

Thomas Strzalkowski on Refereeing Sabre

During last year's USFCA annual conference Thomas Strzalkowski discussed and demonstrated current sabre refereeing with the participants. As a fencer, coach and referee, he has been involved in sabre for 27 years. All of his training was with Wes Glon and Larry Pinkus.

Based on his experience, there are five actions he sees as a referee which sometimes confuse coaches.

Simultaneous actions: simple attack with advance lunge to head.

Fencer A and Fencer B began with simultaneous actions and then began to vary them.

If an action finishes close to one fencer, it is not simultaneous – the opponent begins or completes an advance, freezes, and then reacts. The opponent is trying to steal the touch. He freezes and then does a quick cut. It would be called "attack" and "counter-attack" - out of time. The main point is that you have to take a chance to earn the touch.

He also illustrated, Fencer A's ability to observe his opponent and accelerate his attack (with a quick advance lunge or jump lunge) against a slower opponent and have the attack given to him. If you teach your students to advance, wait and then react, don't expect the calls to be given to them.

Sabre changes constantly. The most recent changes in attacking actions are:

- Older interpretation:** As soon as the foot lands, the attack is finished (attack no, riposte good).
A attacked, B reacted with an attempt to parry, but didn't touch the blade. Both hit (A did a cutover and hit). B gets touch, because attack was over with the foot landing.
As of April 2010: A's feint (cutover) attack is good even if the foot lands, because A made B react to the parry.
- Fencer A does a feint attack. B didn't react. Attack is finished. Both hit. B has touch. If A makes the opponent react it is A's right of way. If the opponent does not react, A loses the right of way. Success in compound attacks depends on the opponent's reactions.
- Attack, counter attack. When is the attack in time or not in time? When is it a preparation or a true attack?
Distance determines if it is an attack or preparation.
Fencer A advances, while drawing back arm. In distance, A's hand comes out. Even if B cuts faster, it is still A's attack because he initiated the action. Counter-attack in time if B started first once A was in distance. Once again, as a referee, he's looking for the fencer who initiates the action, who takes the chance, who takes the risk. That is the person to whom he will always award the touch.
- Parry riposte rules over remise. A attacks, B parries and ripostes. A is hitting hard and the blade whips over and hits B. Both lights are on. B has the right of way. Parry riposte will always be called, no *mal* parry, no whip over. A good referee will always call for the person who is taking the risk.
- When does the attack finish? When is the attack short? When does the opponent take over?
Simple attack
Fencer A begins, B goes in. (A begins with two advances. At the end of the second advance, A's arm is fully extended. At that point A's attack is over. B attacks. Both hit. B gets the touch.) (Essentially, A's continuation to hit was a counter-attack.)
Fencer A advances with bent arm, extends arm, foot lands. (Attack No!) Fencer B hits with distance. (Attack Yes!)

Coach Strzalkowski stressed that 80 percent of sabre touches are scored with distance. As coaches, if your student has the most beautiful action in the world, but the referee isn't awarding your student the touch, then teach the student to change to a different action. Students must adapt. A good student will.