

Coaching 101

PSHS / THFC Workshop

Abstract

This workshop reviews the two main applications of coaching - development and performance. We'll look at how to be better as a training partner or instructor, pushing your friends and students to develop as much as possible. And we'll also look at how those skills translate to the ringside, supporting a fencer and helping them provide their very best performance. The class will make extensive use of fencing games as a training tool and is suitable for anyone with some sparring experience

Plan

Intro chat

- *This workshop is system agnostic. In fact, it's HEMA agnostic.*
- *We're going to work through three main stages, using a number of fencing games at each stage to practice relevant skills:*
 - *Observation: understanding what your student is doing*
 - *Development: pushing their boundaries in fencing, helping them to try new things and expand their game*
 - *Performance: helping to maximise their focus and comfort.*
- *This stuff all works friend-friend, coach/student, etc.*
- *Many of the exercises here are adapted from Michel Rensen's "Armchair Swordfighting" workshop*
- *Other relevant sources I've drawn from:*
 - *Understanding Fencing, Zbigniew Czajkowski*
 - *The Mental Preparation of Fencers and Others, Aladar Kogler*

Take plenty of water breaks, this workshop is hard work.

Observation - 1 hour

Stage 1 - what is my student doing, why are they doing it?

Rensen problem warmup game:

- 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

Awareness / concentration exercise:

- Two roles: coach, fencer
- Fence as in the previous game. Coach's job is to give various cues. Fencer should land most of the hits
- After each exchange, 10 second debrief. Coach asks fencer:
 - What did I do?
 - What was your response?
- The aim of this is to get thinking about what is happening in the fencing, in terms of *recognition* and *decision*.

Counting game:

- Working in quads of 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.

Bad fencing game:

- Working in quads of 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 - 1 hour

Stage 2 - Pushing people out of their comfort zone. Focused on refining their strengths and helping to mitigate their weaknesses.

Focused fencing

- Working in pairs, fencer and coach.
- Fencer: name a thing you want to improve:
 - New move? Which move? When does it get used?
 - Habit to break? What habit? What to do instead?
- Coach: give feeds for that as often as reasonable while fencing
- Fencer: make sure the coach's feeds are sensible (if you want to work on a bind response, let them bind you!); do your thing as often as the coach sets it up.
- Go for a couple of minutes, then switch roles.
- Rotate pairs.

Remove a move

- Working in quads of 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.

Remote control fencer

- Working in quads of 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.

Awareness and analysis exercise

- Working in quads of two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers fence approx 10-15 exchanges.
- After each exchange, short break to talk with the coach.
- Coach, take the discussion through the following four points:
 - Recognition: what did the opponent do?
 - Decision: what did you choose?
 - Analysis: why did it succeed/fail?
 - Planning: how to handle next time?
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles

Performance - 1 hour

Stage 3 - This is the opposite of coaching for development. Keep them engaged, focused, and well inside their comfort zone

Hunter-seeker game

- Working in quads of two fencers with one coach each.
- Fencers: pre brief your coach about one of your strong moves and the relevant conditions for it.
- Fencers fence 1-2 minutes.
 - Coach can yell 'go' if they recognise an opportunity for the move

- 30s debrief - coach, give advise about setups/opportunitites
- Fence another 1-2 mins, coach can cue it again.
- Fencer's goal is to pick up on when they can do their action
 - And to execute with 100% commitment when the coach cues it.
- Coach's goal is to anticipate the moment of action.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

Tactical observation

- Working in quads of 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.

Actionable feedback

- Working in quads of two fencers with one coach each.
- This is mostly an exercise for the coach to practice giving feedback.
- Key feedback points: positive (do x), limited (only one thing), clear
 - Based on your fencer's strengths and their opponent's weaknesses.
- Fencers fence 1-2 minutes.
- 30s feedback section
- Fence another 1-2 minutes.
- Rotate partners so everyone has a go in all roles.

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