

Fencing from the sweeps

May Melee 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' - slashing 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 and mask at minimum. Gloves and throat protection recommended.

Experience: Beginner to intermediate in any longsword method. Fiorists very welcome.

Translations by Christian Trosclair

Streichen 10

*Here **note** how one shall fence with the long sword from the guard which is called the iron-gate [or] side-guard, and how one shall execute the sweeps from it. Know that [there] is good fencing from the sweeps, although they are not named in the Recital. Yet the plays from the Recital arise when one fences from them. And one shall execute 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/arm join
 - ◆ Extended handshake grip
 - ◆ Straight wrists
 - Arms stay straight throughout the motion
 - Hands come up to shoulder height
 - Hips support it

- ◆ No need to step
- ◆ But optionally compass slightly with either foot

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.

Third Play 10

Item. When you sweep underneath onto his sword as before, and if he is then soft upon the sword and low with the hands, so cleave-in straight above with the long edge to the opening at hand.

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 the head (by reversing the sweep)
- 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 10

Item. Execute the first play thusly: when you lay in the side-guard to your left side and someone cleaves-in to you downward from above, so firmly sweep onto his sword with the short edge. If he holds strongly against [it] and is not too high with the hands, double-in with the short edge (between him and his sword) on the left side to his 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 (step out 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 10

Item. If he is low with the hands and will fall upon you, so sweep-through to the other side and jab him 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 hovers 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 asap.

Synthesis 10-15

We're going to finish the 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 random other plays in smaller groups if they want.

Conclusion 5-10

Know that [there] is good fencing from the sweeps, although they are not named in the Recital. Yet the plays from the Recital 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 that 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.

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

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