

A photograph of two fencers in a competitive epee match. The fencers are in a dynamic, lunging position, with their epees extended towards each other. The background shows a blurred indoor setting, possibly a gymnasium or a large hall, with structural beams and other people visible in the distance. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

Competitive Epee Workshop

Charles Alexander

No Fear Fencing Club

6/19/2007

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Competitive training requirements
- The competitive framework
 - Overview
 - Physical fitness
 - Footwork
 - Bladework
 - Strategy and Tactics

Overview

The goal of this workshop is to provide the beginning to intermediate competitor with a narrow view of the competitive big picture.

At the end of this workshop, the participants should have a better knowledge of what it will take to be a competitive fencer at several levels. And an idea of what their next steps should be.

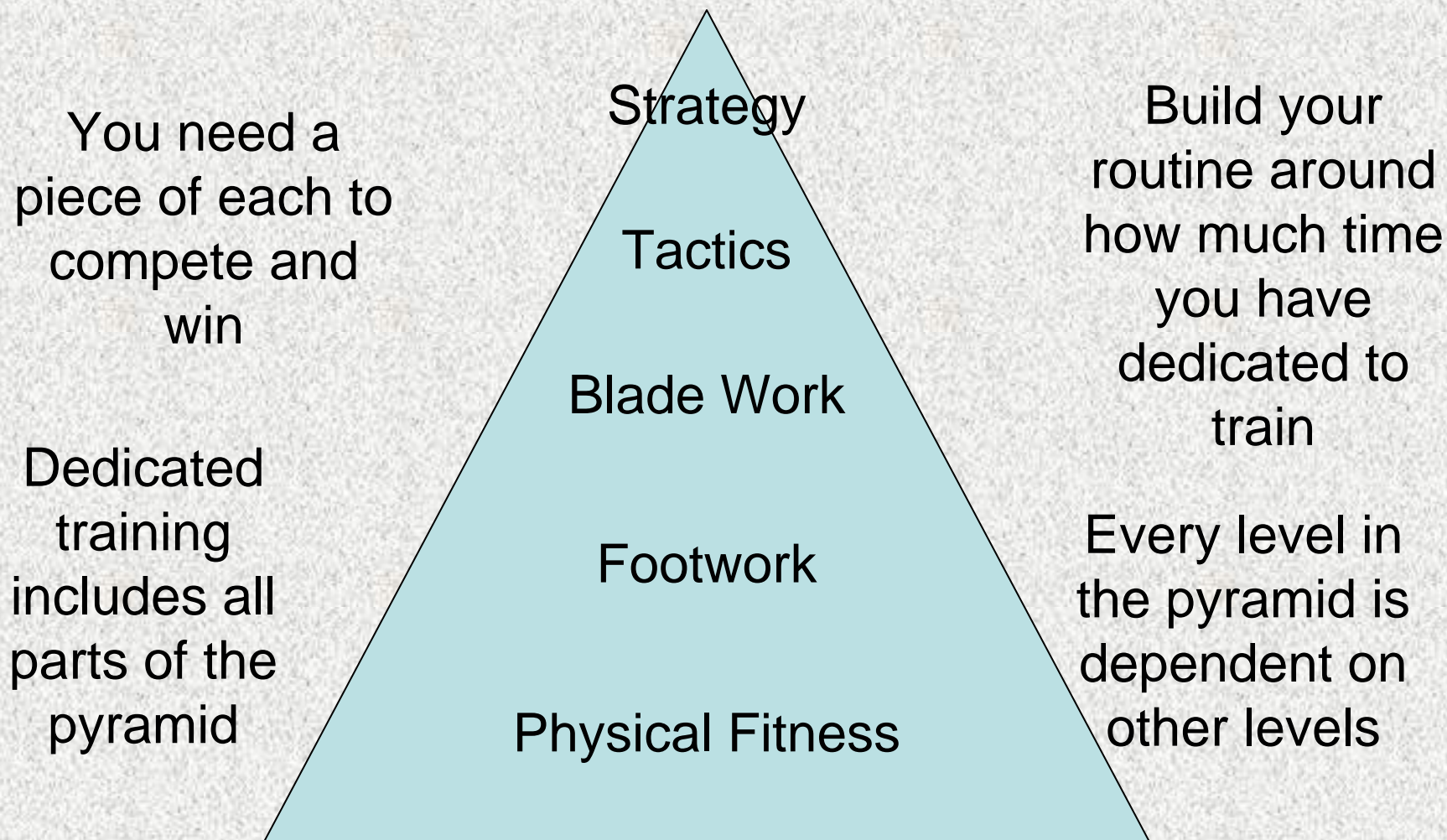
What is fencing?

- A lifetime sport
- A physical game of chess
- A science
- An Art
- All rolled into one sport

What kind of fencer are you?

- Beginner
- Recreational
- Local competitor
- Regional competitor
- National competitor
- International competitor

The Competitive Pyramid



Physical Fitness



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Physical fitness

- You can't get anywhere without it
- It is the number 1 performance element at all levels.
- Are you physically fit?

Physical Fitness

Basic Elements of Success

- Physical conditioning
- Elements (to name a few)
 - Nutrition, weight training, interval and cross training to enhance:
 - Speed, Strength, Acceleration, Endurance, Flexibility, Precision, Control
 - Find a good trainer, let physical training complement your fencing. Focus on the practice of fencing at the salle.

So you think you're fit?



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What Is Physically Fit?

- Depends on the athlete and the sport
- You can use the US Council for physical fitness as a reference.
- Resource:
 - http://www.fitness.gov/resources_factsheet.htm

Physical Fitness Options

- Running, weight training, cross training
- Soccer, basketball, ultimate Frisbee
- Speed drills (lines)
- Sometimes you can't get there with what you have. What do you do?
 - Seek your coaches advice

Physical Trainers

- My advice
- Even a great trainer will need to understand your physical goals, and what physical training to be emphasized.
- A trainer should identify training and schedules that meet your personal needs.
- Trainers can help you not only with strength and endurance, but coordination too.
- If you have trainer and a coach, introduce them, They need to work towards the same goal...
YOU

Foot Work



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Foot Work

- The number 2 element of performance.
- Critical in managing distance which enables perfect blade work.

Training

footwork

- What is push/pull?
- When are you most vulnerable to attack?
- When is the best time to attack?

Good Footwork == Good Distance

(GREAT FOOTWORK == GREAT FENCING)

- What is distance?
- What is critical distance?
- What is correct fencing distance?
- Is fencing distance static or dynamic?
- How does great footwork/distance enable blade work?
- How does poor foot work disable blade work?

Training

footwork

1. Advance
2. Retreat
3. Lunge
4. Fleche

Resource: <http://www.fencing.net/drills/>

Training

footwork

- Repetitive practice of great foot work is required. (when by yourself or when you fence)
- Repetitive practice of poor, mediocre, or good foot work is a waste of time. (At worst, it trains you to have poor foot work)
- As a rule, practice small quick steps going forward. And small to large steps retreating.
- Stay down, in position and ready to go. (don't lose a tempo)
- **KEEP YOUR BACK STRAIGHT AND MAINTAIN EVEN WEIGHT OVER BOTH FEET**

Training

footwork

- What are YOU looking at?
- Distance is gauged from the shoulder. Everything else is target
- What key tells can you look for to anticipate your opponent and manage distance better?
- One technique... Always look your opponent in the eyes, open up your senses and use your peripheral vision to see the tells. A slight shift of weight = direction change, and many more...

Training

footwork + blade work

- Optimal training combinations
 - Long = simple attack, minimal if any bladework, target is the hand when it is extended or as it is extending.
 - Medium = Simple to complex blade action(s), target is the forearm and elbow
 - Short = Final action. Minimal if any bladework, target is the torso. No retreat, no prisoners.

Competitive Issues

Observe your opponent and determine...

- Kill Zone(s)
 - You
 - Your Opponent
- Safe and easy?
- Risky and hard?
- Beware the mutant (or the poster)

Competitive Issues

Manage Fencing Distance

- Manage the distance to enhance and enable your blade work
- Identify correct distance with each new opponent
- Proper distance is not static. Continually adapt distance as change occurs in the bout.
- Always fence in the optimal distance, based on you, your opponent, and your strategy

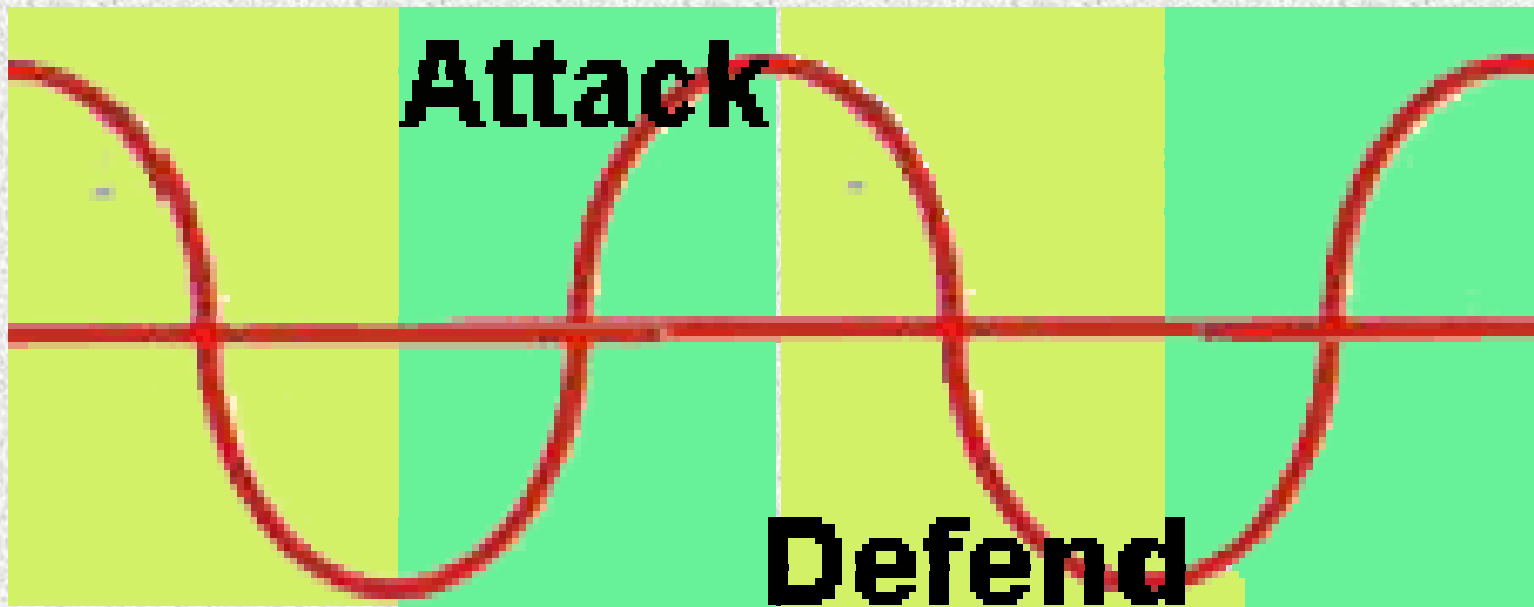
Competitive Issues

- What is push/pull?
- When are you most vulnerable to attack?
- When is the best time to attack?

Competitive Issues

Acceleration, the key to success

- Wave form cycle of offense vs defense as it relates to acceleration.



Competitive Issues

- What is the difference between pressing and attacking?
- Can you feint with your feet?
- What things can you look for in your opponents footwork that will give you an advantage?
- What flaws in your footwork do other competitors take advantage of?

Blade Work



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Basic Blade Actions

Control with Opposition

Six, Counter Six

Eight, Counter Eight

Four, Counter Four

Seven, Counter Seven...

Basic Blade Actions Attacks

Blade work attack elements

Pick

Flick

Beat

Direct, indirect

Absence of blade

Engagement of blade

Tempo...

Whoa! Way too much info!

Basic Blade Actions

Keep it simple

- Pick three to four blade actions
 - Three actions will give you 9 combinations!
 - Four actions will give you 16 combinations!
- Pick your actions to match your strengths
- Combine with long, medium and short distance
- Combine them in different ways to create **EFFECTIVE** combinations
- Examples...

Basic Blade Actions

Keep it simple

- Keep actions simple when training
- Understand what makes an action successful (great foot work is critical)
- Execution of any single action is a separate and independent of the previous, or next action
- Combine simple actions to make combinations..

Basic Fencing Physiology

- Let your legs do the work of adjusting distance, let your arm and hand engage the blade
- Square shoulders make for successful opposition actions
- Where is your thumb?
- Close the lines

Basic Fencing Physics

- Leverage
 - What is leverage? How does it apply?
 - What is a fulcrum?
- Speed vs acceleration
 - What is speed and how is it measured?
 - What is acceleration and how is it measured?
 - Why is this difference meaningful?
- Mass times acceleration equals force.

Basic Fencing Physics

- What makes a opposition action effective?
- Mass times acceleration equals force.
- Use of the foible and the forte simultaneously is a good thing!
- Improve your point control and while making it harder for you opponent... keep the point on the belle.

Competitive Guidance

- Keep six line closed
- Work the right actions at the right distances
- Finishing actions to six and eight lines
- Once in short distance, finish it
- Keep point on the belle
- Open your senses up
 - Look your opponent in the eye
 - Use peripheral vision for targets/tells/distance
 - Observe patterns and exploit them

Competitive Guidance

- KISS – Keep it simple
- Observe your opponent before you bout
- Develop a basic strategy, but be flexible
- 5 vs 15 touch bouts require different strategies
- Body and position awareness on the strip
- Remember your mistakes, but don't dwell on them. Write them down, fix at practice.
- Use the field of play to your advantage

Competitive Guidance

- Use the clock
- Use the ref (respectfully. “why did you call halt?”)
- Check the score after each bout
- Don’t sign a score sheet without checking
- As a goal, strive for a result that is better than your original seed.
- If you can make the final eight, you can win (just happy to be here...)

Training Discipline



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The Mind

The Learning Process

- The lesson is given
 - Mechanical skills are cataloged at a conscience level
 - Through repetitive actions, the movements become rote responses to stimulus that are programmed at a subconscious level
 - These subconscious responses are called rote reactions.
 - Rote reactions provide speed of action

The Mind

The Learning Process

- Repetitive and disciplined practice programs the right reactions at the right time
- Repetitive or repeated actions without discipline and attention to detail yield questionable results
- Meet Dr. Skinner...

The Mind

The Learning Process

- Dr. Skinner's basic hypothesis was that behavior can be modified through very simple and random positive reinforcement
- Slot machines... a great example
- This works on Epee fencers, both in practice and on the strip...
- Do YOU have a "hail mary" move?
 - Do you know what it is?

The Mind

Practice Guidelines

- Learn the basic mechanical actions with formal discipline. Practice them until you can do the movements perfectly without thinking about it. Use a mirror...
- Work on one thing at a time.
 - Never abandon the basics
 - Add new skills over time

The Mind

Training during open fencing

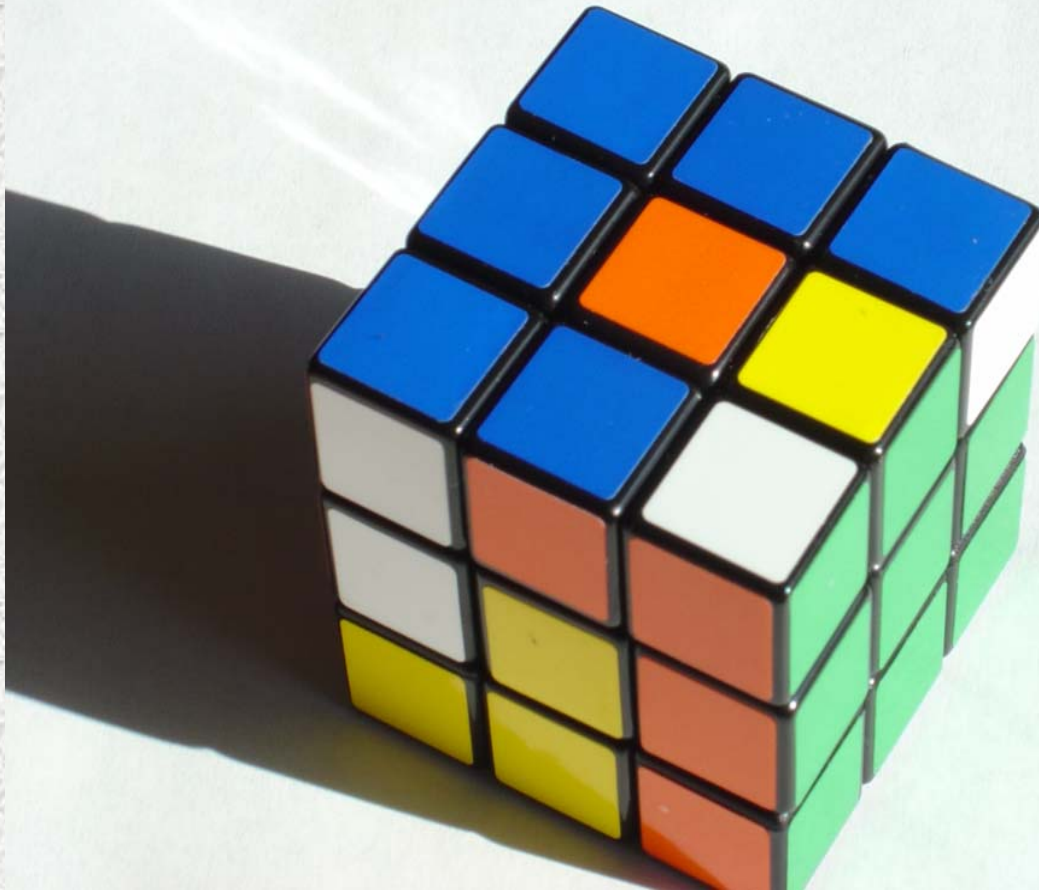
- Practice great actions 100% of the time
 - Hardest part of practicing with team mates is they know what you are practicing... If you can make your move work on them every time... It may very well work in competition. A word of caution, your team mates will adapt to your skills, don't over compensate to overcome this. Just add a new skill...
 - Don't always keep score, it leads to the wrong training behavior

The Mind

Training during open fencing

- Practice to win all of the time
 - Practice perfect actions and strategies.
 - Practice offense (60%) defense (30%) and to win (10%)
 - When practicing to win, always keep time.
 - When practicing offense/defense with a partner, don't keep score. You can use a countdown timer to limit your time on the strip.

Strategy and Tactics



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Strategy vs Tactics

- How do strategy and tactics relate?
Strategy is simply setting goals and objectives.
 - Win the bout
 - Run the clock...
 - distance, distance, distance
- Tactics are the actions used to achieve your goals.
 - Invite the attack and prepare a counter attack

The Mind

waxing philosophical

- Mind
 - Logical
 - Control and mental balance
 - Define strategies and tactics
 - Focuses and directs power constructively
 - Emotion
 - Raw emotions (Passion to win, is good)
 - All emotions need to be kept under control
 - How can an opponent take advantage of you?

Basic SWOT

(Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat)

| | Your Arms (bladework) | Your Legs (footwork) |
|------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Your Reach | Longer(+) Same(0) Shorter(-) | Longer(+) Same(0) Shorter(-) |
| Your Speed | Faster(+) Same(0) Slower(-) | Faster(+) Same(0) Slower(-) |

What would you do if...

(Discussion)

| | Your Arms (bladework) | Your Legs (footwork) |
|------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Your Reach | Longer(+) | Shorter(-) |
| Your Speed | Slower(-) | Slower(-) |

Strategy 101

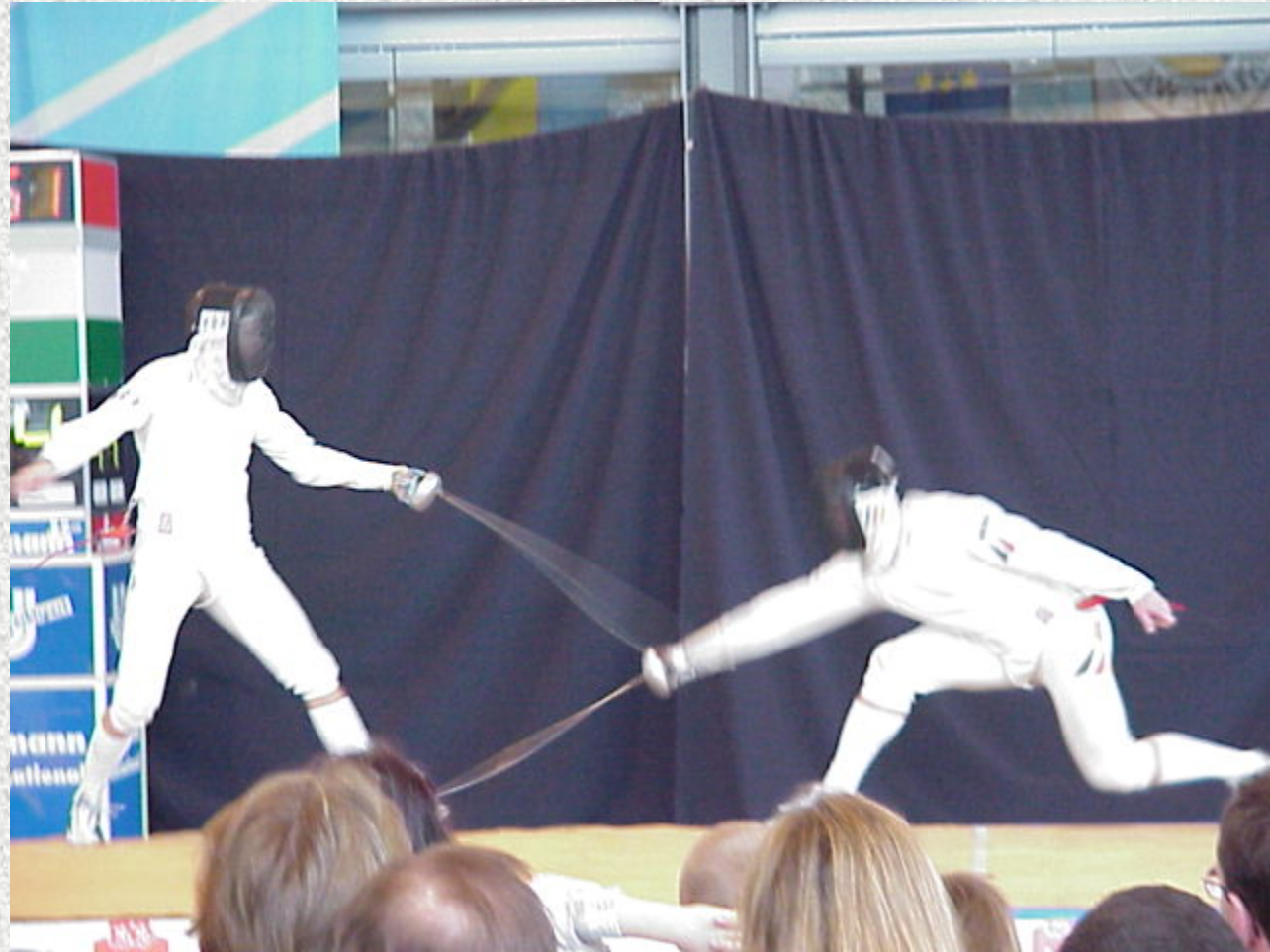
- Patterns, look for them, everyone has them.
- Subtlety vs. brute force, both are good when used at the right time
- SWOT analysis (identify the following compared to your opponent)
 - Your Strengths
 - Your Weaknesses
 - Your opportunity
 - Their threats
- **KEEP THIS SIMPLE**

Strategy and Tactics

Bout Scenarios

- You have considerably longer reach, what strategy.
- Your opponent is a better fencer than you, but they don't know anything about you.
- Your opponent is an aggressive attacker, and s/he is good at it.
- Your opponent is a defensive fencer and s/he is good at it.

You and Your Coach



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Responsibilities

- Coaches
 - The responsibility of the coach is to facilitate the development of fencing skills.
 - Factory?
 - Custom?
- Students
 - The responsibility is to take the guidance and teachings of the coach, and apply them to disciplined training activities independent of the coach.

Select the Right Coach

- Understanding of your personal goals is critical in selecting a coach.
- Interview coaches to make sure that you and your coach have some synergy and they meet YOUR requirements
- Don't settle, there are many good coaches and they are all different.
- Have fun

Selecting the right coach

- Pedagogy
 - Factory vs Custom
- Personality
 - Brutal vs Easy going
- Skill level and history
 - Recreational vs World class
 - Results
- What I do...

Take Responsibility

- Choosing a coach
- Loyalty is good, honesty is good, gaining knowledge from different sources is great!
 - Coaches and competitive fencers provide great input.
- Resource: American Fencing Spring 2006
 - “It takes two”, The fencer coach relationship
Author: Steven Hesky

Develop Reasonable Goals

- Sit down with your coach and define reasonable short and/or long term goals.
 - What's reasonable...
- Build a contract with your coach around a game plan that both you and your coach can commit to.
- Respect the contract and execute against it.

Questions?

Experience vs. Performance

