

Learning to Train

HEMAC Dijon, May 10th 2018

Intro

It is very common for people to study techniques in simple drills and then struggle to apply them in free fencing. This workshop will look at how to train in order to bridge this gap, by teaching the play of 'twer unter twer' using drills drawn from Understanding Fencing. We will work through a series of intermediate exercises that progressively build the ability to recognise a situation, select an appropriate response and apply that response under pressure.

By the end of the class participants will be using the 'twer unter twer' in free fencing. More importantly, they will also have acquired a toolbox they can use for training other plays at their own clubs.

Theory

- Techniques exist as solutions to problems
- Effective use of techniques requires accurate and quick decision making.
- This hinges on good recognition and extensive practice.
- Mechanical efficiency is also important, but in general an ounce of good decision making will outweigh a pound of perfect mechanics.
- Training is best constructed to move from simple to complex, from choreographed to open, from compliant to competitive.
- Students should be challenged but mostly successful. Coach's job is to ensure that's true.

Choreographed drill

- Purpose - to learn the situation and technique
- Read out text:

Here note the break against the upper thwart-cut

Item. Note, when you bind him from your right side with an

over-cut (or otherwise on his sword), if he then strikes-around with the thwart to the other side, so come forward as well with the thwart-cut under his sword on his neck (as stands pictured hereafter next to this), such that he strikes himself the same with your sword.

- Demonstrate
 - Emphasise position of sword and forward movement of the body
- Practice via 3 step drill - in order to maintain really good connection between the technique and its situation (they twer round high from the bind)
- Oberhaw, parry & twer round, untertwer

Stimulus/response

- Purpose - to hardwire the technique into muscle memory as a reaction to the situation
 - Note: start this slower and build up the speed.
 - ◆ What you need to do in slower ones is keep *decision making* fast but do the *action* slower
 - Error rate: about 20% is good
- Demonstrate:
 - From the bind we've already reached. Doesn't matter how you get there.
 - When you feel the fencer start to move away, drop under them with the untertwer
- Fencer holds firm, coach twers, fencer reacts instantly with the untertwer.
 - You can make it more difficult by using movement and varying timing.

Competitive drill

- Purpose - increase the difficulty and require sharper execution and reflexes, without increasing the complexity
- The drill is simply exactly the same prescribed actions as before, but now all actions are aimed **to hit**.
 - If they miss their parry, hit them!
 - One additional detail, though - if you hit on your action, abzug properly before going again.

- Success rate should be about even, and coach should manage the difficulty to achieve that.

Choice exercise

- Having worked on a *choreographed* exercise from maximum to minimum *compliance*, we now start to expand the options.
- Same beginning. Coach now has a second option - just shove the blade down after their parry and then strike at the head.
 - Fencer breaks this with *schnappen*.
 - Again, we practice this starting slower and building speed over reps, emphasising quick decision making.
- Drill:
 - Fencer *oberhaw*, coach responds with: parry and *twer* **or** press blade
 - Fencer responds with *untertwer* **or** *schnappen*

Dynamic choice

- Now we're going to put some of the noncompliance and freedom back in.
- Increase movement around when fencing.
- Coach is trying to land their hits, within the constraints of the drill's rules about their actions (e.g. no feints etc)
- The success rate for the fencer should still be pretty good, coach's job is to manage intensity/speed to achieve that.
- Drill is otherwise the same as before.

Sparring Game

- A good next step after dynamic choice exercises are focused sparring games.
 - Lots of repetitions of precisely the situation we're looking for.
 - Freedom of movement, timing, distance, intensity to get variation that helps with sparring.
- Here we prescribe specific ranges of actions for each fencer, and set them to it.
 - Coach: you can only use *twerhaw*
 - Fencer: you can only make straight parries or do the *untertwer*
- This game is a competition between the two parties.

Focused sparring

- Next up is focused sparring.
- This is essentially normal sparring, but with the understanding that one partner is taking the role of *coach* and the other is taking the role of *fencer*.
 - It has an advantage over free sparring because it generates a high number of repetitions for the thing you are focusing on learning.
 - It has an advantage over prescribed drills that the situation is generally open, so the fencer learns to identify situations and execute the technique under varying conditions of the bout.
- Coach: twer round a lot.

Free sparring

- Finally, completely open sparring.
- Both parties still have one simple task, though - try and use this play.

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