

Summary of Foil Coaching Workshop - 16th March 2025 – Adam Blight

To view a youtube video of this workshop, go to - <https://youtu.be/CPOcccJPqMA>

This workshop features the topic of - **How to deliver flowing, controlled and coordinated individual lessons incorporating surprise and variety.** The workshop explores, explains and practices a range of specific coaching skills and concepts which can enable the coach to introduce unannounced elements into individual lessons in a controlled way. Through being able to reliably introduce surprise and variety into a free flowing lesson, the fencer can develop resilience, adaptability and creativity. Also the need for verbal instruction can be minimised. The workshop approaches the topic from the perspective of working with fencers of all levels from relative beginners to capable international competitors. What this envisaged lesson does NOT aim do is for e.g. Develop specific exercises, Teach tactics, technique or new actions.

As an example this video shows a warm up lesson with Adam Blight and David Alexander at the 2015 European Championships in Montroux, Switzerland. <https://youtu.be/Z9mBrDprdLs> This is a free flowing lesson with a minimum of verbal instruction where the fencer faces an appropriate level of challenge and the coach maintains control.

A general set of guiding ideas and thought were displayed to help with the goal of delivering free flowing individual lessons.

- There is a base level of fencing capability required, so in the first instance there will need to have been some previous development of fencing skills.
- **Start your lessons in a more or less standard way.** Enabling your fencer to calibrate and connect with the actions of fencing, hitting, finding the blade, moving etc. And for you to get a feel for how your fencer is at that moment and connect with your fencer.
- In expanding and extending the lesson. **Have a simple starting point.** Reposts for e.g. are a good starting point, your fencer is most probably balanced, alert and able to respond.
- Allow your fencer to improvise and follow their intuition. Where appropriate briefly discuss the intuitive and improvised choices made and come to an agreement regarding their effectiveness.
- There is an opportunity to stop and **coach** elements of technique, you may choose to leave that to another time rather than disrupt the flow of the lesson.
- It's good for the fencer and coach to be familiar with each other and have an agreement over what are good choices of response to different scenarios.
- **ALWAYS** pre plan an unannounced or surprise action. with practice this pre planning can be on a 'just in time' basis.
- **Always be 'coaching'** and try not to end up **'fencing'** your fencer.
- Give verbal reactions but minimise verbal instructions.
- Stop and consider before introducing elements of **'teaching'**, it may not be needed and it may not help.
- Areas which can be used by the coach can include - parrying offensive actions , evading s fencers attempt to find the blade, changes to available target, creating then changing rhythms, exploiting a fencers rhythmic patterns, varying distance.
- **Have some fun!!!**

Following an introduction to the workshop, coaches were instructed to give their pupils a routine lesson to prepare them for work. A demonstration of a short routine lesson was shown and the value of having a more or less similar way of starting an individual lesson was emphasised. This then progressed to a sequence of specific practices.

Practice – 1. How we want our fencer to parry. The goal of this practice was to use a choice reaction exercise where the pupil selects between the requirement for a direct or disengage riposte after a parry of quarte. It was emphasised that the pupil should have the capability to perform this well and for some fencers developing this capability will be a prerequisite. It was also emphasised that for capable fencers it can be a bad idea for the coach to attempt to parry a direct riposte as a

fencer who properly controls the timing of this riposte should hit. The preference was for taking the parry clearly in the guard and not allowing the point to drift. How the coach should set the conditions for the choice was emphasised and also the tactical logic of using the disengage against an opponent who, anticipating a direct riposte, parried too soon. From this beginning, the coach can extend the phrase through evading parries, changing distance, changing target, drawing compound reposts etc.

Practice – 2. Stretching the distance. By combining parries, successive parries, direct and indirect riposte and then extending the distance, the coach can introduce compound ripostes into the mixture of actions.

Practice – 3. Use a simple starting point - quarte. The coach presents the blade and the fencer makes an initial parry of quarte can be used as a starting point, meaning for one thing, very little verbal instruction is needed. Following the pupils parry of quarte, the coach extends the phrase through evading parries, changing distance, changing target, drawing compound reposts etc.

Practice – 4. Use a simple starting point - octave. The coach begins the actions with a presentation into octave. Following the pupils parry of octave, the coach extends the phrase through evading parries, changing distance, changing target, drawing compound reposts etc. With this choice the initial riposte is generally into the high line by disengage and it can be more straight forward for the coach to parry should they wish to.

Practice – 5. Quarte disengage, sixte disengage routine. The coach presents the blade and the fencer parries quarte and ripostes by disengage, the coach leaves their blade there and the fencer immediately parried circular sixte, at which point the coach immediately presents the blade again and the action is repeated. As the routine develops, distance is extended or contracted, movement is increased. The fencer relies on speed and reach when the distance is increased. It is observed that, no matter how capable and fast the fencer is, the coach can always be in control as, in essence they are always waiting for the fencer to complete the disengage.

Practice – 6. Quarte direct, sixte direct routine. The coach presents the blade, the fencer parries quarte and riposte direct and immediately parried sixte and riposte direct, the coach immediately presents the blade and the action is repeated. This is conducted with movement and emphasis is given to the idea that the fencer can control the speed through briefly holding the parry. As a further variation the fencer is given the option of reposting with any variety of riposte and encouraged to improvise. It is observed that the fencer can control the speed and rhythm by momentarily holding the parry, though all ripostes should be fast.

Practice – 7. Compound/simple attack routine. The coach performs a continuous sequence of parries/changes of guard of – quarte, counter-quarte, sixte, counter-sixte etc. The fencer attacks with one, two or three evasions of the blade to hit. The attack is executed with –

1. From stationary.
2. From movement.
3. From stationary at the moment of the coach saying "now".
4. From movement at the moment of the coach saying "now".
5. From facing the opposite direction at the moment of the coach saying "now jump round and attack.

Practice 8. General practice. The coaches practiced as they wished with their fencers around the theme of the workshop.