

Know Your Student

IGX 2019 Class 3

Abstract

Once a fencer knows themselves and their opponent, those same analytical skills can be put to use as a coach. This class will provide a number of group training exercises to help students build their coaching skills. We'll also look at different types of coaching objectives and discuss how to improve your own fencing by coaching others.

This class is the last part in a three class series. It draws heavily on the self-analysis techniques in part one and the reconnaissance methods in part two. Attendees are recommended to take all three classes in the series for best results.

Equipment: Longsword, mask, sparring gloves. Jacket recommended, full kit is a bonus.

Experience: Attendees should know basic cuts, thrusts and parries and have some experience actually fencing.

Outline

All exercises 15 minutes: explanation; practice; water break

Observation

Warmup game - posing problems (pairs)

- Two roles: coach, fencer.
- Coach's job is to pose simple fencing problems for the fencer.
 - E.g. advance in longpoint; throw oberhaw; wait in guard; etc
 - Goal: give a wide variety of cues.
 - Stretch goal: mentally note strong/weak points; preferred actions; etc
- Fencer reacts as seems reasonable, tries to solve them in a couple of actions per problem.
 - Goals: get physically moving, get thinking about fencing

Bad fencing game - deliberate fuckups (quads)

- Two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers: each of you secretly pick a mistake you're going to be making all fight. For example:
 - Hold your sword with the wrong hand
 - Never extend your arms, keep your elbows pressed against your torso at all times.
 - Always step with the opposite foot to your cut.
- Then fencers fence for 2mins
- Coach: watch your fencer fence, try to understand what the fundamental problem they added is.
- This is a great drill because it helps to:
 - Recognise problems in someone's fencing, without criticising them as a person (since the issue is an act)
 - Understand the difference between a fundamental problem (my hands are backwards) and a consequence (my point control in thrusts is terrible). Feedback in upcoming exercises will work much better if it's targeted at fundamental problems.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

Development coaching

Counting game (quads)

- Two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers: each brief your coach on one thing you would like to improve. Examples:
 - An action you want to stop doing ("I wind to left ochs in every bind")
 - An opportunity you want to take ("I make a parry and step away instead of trying to riposte")
 - Should be specific and quantifiable.
- Then fencers fence for 2mins.
- Coach: watch your fencer fence. Any time they do the action they listed, **loudly** count it out
- That's all, very simple drill. Builds the ability to recognise your fencer's patterns from the outside.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

Remote control fencer (quads)

- Two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers fence for 1-2 mins.
- Coach: watch your fencer, look for an opportunity for an action they know that they could be using
 - For example: "your opponent hesitates on entry, throw a thrust in that moment"
 - 30s debrief - tell them what the move is and what you'll yell ("Go!" is recommended)
- Fencers: fence for another 1-2 mins
- Coach may yell "Go!" at any time during this. When they do, fencer *must* execute their given action.
 - Challenge for the coach - read the fight to a strong enough extent that you can give this cue *early*.
 - That way when the fencer hears and reacts to it the timing will be correct.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

Remove a move (quads)

- Two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers fence for 1-2 mins
- Coach: watch your fencer, look for a move they do too much
 - 30s debrief - tell them the thing they have to stop doing now
- Fencers: fence for another 1-2 mins, forbidden from doing that action.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

Performance coaching

Basic tactical analysis (quads)

- Two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers fence for 1-2 minutes.
 - Coach: watch your fencer's opponent carefully.
- 30s debrief: coach gives weakness/opening/pattern observed. Fencer comes up with a response to exploit it
- Fence for 1-2 minutes more, focus on executing your plan.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

Summary

- The foundation of coaching is observation/understanding
 - You need to know what your student is doing, why they are doing it, and what other issues it's causing.
- Then you can push with this in two further directions
- In the club, you can push for development. Help someone fix their weaknesses, shore up their strengths, push out of their comfort zone.
- In a tournament, you instead push for performance. Help someone to stay in their strengths and be comfortable/confident.
- Several of these exercises are borrowed from the fantastic Michel Rensen, be sure to check him out.

This document may be freely shared with credit. Please borrow or adapt exercises and ideas. Feedback and questions are welcomed: send to Tea Kew on Facebook, or to tea@ringeck.net. If you would like me to come teach at your club or event, get in touch and we'll try and make it work.

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