

A Study in Swords

Oxford Sword and Staff - April 7th 2018

It's easy to learn a bunch of cool techniques in a class, but much harder is using them in free sparring. This seminar will be looking at bringing tactics and techniques into your fencing. Practicing this is vital to being able to produce use techniques in a difficult situation, such as a tournament bout.

Saturday will focus on training methods that can be used to practice using techniques in their context: recognising the situation you need to use a technique; understanding the situation and selecting your action; making sensible decisions fast. Sunday we'll move on to explore strategy in fencing: using sparring games to practice various tactics; implementing a plan when fighting; coaching and acting on feedback.

Participants should know how to make basic cuts and thrusts reasonably well, but we'll be working on quite general material, instead of specific advanced techniques. For the non-Liechtenauerists, the ideas here are applicable for training in any longsword system.

Format

Stimulus response drills - Sat AM

- Used to build muscle memory habits/develop ability to do things 'automatically'
- Hand fencing variants for initial concepts and general structure
- Guided, pressure, distance, entry, etc
- Self-focused - understand cues

Decision exercises - Sat PM

- Used to practice recognising situations and choosing appropriate techniques.
- Hand fencing variants
- Guided, hard/soft, near/far, advance/retreat, go/stop, etc
- Self-focused - analyse problems, implement solutions

Focused games - Sun AM

- Used to get lots of repetitions with a higher 'aliveness'
- Hand based games
- Directed sparring games
- Self-directed sparring requests.

Coaching and strategy - Sun PM

- Using external feedback to support your fencing and help you stay on target.
- Task-based fencing
- Remote control fencers
- Good/bad/goal

Plan

Saturday

Arrive & Warmup - 30 mins

Stimulus Response - 2.5hrs

- Used to build muscle memory habits/develop ability to do things 'automatically'
- Hand fencing variants for initial concepts and general structure
- Guided, pressure, distance, entry, etc
- Self-focused - understand cues

Short section on theory of these exercises, timing and intensity for effective results.

- These are about building reaction times.
- Work at a pace that means you can begin to react within their action
- Progressively increase intensity to create improvement.
- A development can be to add a consequence and make it a competition between coach and fencer.

Hand (30 mins):

- Leave bind, hit
- Push bind, disengage
- Enter measure, hit (you and them)
- Change guard, hit

Sword (pre-prep) - 1 hr 15 or so:

- Leave bind
 - hit
- Push bind
 - zucken and hit on the other side
- Enter measure
 - hit (you and them)
- Enter measure, they attack
 - zornhaw
- Enter measure, they cut low
 - schaitler
- Bind, they cut round
 - twer unter
- In ochs, they wind against you
 - mutieren
- Ochs, they shove you away
 - verkehrer
- Bind, they shove up and close
 - you schnitt

Sword (fencer's choice) - remaining time

- Get each person in a quad to pick one thing (should be brief/atomic)
- Work out the setup. Go to a situation just before that.
- Coach gives the setup, fencer goes.

Lunchbreak - (13-14)

Decision making - 3 hrs

- Used to practice recognising situations and choosing appropriate techniques.
- Hand fencing variants
- Guided, hard/soft, near/far, advance/retreat, go/stop, etc
- Self-focused - analyse problems, implement solutions

Hand - 30

- Bind soft/hard
- Low/high attack on entering measure
- Hit/ablaufen

Preset - 90

- Bind pressure
 - schnappen or ort
- Create bind pressure
 - zucken or twer unter twer
- Enter and they attack high or low
 - Zornort or schaitler
- Bind/parry high or low
 - Mutieren if high
 - Verkehrer if low
- Enter in langort, they come in (deep) or beat sword
 - Durchwechselln or absetzen
- Enter in low guard, they attack
 - For your head - beat riposte
 - For your sword - disengage thrust
- Enter pflug against their lazy langort, they chamber or thrust at you
 - Nachreissen or absetzen
- Enter, they attack, you parry.
 - They retreat, chase with point
 - They push in, schnitt

Fencer lead - 60

- Each member of a group picks a technique and its counterpart along one of these decision lines

Sunday

Arrive & Warmup - 30 mins

Sparring Games - 2.5hrs

- Used to get lots of repetitions with a higher 'aliveness'
- Hand based games
- Directed sparring games
- Self-directed sparring requests.

Hand (15 mins or so):

- Sword and buckler fencing. Targets are shoulder and thigh

Sword (15 mins each):

- 1-2-3-4-5
 - Fencers take turns to deliver n attacks. Don't stop on hits. Play head only.
- Bind and flee game
 - One fencer can only score free hits, the other can only score from the bind.
- Start bound.
 - Start the bout with arms extended, crossed around the mid blade (should be one step to hit distance). Fence freely.
- Zombie
 - One fencer does a six cut pattern constantly repeating. Other has to land a clean hit to the hands, body, head in order to win.
- King in the hole
 - King fixes one foot and loses if they move it, but wins all doubles and afterblows. Afterblow time is until the fencer is out of range.

Halfway through each game's section, have a two minute huddle to ask what the 'point' of this game is, then get people to resume play with that in mind.

We skipped this one, but Mike S played it with his half of the room in the next segment:

- Defend the wall
 - Alternating roles for the keepers

Self-directed (1hr):

- pick a technique
- design a game together which helps create the context for that technique
- Play it for a bit then try the next

Lunchbreak - (13-14)

Implementing Plans - 2 hrs

- Using external feedback to support your fencing and help you stay on target.
- Task-based fencing

- Remote control fencers
- Good/bad/goal

Diagnostic fencing

- Give your partner a good range of challenges/tests
- Watch for:
 - what they can do
 - what they struggle with
 - what they miss/skip/omit

Focused fencing:

- Set yourself an objective to try and use
 - E.g. fence from a specific guard or use a specific attack
- Or ask your partner to give you something a lot for you to practice against it.
- Then fence

Remote control

- Fence for a bit
- Discuss with your coach. They give a specific task
- Fence again, when they signal you do that thing.

External feedback notes

- Watch your fencer. Take note of
 - When do they land hits?
 - When do they get hit?
 - Do they attack first?
 - Do they control distance?
 - Which actions tend to be high percentage for them?
- Tell them, based on this:
 - Something they're doing which is working well - good management of distance, nice thrusts, effective first parries, etc
 - Something they're doing which is causing problems - making a second parry with bad mechanics, freezing after attack parried.
 - Something they should try doing to help themselves - use these mechanics for your second parry, cut round with this technique if your first one is blocked.

Freeplay time if anyone is still alive

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