

Sparring games

HEMAG Dijon 2019

Sparring games are a great intermediate tool between drills and free fencing. They can be particularly useful for teaching concepts, such as vor and nach. This session will introduce participants to a selection of games that can help develop their skills, fitness and ability to use these ideas under pressure. Bring full gear and be prepared to sweat.

Experience: You should know at least basic attacks and defences and be comfortable in a free-sparring environment.

Equipment: Full tournament gear, including longswords.

Intro

While people arrive and get started.

Soviet foil mode hand-fencing. Speed dating format.

- Start with the hand high
- Targets are shoulder and thigh
- Strikes have to be 'cuts' and go through, no holding the arm out
- No parrying, only defence with distance
- Change partners every couple of minutes

Then call everyone together and lay out the ground rules:

- *Fence at intensities you're comfortable with, don't go nuts.*
- *We'll challenge you with the situations and rules not contact levels - and we're going to fence a lot.*
- *Take breaks. Breathe, get your mask off, drink a mouthful of water, get back into it.*

Helping

Sparring games don't have to be high intensity. This game from Michel Rensen is a great way to warm up your student or training partner for a competition - it focuses on getting their brain switched on and active while getting them moving some. So gear up and let's warm up.

Rensen coaching warmup game

- Define the coach and the fencer
- Coach aims to feed useful practice problems
- Things which can be solved in 1-2 actions
- E.g. simple attacks (over under thrust twer), simple feints, entering in various guards, etc.
- Keep the intensity moderate
- The fencer should succeed if they are doing something reasonably smart
- Think about pressure

Drilling

One way to use sparring games is to spice up basic technique drilling, increasing the aliveness and difficulty of the situation. This game from Harrison Ridgeway is an excellent tool for livening up your basic practice, once you know the idea of a technique.

Harry three parries game

- Pick a technique.
- Your partner throws three basic attacks. Movement and so on are allowed. Parry all three.
- Then they give you the feed and you execute your technique.
- Do five, then switch it round.

Actions

Restricting actions gives an excellent basis for a sparring game, allowing you to work on a specific part of your arsenal. This traditional fencing game is a great way to practice measure and initiative.

Soviet foil (no parry fencing)

- The only legal blade action is a full committed cut
- Must be made from overhead/high tag
- Must go through to the ground (unless it hits)
- No parries or blade feints
- Just distance management and timing/threat.

Roles

Another effective move is to restrict roles, creating the idea of 'turn-taking' automatically and promoting thinking about all stages of an effective attack - the entry, the krieg and the withdrawal. This game

from Andreas Markehed helps work on this idea.

Markehed alternating roles game

- When it's your attacking turn, you make three actions:
 - A provoker to draw a response.
 - A hitter to land your blow
 - A taker to clear the afterblow while you retreat.
- As you finish this, it's immediately the opponent's turn to start the process.
- When they finish, it's your turn again.
- Don't break on hits.

Tactics

This last exercise has touched on one of the best aspects of sparring games as training tools - using them to create and practice tactical situations. This last game repeatedly puts you in the situation of needing to decisively and rapidly attack.

Groups of 6 this time, ideally.

New attackers game

- Designate the defender. They can move at full speed.
- Attackers fight slightly lower intent.
- However, every 15 seconds a new attacker joins the fray.
- If the previous one isn't downed, you now need to fight two people. Or three. Or four.

Ending:

- Any questions?
- Check out the Illustrated Ringeck. If you'd like me to come to your club or event, please get in touch and we can try to make it happen.

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