the level of a children’s pastime”

At first reading I was unsure as to whether this comment was to be taken tongue in cheek, but the rest of the Article examines how swordplay throughout the 18th and 19th centuries was still a necessary practice for personal protection and might well involve ‘Broken heads’ and ‘bruises in every part’.

Aylward talks of his own experiences at the London Fencing Club in the late 1800's (he was born in 1870, so would have been in his 90s at the time of writing his article!) when "It was the custom of the members in their less strenuous moments to break foil blades..." and that members had to be "induced...to wear stout leather jackets and thigh pads." so I think he was probably being sincere .

"Yes," you say "but what has this got to do with fencing today?" Well, my answer is that I wonder if, in the mind of the Public, fencing is sometimes seen as a children's pastime. Before the pandemic, for a number of years, one of my clubs gave fencing demonstrations at a local Fete. We had a space roped off and three Pistes (lengths of carpet runner pegged down) fencing foil, epee and sabre; we did half an hour on, 45 minutes off and we could get three sessions in during the day. While the fencing was going on, a number of us would schmooze the crowd, flyers in hand, trying to drum up trade.

My tactic, a few minutes into the demonstration, was to approach the side of the Arena and ask "So, do we have any potential fencers here?" Almost every time, the response of the Adults was to look towards the children they might have with them and say "Well, I don't know. What do you think, would you like to try it?" (this last to the children). "No, " I would cry "I mean you as well!"

We all know fencing is a Sport for Life; not just a sport that you can DO all your life, but a sport that you can START at any time of life. Yes, if you aspire to elite successes, then you can't start (or restart, as I did) in your 30's but how many 9-year olds think "I want to win an Olympic medal, so I'll start Fencing"? More often it's the PARENT who suggests it - it's certainly the parent that pays and who drives/accompanies the kid to training.

My point is that if we want to grow the sport then our marketplace is greater than the school games lesson or afterschool activity session with runaround warm up games and (relatively) easily reached targets. We need to celebrate the fact that ours is a difficult sport and that it takes time and maturity to master the techniques and to learn and understand the terminology but that the process of doing so will be interesting, enjoyable and worthwhile (and as Coaches it is our job to develop an interesting syllabus and deliver sessions that are enjoyable and worthwhile).



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www.baf-fencing.com



Ok, Alan so put your money where our mouth is, where else might a Market be found?

Stay at Home Parents

Let's say a parent chooses to leave the workspace to take care of an infant and stays in a Caring role throughout the pre-school years. Once the child is in Fulltime education, that parent may not want or be able to return to Employment but might want something to fill the empty space left by the Little One's escape to Big School. Daytime TV? Workout at the gym? No! Afternoon Fencing!

30 Somethings

So a Young Person has worked hard through 6th Form and College, graduated with a good degree and has put in a number of years discovering and establishing a base in a suitable and satisfying career. Time for some FUN! Nights in the Pub or Club? Evenings on the couch watching Netflix (other streaming services are available). No! Fencing!

Parents of Independant Teenagers

Having raised a child through the Pre-school and Primary years, said child is now a responsible and independent Teenager with their own circle of friends. Does that parent sit at home worrying about drugs and alcohol and 'boogie-woogie music' (as Aylwood himself might have said) when the child is out with those friends? No! They go Fencing!

And so...

- ***Parent that might want to re-establish a link/share a hobby with a child***
- ***A newly single 40-something that lost their circle of friends in the separation settlement***
- ***The Unemployed***
- ***The Retired***
- ***Those that "Used to fence once"***
- ***Those that "Have always wanted to try"***
- ***etc.***

Ours really is a Sport for All (all the above should be taken to include disabled and non-disabled persons and those with or without a sensory impairment) but how do we reach all these people? I have no idea, I have no marketing skills at all. If any Member has successfully entered any of these markets (or any not mentioned) would they care to share?



Chat Bot Interviewed About Fencing!

By Nick Chapman

AI seems to be all over the news at the moment, especially ChatGPT. For those of you who don't keep up with the news (and who can blame you) essentially ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence accessible by anyone via the internet. It produces text in response to questions or requests. The news would have you believe it is very good and whilst it might make occasional factual mistakes it reads like human speech. So I thought I would give it a try, and being a fencing coach I thought I would have the best chance of assessing its accuracy if I asked it questions on a subject I knew something about.

Initially I decided to go with a set of three questions, and each time I gave it two opportunities to answer.

My questions were 'Explain why Foil is better than Epee', 'Explain why Epee is better than Sabre' and final (inevitably) 'Explain why Sabre is better than Foil'.

It's difficult to say whether foil is definitively better than epee, as both weapons have their own unique characteristics and are used in different ways.

Firstly, I have to say I was pleased that it doesn't take up the bias implicit in the question, and in all six cases the text read like speech, was coherent (and that's more than I am sometimes) and both the intro and the conclusions were reasonable positions.

It's not accurate to say that foil is "better" than epee, as they are both different weapons used in the sport of fencing, with their own unique rules and techniques. Each weapon has its own advantages and disadvantages, and the choice of which weapon to use often comes down to personal preference and style.

However, the bulk of the content demonstrated a very poor understanding of the weapons and little appreciation for the character of each weapon, or for that matter the rules of each weapon. It chose to talk about the tactical differences without the wisdom to understand that its lack of depth of knowledge made such assertions at best unfounded at worst nonsensical.

Some of my favourite mistakes.

Epee, on the other hand, has a target area that includes the entire body, and hits can be made with the tip or the sides of the blade.

In epee, any hit with the tip of the weapon is considered valid, regardless of the amount of force used.

In sabre, hits must be made with the edge or tip of the blade, and there are specific rules about the amount of force and angle of the blade that must be used.

Some of it's more contentious comments

Foil is often considered a more technical weapon than epee.

In epee, fencers may be more willing to close the distance and engage in close combat.

Favourite contradiction between first and second answer

Epee, on the other hand, has a target area that includes the entire body... This can result in a slower, more strategic style of fencing, as fencers may focus on waiting for an opportunity to strike rather than making quick attacks.

This means that in epee, fencers can be more aggressive and take more risks with their attacks.

Favourite stupid comment

In sabre, fencers may be more focused on quick and aggressive attacks to the upper body, since that is the only valid target area.

A colleague suggested that I try being more specific in my question, after all he would have questioned the premise of my question 'what do you mean by better'. He tried a more specific 'what are the Fencing right of way rules?'

The response was once again coherent, and intelligible, with a good intro and ending.

In fencing, the right of way refers to the rule that determines which fencer has priority in attacking and scoring a touch in a given situation. The right of way rules can be complex, but here are the basic principles:

- 1. The fencer who initiates an attack has the right of way.***
- 2. If two fencers attack simultaneously, the fencer who started their attack first has the right of way.***
- 3. If a fencer's attack misses or is parried, the right of way switches to the other fencer.***
- 4. If a fencer's attack is blocked by their opponent's blade, but the fencer continues the attack without stopping, they retain the right of way.***
- 5. If a fencer's attack is blocked and they stop their movement, the right of way switches to the opponent.***

It's important to note that the right of way is not absolute and can change multiple times in a single action. Fencers need to be aware of their opponent's movements and actions to determine who has the right of way at any given moment.

But however good the content is the failure to point out that at Epee there is no right of way make the answer at best incomplete and at worst misleading.

Next, we tried 'What are the right of way rules for foil?'

Again, a good intro, good conclusion, and this time fairly good content in the middle, spoilt only by poor use of technical terms (it keeps calling the offensive action after a successful parry a counterattack rather than a riposte).

In one answer it referred to the action following the parry, first as a counterattack, and then an attack, when actually it is neither, it's a riposte.

The AI has the right idea it's just not quite applying the terminology correctly, it's not understanding that in a technical environment, words take on a new meaning very specific to that context, not necessarily the same as the general usage or dictionary definition (perhaps all that is required is for AI to access to a vastly expanded dictionary where all technical uses of words are included, oh, but isn't that what the internet is?).

Given that limitation, it is a 'chat' bot therefore the ability to ask follow up questions, seeking clarity, does in part mitigate problems from the initial lack of clarity (though this requires you to understand the initial ambiguity on order to realise to ask the additional question). It makes it a tool for exploring rather than a simple answer generator. Perhaps the error was in my preconception of what I was going to get, rather than in the AI's performance.

Either way, whatever you think of its ability now consider the recent speed of development and consider where it might be in two or five years time (what I accessed was ChatGPT 3.5, and ChatGPT 4 is already available, at a price. ChatGPT 4 is, by all reports, far better). Will we get to a stage where AI will ask questions in return, making the interaction into a genuine conversation? Will it be able to use this to solve its contextual accuracy problems. Is there a point in the future where a fencer will be able to upload footage of their fight and the AI to then asks questions about the context before suggesting training opportunities? Let's face it lots of coaches (in all sorts of sports, not just fencing) use video, augmented by slow motion and computer analysis software, to assess athletes' technique. Arguably AI is already capable of making that analysis faster and probably capable of taking in more data, simultaneously considering more aspects of the action, the question is how long before it learns to generate more accurate or more useful conclusions.

My conclusion, based on this first and very basic and limited interaction with the program, is that we are not going to see AI authoring any bestselling books on fencing in the near future. Don't get me wrong, I think it is amazing that AI has got to the point that it can articulate itself in flowing and understandable English, can take a balanced position, can provide context to its position and perhaps most amazingly of all can do it in a couple of second (I'm guessing it actually does it milliseconds and the fact that the text appears on the screen more slowly is just it's attempt not to intimidate me). However, it needs to learn/be taught to delve deeper into technical subjects, better interpret the application of words in a technical environment. Thus, allowing it to give an answer that has contexts related accuracy, real meaning, an answer that is going to convince anyone with more than a few months experience of, for instance, fencing. Given the recent speed of AI advancement I am sure this won't be far into our future. Part of me is pleasantly relaxed knowing that the computers will not be taking over the world just yet....another is marvelling on the threshold that we are approaching....and yet another is panicking about how many people will believe the nonsense AI will currently answer with!



Comfort Blankets or Less is More

By Craig Jinks

I wanted to talk to you about a bugbear of mine – over-coaching at competition.

In a work context we have a very clear distinction between the role of a mentor and the role of a coach – a mentor describes what they would have done in a particular situation, to help the student/mentee take that next step, whereas a coach asks them the questions that allow the student to work out what the right move is for them.

In sport coaching, we often have to wear both hats at times – sometimes instructing, sometimes coaching. Both have their moments... apart from in the middle of a competition.

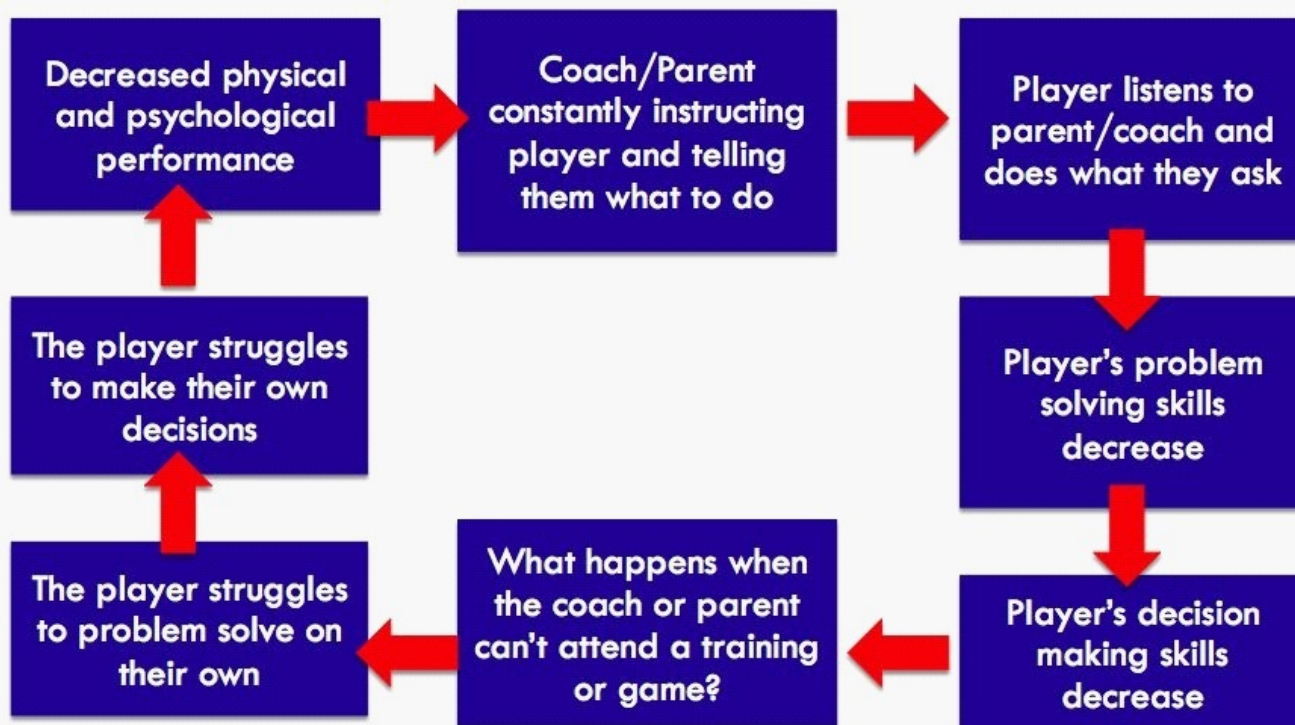
I see it a lot and I'm sure you have... the warm-up lesson that includes a lot of telling off, the mid competition lecture and a run through some drills, or worst of all, you hear instructions being shouted from the end of the piste between points (even during points). And the result in each situation... a confused fencer now double guessing themselves, or focusing too much on what you've just instructed them to do. (I'll admit here that I used to love it when an opponent was getting end of the piste coaching during a bout, because I knew exactly what they were going to try next – think about that 😊)

What are you trying to do in that situation as a coach?

If you're trying to teach them not to think for themselves, then carry on.

I'm not joking...

The following infographic is from a New Zealand Youth Sport site 'Balance is Better'. The article it appears in, "Unknown Damage from the Touchline", touches on the same issues.



I'd go so far as to say that if you're giving technical advice, beyond expected reminders like "remember your distance", "relax" - you need to stop. A fencer with any kind of experience is, at that moment, trying to work out what to do... they don't want to also be worrying about how to do it as well.

We need to think hard about the role we take at competition, about the needs of our students and what is best for them in the long term. With positive only support from the piste end - you'll achieve far more with applause and 'well done's for the right tactic/approach to a point than you ever will with instruction from the sides. Ex-England Rugby Coach Eddie Jones on match situations:

"We kid ourselves that we're important during the game, but we're not. The players are the important ones. We can send out one or two messages, that sometimes help, sometimes it doesn't help. You want to get to the situation where players take the decision on the field."

But what about the rest of the day?..

The coach (in coaching mode) has a lot of value on competition day. Yes, they can be invaluable in observing and helping athletes solve problems, but their main role I'd describe as comfort blanket - simply, doing whatever your athlete needs to be in the best frame of mind for the competition.

Internationally renowned coach educator Wade Gilbert, in his book 'Coaching Better Every Season' talks about the common mistake of over-coaching in competitive situations. He goes on to add that, while effective coaches generally adopt a 'less is more' approach in competition contexts, they play more than a passive role. Instead, they will spend more than 50% of their time silently observing and the remainder encouraging with support and praise, and providing concise feedback and reminders during natural breaks or 'teachable' moments.

So, ask yourself the question – do I know what works best for my athlete(s) in that situation? Is the most effective coaching you can give them to remind them that they know how to do this, to help them relax and keep composed, and help them learn how to solve their own problems on the piste.

And while you're at it – role model for their club mates and parents. Help them understand the difference between vocal support, helping their friend/child and going too far.

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<https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/the-unknown-damage-caused-from-the-touchline/>
<https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/no-coach-is-an-island-coaching-in-competition/>

Gilbert, Wade: Coaching Better Every Season (2016)

PS - This article came about because of a chat between Nick Chapman & I at the Public Schools Championships (Sabre day). He was looking for his pupil, and found mine instead. Luckily the two pupils were friends, so his pupil and mine weren't far apart. We fell to discussing how we both had a hands off approach at a competition, and how it was important for the development of the fencer not to be told what to do, but to be allowed to make their own decisions on the piste. BUT... being there for your fencer, to give them the mental support they need while the bout progresses. Also the importance of reviewing their performance at the right point afterwards, and that might be after they've had a shower, and had time to calm down. Kevin: Editor.

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The study guides are being reviewed and re-written,



It is essential that all activities that are undertaken by members (coaches) are risk 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.



Malcolm in his Museum

Visit to The National Fencing Museum, Friday 28th April 2023

By Prof. Peter Northam

Over many years I had promised myself a visit to Malcolm Fare's private fencing museum. I wish I hadn't taken so long! After a couple of emails, Malcolm agreed the above date, so it was on. I turned up around 10.30 and was welcomed with a cup of coffee.

Malcolm took me to a purpose-built building, pointing out some advertising boards in the windows from the 2012 Olympics, these he rescued from a skip. Entering the building I was immediately faced with display cases of Foils, Epee's and Sabres, pictures on walls, original costumes and shoes. These were items not of military significance, but devoted solely to the sport of fencing. I was taken through several rooms; stacked full of weapons, original manuscripts of fencing manuals, trophies from now defunct competitions, medals awarded to past fencing masters, portraits of said masters. All this accompanied by Malcolm's commentary of what the items were and the stories behind how he acquired them, absolutely fascinating! and this is only a brief description!!

I spent a wonderful 2½ hours, that went like a flash, absorbing this wonderful collection. I came back with a determination to visit again; I have more questions for Malcolm!

Remember, this is a private museum and any visit must be made by prior arrangement. If you are interested in the history of fencing, I highly recommend a visit.

Thank you, Malcolm.

**Visit by appointment:
contact Malcolm Fare, 01684 311994,
malcolm.fare@gmail.com**





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.

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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.**

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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.

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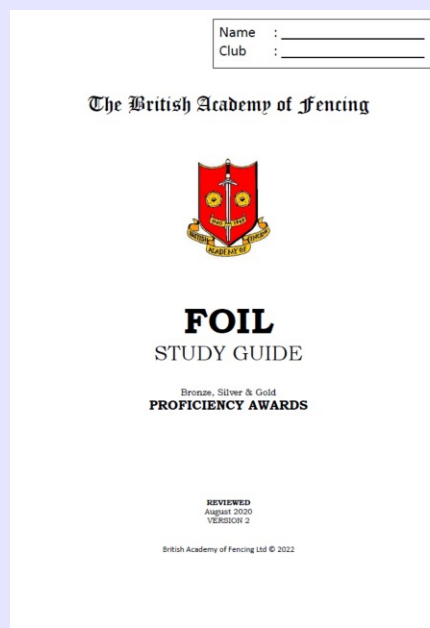
Foil Study Guide

The Foil Study Guide Version 2 is now available. It has been completely rewritten, which is why it has taken so long, and there have been some minor changes made to the syllabus. Changes reflect the character of the weapon, rules update, introduction to refereeing, a more pupil centred approach, as well as including some new photo's. The cost has increased to £7.50 which includes postage.

Order your copies now....

From Maitre Donald Walker

proficiencyawards@baf-fencing.com





If Not Then, When?

By Prof. Phil. Carson

In Academy News (Reply was in Academy News August 2022 edition 112, which was referencing "The Coaching Emperor is Wearing no Clothes" published in Feb 2022 issue 111) I wrote of the need for some thought leadership around coaching pedagogy and received a reply along the lines that the BAF was the best and didn't need to change. I have since found that view is strong amongst some BAF coaches, but have been wondering what that view is based on and why the coach education systems of much more successful countries and cutting edge research on developing coach expertise, have been rejected.

In 2014, David Kirby published his seminal MPhil thesis entitled, "From Piste to Podium, A Qualitative Exploration of the Development of Fencing Coaching in Britain". It delves into the reasons why Britain's approach to coaching has presided over a decline in performance in the previous 40 years and provides signposts to necessary improvements to halt the trend. Elsewhere in the same period, the ideas about how to teach and coach fencing have moved on from technical instructor to that of biopsychosocial educator. The coach is now someone who embraces complexity and not only technical knowledge, but also the "ologies" and pedagogy. "...coaching practitioners requir[ing] not only expansive technical knowledge of their sport but also the pedagogical skills of a teacher, the counselling skills of a psychologist, the training expertise of a physiologist, and the administrative leadership of a business executive." Now, nearly 10 years on, the picture has changed little. David's findings were that we needed a pathway towards expertise and that the current coach education programmes in the UK are not up to the task. They self-evidently remain inadequate. As high performing coaches develop their skill through reflective practice and experience, so too should the programme providers themselves, after all "ten years of coaching without reflection is simply one year of coaching repeated ten times."

Coach education in the UK remains to this day instructional, skills based and over simplified, whereas other countries have embraced the complexity of coaching and professionalised their approaches. Coaching is as much pedagogical as it is technical, a point I have made several times and one that continues to be rejected. The evidence of this point is overwhelming in the literature, so it is questionable why the NGBs and other coaching organisations continue to reject any discussion about pedagogy. In the absence of thinking and development of pedagogy, coaches in the UK will remain behind the curve. We cannot continue replicating a template that is now over 20 years old, especially when as a project it has failed to affect any change in the now 50 year decline in British fencing.

Some of the important sections in David's work include an exploration of how coaches learn, the professionalisation of coaching and the need to move from a system based on beliefs to one that is built on evidence. He also identifies a well regarded definition of coaching effectiveness, which is a combination of coach knowledge, coach expertise (experience) and athlete results. With a more contemporary evidence-based approach to coaching, it will necessarily mean that coach educators are qualified and able to handle the -ologies and pedagogy in a way that is practical and meaningful to coach candidates.

So long as GB insists on outdated teaching and educational practices, ignoring developments in coaching expertise and skill acquisition, it will remain an anachronism. The problems and potential solutions were identified by David nearly ten years ago. Surely we cannot expect different results from doing things the same way year in, year out? We need change and David provides a great starting point for the discussion. The issue then is when that discussion is to take place. **If not now, then when?**

David's thesis, complete with all references above, can be read in full here:

<https://theses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/5849/1/Kirby15MPhil.pdf>

Coaching Courses and Examinations



Coaching courses do not have to be run by full fencing masters. Anyone can organise a coaching course. However, it is important that the person delivering the training, as in any other discipline, has the appropriate knowledge, experience and skills. The level of knowledge, experience and skill required will be dependant upon the type and standard of training being provided.

However, for assessments and examinations there are a number of rules set down by the Academy.

Level 1 assessments may be conducted by either a Level 4 (Advanced) coach, a Provost, Maître d'escrime or a full Master. The qualifications held by the assessor must be in the same weapon that is being assessed. There is no minimum qualification for the coach undertaking the training of an individual for a Level 1 award.

An application to hold Examinations for Level 2 through to Diploma must be made to the Secretary of the Academy. It is then for the committee to consider the application and form the necessary boards. The Secretary of the Academy will also be able to advise on the costs of setting up examinations.

All assessors and examiners must be current members of the Academy.

For further guidance please contact Prof. Andy Vincent. vicepresident1@baf-fencing.com



A Mirror to the Self.

By Kevin Nelson

I had just arrived at a prep school and was signing in (in their staff room) when I noticed a couple of books on the shelf... During one of my clubs that week I had seen first hand a shutdown in a young lad, and must admit I wasn't quite sure what to do, but his father did. So I borrowed the following two books from the staffroom hoping to gain a greater insight into what had happened and why. The books are written from the point of view of an autistic person, are easy to understand, and quick to read, just like a comic. But just be warned you might feel like a hypochondriac reading a medical textbook. Some of the symptoms mentioned are quite normal for all of us! Where the books become useful is giving some clues towards potential coping strategies, as do the websites of the National Autistic Society, and the NHS.

'The girl with the curly hair visual guide' series.

Asperger's Syndrome in 8-11 Year Olds: Alis Rowe: ISBN9781511611893

This book looks at some of the typical symptoms of those with Autistic spectrum disorder, and suggests some coping strategies that might help alleviate some of the issues that people on the spectrum face every day.

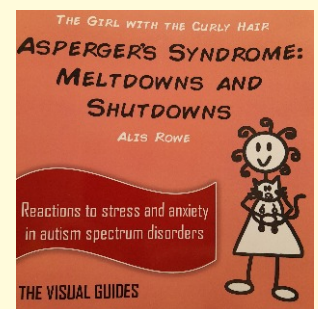
Asperger's Syndrome: Meltdowns and Shutdowns: Alis Rowe: ISBN9781507814864

This book deals with why the person with ASD can struggle with a neurotypical world. What their reactions to stress might be and how the neurotypical can help them cope.

After some further reading around the subject. Autism seems to be defined by its own symptoms, and any definition seems to refer to the symptoms of the condition.

"Autism is not an illness

- Being autistic does not mean you have an illness or disease. It means your brain works in a different way from other people.
- It's something you're born with. Signs of autism might be noticed when you're very young, or not until you're older.
- If you're autistic, you're autistic your whole life.
- Autism is not a medical condition with treatments or a "cure". But some people need support to help them with certain things."¹



Some of the Signs of Autism and Some Potential Strategies

The good point of autism being referred to as a spectrum, is that people display different aspects and strengths of it. Fencing is a sport that is good for self-control, co-ordination, it can have a structured environment, with minimal social interaction, or a more formalised socialisation. We wear a mask so eye contact is not so intimidating. Therefore fencing can be good for an autistic person encouraging their self-confidence, helping them to develop their own coping strategies.

Social Interaction

Autistic people often have difficulty reading other people, whether it is body language, or tone of voice. They tend to take things literally, and can struggle with abstract concepts. As it is referred to as a spectrum some have a good command of language whereas others barely speak. They can have trouble recognising emotions in others and find difficulty in expressing their own. Sometimes they just need a little more time to process the information.

Potential Strategies

- Use their name, when you start talking to them so they know you are talking to them.
- Engage them through their current interests.
- When explaining say less, and slow it down, so they are able to process the information.
- Use less body language when explaining.
- Be aware of the environment, are there too many distractions (i.e. People talking loudly), for the autistic person to be able to process the information you are imparting. Can you create a physical block between two groups who are practicing different things.
- Set up a process for time-out, when they are feeling overwhelmed, so they can quickly let you know that they are going into a quiet space.
- If you have to say “**NO**” then explain why afterwards (Safety issue).
- Or say “Yes”, but we have to do this first (When they are trying to get their own way).

Routines

Autistic people often have set routines, this is a way that they can have some control over a confusing world full of unspoken rules. So a change to their routines can make them feel very anxious. They may also have a behaviour that will calm them when they feel anxious - Rocking, hand flapping, or some other form of repetitive action. But be aware, sometimes they do it just because it makes them feel good.

Potential Strategies

- Increase structure in your fencing sessions, this is where lesson plans help. (Greeting/Starter/Main/Plenary) Is your equipment always in the same place? Encourage them to have their own equipment to look after.
- Reflect after sessions to understand the behavioural triggers, and how to avoid them. Is the behaviour to block out stimulation, or to reduce their anxiety?

Sensory Overload

Autistic people may be over or under sensitive to... light, smells, touch, tastes, pain, and can be overwhelmed by them. Many of these will not come up in a fencing environment, but some will...

Potential Strategies

- How often do you wash club kit? Do they complain about the smell? If you use febreze to mask the smell, do they complain about that too? Can you use non-scented washing powder? Make sure you wash the kit regularly.
- Always ask permission before touching the person, where possible approach from the front.
- Encourage the use of chest protectors.

Single Focus Hobbies/Interests.

Many autistic people have highly focused hobbies or interests, they can become experts in their special interests. Interests give them focus, provides structure, and can give them a way to start conversations. But these interests can also take over their life, causing significant disruption.

Meltdowns and Shutdowns

Sometimes its all too much, and the autistic person goes into a meltdown or a shutdown.

A *meltdown* is where the person is completely overwhelmed, and the response is physical or verbal, lashing out or screaming.

A *shutdown*, is where they freeze, and feel they can no longer interact with the world.

Potential Strategies

- Give them a quiet space to find their own mental equilibrium. It may take longer than you think.
- They may need someone they can instinctively trust/love to be with them (Parent).
- Often there are signs that a meltdown/shutdown is about to happen, do you know what those signs are, or what will trigger it? Can you get them into a quiet space before it happens. **Avoidance is always preferable.**
- Do they know themselves when they are about to be overwhelmed and do something to take themselves out of it (like repeatedly asking to go to the toilet).
- If you know what the likely signs are, can you write your lesson plans to minimise the chances of a meltdown or shutdown happening.
- They may need more “comfort blanket” style support at a competition.

Potential Further Reading

1: NHS Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/what-is-autism/> : 29/5/23.

2: National Autistic Society Website: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism> : 30/5/23

Do you Sell Fencing Kit in Great Britain?

By Howard Wheeler

For years UK fencing coaches have sold fencing kit, in the distant past mainly from Leon Paul, but over time and often via international connections, from foreign suppliers and manufacturers. When these were outside the EU, nothing legally has changed since Brexit, even though most never realised their significant legal responsibilities. When the supply was from the EU those responsibilities were much less.



Now since Brexit that has all changed even for CE marked kit sold in Great Britain (GB).

There is no doubt that small scale supply is usually 'under the radar', and you probably think that even if an accident occurred you would be unlikely to be held to task. But you should at least know the potential risks you run even if you think they are extremely small. Some enterprises may have grown to a much larger scale being more obvious to the UK Authorities. Either way, it may only take a complaint to wake the Authorities up especially if an accident or environmental issue occurs. For jackets, masks, and breeches we have all become used to CEN level 1 and 2, and possibly the CE mark that 'sits behind' this. For Britain CE marking is now changing. Some may have already seen the replacement UKCA mark, from the end of 2027 CE marking will no longer have any status in GB. UKCA has the same CEN marking requirements.



Although the issues below are very dry, complicated, and boring, for manufacturers and sellers, they unfortunately are extremely important with possible serious legal implications.

The UK left the EU at the end of 2020, since then any importer into GB who bought new (or even second hand) fencing stock for resale from the EU (and even Northern Ireland) suddenly became an Importer rather than a Distributor. Manufacturers, Importers and Distributors are all legally defined roles. There is also something called a Manufacturer's Authorised Representative, but it would be surprising if any exist in the UK for fencing equipment. Under these product regulations you are only an Importer if you resell. If you just use the kit for yourself, you are not an 'Importer'. Importers have very significant legal responsibilities. They are responsible for all safety and possibly environmental aspects of the kit they sell. If ever so asked by the UK's Authorities, Manufacturers and Importers must supply the relevant technical information. Non-UK manufacturers do not have to follow UK regulations, Importers however do.

List of applicable UKs UKCA (or CE) marking Product Regulations

	PPE Regs	Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regs	RoHS Regs	Electromagnetic Compatibility Regs	Radio Equipment Regs
Jackets	Yes				
Breeches	Yes				
Gloves	Yes				
Electric jackets			Yes		
Electric gloves	Yes		Yes		
Foil masks (electric)	Yes		Yes		
Epee masks	Yes				
Sabre masks (electric)	Yes		Yes		
Mask wires			Yes		
Mains powered boxes		Yes	Yes	Yes (but could be 'trumped' by Radio Regs)	Yes, if radio communications on board
Battery powered boxes			Yes	Yes (but could be 'trumped' by Radio Regs)	Yes, if radio communications on board
Ground wires			Yes		
Spools			Yes		
Wireless boxes			Yes		Yes
Wireless accessories		N/A (Radio Regs 'trump' EESRs)	Yes		Yes
Electric foil			Yes		
Electric Epee			Yes		
Electric sabre			Yes		

Failure to do so can result in heavy fines and even possibly imprisonment. The Authorities only request the information if there is a possible safety or an environmental issue, they should not ask just because they feel like it even if they think you are not following the rules. UK based manufacturers (and any UK Authorised Representative) have the same responsibilities, thereby relieving UK sellers from the more complicated requirements.

UK manufacturers and GB Importers must be able to supply for EACH equipment model a Declaration of Conformity and a detailed Technical File showing how that model meets any applicable UK Regulation. They also must be certain that this information is accurate and correct. For a few products (e.g. those with radio devices), the Declaration must also be sent with the product to the end user.

The UKCA mark (or until 31 December 2027 the CE marking) must be on each item (or if not practicable, the packaging or documentation). If you import you also need to ensure a 'Prime Importer', who could be you, is also marked on the product or the documents accompanying the fencing kit. Different UK regulations apply to different types of fencing kit. Below is a table showing which regs I would expect fencing kit to meet. Other regulations exist but, in most instances, these would not apply (note plastic swords and related items may however fall under the Toys Regulations).

Over recent years more and more regulations have become applicable to much more equipment and it would be interesting to know if our UK manufacturer(s) realise this and do meet all the regulations above.

Where there is a UKCA mark there must be a UKCA Declaration of Conformity. Where there is a CE mark there must be an EU Declaration of Conformity.

Each UKCA Declaration of Conformity **must list all the relevant** UK regulations and any CE Declaration of Conformity must list the equivalent EU Directives. It is the manufacturer's responsibility to ensure that all the correct regulations are listed but is it also the Importer's responsibility to ensure that the manufacturer is doing their job properly for the products they import and sell.

Fines can be as high as £10,000 and/or 3 months imprisonment. Equipment can also be stopped at Customs or impounded when inside GB.

There is frequently an issue with manufacturers not wanting to release their Technical File to GB Importers to hold. Unfortunately the law then requires for the Importer to either stop selling the product or only sell once the manufacturer has set up a UK Authorised Representative to work for them and to hold the file on UK soil. The basic requirement is that someone accountable under UK law holds the Technical File and keeps it available for up to ten years after the last one is sold!

Even UK Distributors must ensure the manufacturer is marked on the product or the documentation, that it is UKCA or CE marked and if imported, Importer details are also marked on any product they sell.

So basically if you import to sell (1) ensure relevant equipment is UKCA (or for the present CE) marked, (2) keep a copy of the Declaration of Conformity and check that it is correct (as well as the above list other requirements exist on the declaration), (3) hold a copy of the Technical File or absolutely ensure that someone in the UK holds it, (4) be certain that the Technical File is complete and holds all the relevant info (can be quite a task), and (5) keep the declaration and the file for ten years after you sell the last item covered.

Or maybe you will just decide to take the risk?

Howard Wheeler is a Principal Consultant for Finch Consulting, a Chartered Engineer, has worked with and providing training on CE for many decades and UKCA since it came into force. He is an occasional fencer and a member of the BAF having passed a BAF level 2 coaching course many years ago.

Letters

Last year I wrote a letter about badly behaved fencers. In the main, however, it was my great pleasure to work with pupils at all levels who were eager to learn and a pleasure to teach/coach. I'd like to mention a few.

Andrew, started in primary school and left for university at the age of 18. He invented a very unorthodox style and was incredibly fast. He won many medals, usually gold. Nat was the same age and also left for uni. I greatly enjoyed working on prise de fer with him : he was an expert. Tegan, an older young lady, had the most precise, exquisite footwork I've ever seen. She was the envy of the club! Another one for uni, but she's now returned. Sean, a business man, left handed, (I loved working with left handers!) was so keen he was fencing 3 or 4 nights a week, but that fell through because of local club closures. Josh, a young lad of 13, very much a loner - never smiled or spoke much - but he was a natural fencer and came alive as soon as he picked a foil up. His command of progressive compound attacks was impressive for someone so young. Lily, a slender girl of about 16 was also an expert at progressive compound attacks, with an incredibly long lunge. Whenever I needed someone as a partner in order to demonstrate, it was always Lily! Olivia, in her early 20s, was quiet and studious, and very keen to learn. She was able to fly a plane and left to join the RAF, her aim becoming a pilot! I hope she succeeds!

There were, of course, many more, and they became my friends as well as pupils. Advancing years have forced my retirement, but I'd do it all again if I had the chance!

Clive Madgin BAF ret.



British Academy of Fencing Historical Notes



The British Academy of Fencing is an organisation for fencing coaches in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Its origins go back to 1540, when King Henry VIII issued a signed Bill (or Warrant signed by the Sovereign and directed to the Lord Chancellor for passing Letters Patent under the Great Seal) under the title "Masters of ye Noble Science of Defence". This still exists at the Public Records Office (C.82/770)

This Bill gave Masters a monopoly of teaching fencing in England and empowered them to commit to goal any offender who taught without being a member of the Guild.

When Henry VIII died in 1547 his monopoly lapsed and it was not renewed so far as research can prove. However, the Ancient Masters seem to have recovered their lawful privileges from a sympathetic James I. On July 1st, 1605, he granted them a Warrant (Rymer's Feodera Vol. XVI. This Warrant was abolished when James I was forced to pass the Monopolies Act 21 Cap III in 1623/24.

During the Restoration the body fell into ill-repute because of the so-called "Masters" who did not ply their prizes (a traditional examination which required the fighting and defeating of their betters). These swordsmen merely gave themselves the title "Master" or "Professor" and were, in fact, nothing more than paid prize fighters with swords and were the forerunners of pugilists. From then on decline was rapid and to all intents and purposes the Body ceased to exist, even though some Fencing Masters managed to earn a living in the country.

In 1903 the Guild was reformed under the title "The London Academie d'Armes and again in 1931, under the title The British Federation of Fencing Masters".

During the last war it hibernated, but in 1949 the Ancient Guild of Fencing Masters was refounded as "The British Academy of Fencing". The inspiration for this venture came from the late Charles de Beaumont and it was implemented by Professor Roger Crosnier, Professor Leon Paul and Mr J D Aylward. The Academy's first President was Professor Leon Bertrand.

The Academy of today is a progressive organisation and changes are constantly taking place. By the maintenance of a carefully structured system of courses and examinations, the Academy provides teachers and/or coaches of fencing with the opportunities to qualify through Level 1 to Level 5 (Initial, Basic, Intermediate, Advanced and Diploma) Awards with Foil, Epee and Sabre. Members may choose to study and be examined at one/two weapons up to Level 5 (Diploma) and use the title Maître, or complete all three weapons at Level 5 and use the title Professor.