

# Fencing from the sweeps

*Festival of the Sword 2019*

Ringeck's longsword gloss includes a series of additional techniques that have been added to Liechtenauer's art. The bulk of these are plays from 'streychen' - sweeping up with the sword from a low position. This class will introduce these plays; look at the mechanics and timing required to use them successfully; and examine what they can tell us about the doctrine of Liechtenauer's fencing.

Equipment: Longsword simulators (flexible steel or synthetic), masks. Throat protectors and protective gloves encouraged.

Experience: Beginner level and up - if you know basic ascending/descending cuts with the longsword you'll be fine. This workshop has a strong theoretical component that will be relevant to experienced Liechtenauer and Fiore practitioners.

Translations kindly provided by Christian Trosclair

## Streichen 15

*Here note to fence from the side guards, that is, also the sweeps. Know that [there] is good fencing from the sweeps, even though they are not named in the record. Yet the plays from the record arise when one fences from them. And one shall conduct the sweeps from the left side, because when they are from the right they are not as certain as from the left.*

Opening practice:

- Objectives: warm people up a bit, and introduce them to the sweeping cut
- Give them the mechanics to do it effectively
  - 120 degree angle for the sword
  - Strong wrist structure, not overextended
  - Hands come up to shoulder height or fractionally beyond
  - Hips support it, optionally compass slightly with either foot, but no need for large steps.

Show the nebenhut (both forward/alber and back/tail variants) and then the streychen, emphasising the key details.

Have people start by working solo in the air

Then follow on by working in pairs - practice sweeping through a fixed langort and then through a (slow) incoming cut.

*Now we're going to look at three selected plays from Ringeck's commentary on the sweeps. While we go through these, think about how they relate to the five words - vor nach swech sterk indes.*

## **Third Play 15**

*Item. When you sweep up against their sword like before, if the opponent is subsequently soft at the sword and low with their hands, then immediately cut into the opening using your long edge.*

*They cut straight in. Clear it with the sweep, have a line, hit them in the face.*

Demo play with a partner

Simple technical drill (slow but smooth to start):

- Coach steps in and then throws the cut
  - Fencer sweeps it and then cuts back to the head.
- Occasionally fencer doesn't move, take the hit (to make sure the coach is on target)

Key feedback points will probably be hip engagement and arm structure

## **First Play 15**

*Item. Conduct the first play like this:*

*Item. When you lay in the side guard on your left side and someone cuts in from above downward, sweep firmly into their sword up from below with your short edge. If the opponent stands strong and is not too high with the hands, double in between them and their sword applying the short edge to the left of their neck*

*They cut in. As you clear it with the sweep, they drive strongly onto your sword. You don't have a line straight to their face with a cut, so double behind their sword to get them anyway.*

Demo play with a partner

Simple technical drill (slow but smooth to start - particularly important here):

- Coach steps in and then throws the cut.
  - Fencer sweeps it
  - Coach binds into the sweep strongly, so the fencer doubles behind (stepping out with the left foot is helpful)
- Occasionally fencer doesn't move and takes the head hit.
- Occasionally coach goes weak so the fencer strikes directly

Key feedback points will probably be about anticipating, particularly from the coach.

## **Eighth Play 15**

*Item. If the opponent is low with their hands and will fall upon you, then sweep through to the other side and thrust them in the chest. So have you changed through.*

*They target your sword, trying to suppress it with a direct cut or the sperren. So disengage around and thrust them in the throat.*

Demo with a partner

Simple technical drill:

- Coach decides to drop on the sword, steps in and does so (this decision sets up the body language cues)
  - Fencer shifts sideways and slashes through to jab the chest
- Occasionally the coach should go for the third play (decide before entry), fencer reacts appropriately.

Key feedback point is making the movement tight but direct and recognising coach decision before they even start. You're looking for some very subtle body language cues to make this reliable.

## Concept 5-10

*Know that [there] is good fencing from the sweeps, even though they are not named in the record. Yet the plays from the record arise when one fences from them.*

*Ask for thoughts on the five words in the plays we've looked at.*

*Key points:*

- *Nach vs vor - do they target you or your sword? Are you compelled to parry?*
- *Weak vs strong - shapes your continuation after the bind.*
- *Indes - perception/reaction melded into a single unit that is fast enough to happen in these incredibly fleeting binds.*

*Any Fiorists? Did you recognise any/most of these plays?*

*The procedure that Ringeck seems to have followed for writing his commentary on the sweeps is to take existing stücke (plays, pieces, techniques) and put them into Liechtenauer's conceptual/tactical framework. The specific details largely aren't novel, but the way of thinking about them is new.*

*This is likely to be the same procedure Papa Liechtenauer himself followed for creating the system that we now give his name. The plays and pieces are largely not new. Instead they have been put into a new conceptual framework, giving a new way of understanding them, relating them to each other and thinking about them. One of the big advantages of studying the plays of the sweeps is that we can use this as a microcosm to help us understand the whole system's creation better.*

## Synthesis 15-20

*Right, enough talking, let's go back to fencing.*

*We're going to finish the fencing part of this class with an open exercise to combine the three plays we've looked at. Keep it at a moderate pace, so that everyone can make decisions nice and easily. If you want to make it more complicated, try adding other plays or techniques in, bearing in mind the five words.*

Open Exercise:

- Coach can do any feed
- Fencer starts with the sweep and can finish with any of these.
- Optionally, you can try and fit other plays in - there are several more in the sweeps
  - And the whole rest of the system works well from these setups, when you keep the five words properly in mind.

Encourage experimentation and trying things out. Show people some of the other plays in smaller groups if they want.

## Conclusion 5

Fencing from the sweeps largely uses common techniques, not special new inventions.

These common techniques have been put into Liechtenauer's model by one of his students.

We can study them both as useful fencing tools in themselves, but also (and perhaps more importantly) to understand the creation of Liechtenauer's system.

Thank you for showing up and I hope you enjoyed the class.

Class notes will be published on my club page - New Cross Historical Fencing. Check out the Illustrated Ringeck. I enjoy teaching and sharing ideas, so if you'd like me to come to your club or event please get in touch so we can try to make it happen.

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