



Zbigniew Czajkowski, PhD, Dr. h.c. for 75 years connected with fencing (competitor, coach, referee, activist, scientist, author). For many years he took part in fencing competitions including international tournaments in all three weapons with very good results. For many years he has been working as a coach. Among his pupils there are many medalists of Olympic Games, World Championships, European Championships and other tournaments. He has worked (since 1980) also as a lecturer at Academy of Physical Education in Katowice – in Fencing Department. He also conducts many coach's courses and seminars in many countries. He is the author of 30 books on fencing, training and sport psychology and hundreds of articles.

Address: Zbigniew Czajkowski, ul. J. Fałata 16 a m 9, 41-902 Bytom, Poland

ZBIGNIEW CZAJKOWSKI

Academy of Physical Education in Katowice (Poland), Committee of Scientific Research, Idokan Poland Association
 Phone +48 32 282 57 56; z.czajkowski@interia.pl

Characteristics of Contemporary Fencing

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Abstract

Human beings from prehistory times were forced to fight – against nature, animals, and other people. Hence, the necessity to have weapons and to know how to use them. The weapons change from very primitive ones (stones, pieces of wood) to more complicated (axes, arches, lances, swords, rapiers, epees and so on). Humans had to learn how to use various weapons and this is the origin of fencing. Fencing is a bout between two armed men with the desire to hit one's opponent and to avoid being hit oneself. So, it was necessary to develop energy abilities (strength, speed and endurance) and co-ordination abilities (motor learning ability, skilful execution of movements) and tactical abilities (appropriate choice of action). The ways of fighting and training today make fencing a very modern, complicated sport, developing energy abilities, coordination, speed and accuracy of perception, various aspects of attention, many sensory-motor skills (fencing actions), the appropriate kind and level of motivation and arousal. Fencing nowadays is only a sport and not a preparation for duel or war.

“The exercising of weapons putteth away aches, griefs and diseases; it expelleth melancholic, cholericke and evil conceits; it keepeth a man in breath, perfect health and long lyfe.”

George Silver, 1599

“Fencing is as much a mind game as a physical test. Even though you face one another through the mesh in the mask, your confrontation with opponents is eyeball to eyeball, with all the mental pressure this entails.”

Terrence Kingston, 2001

The words of the Fencing Master in Moliere's “*Citizen Turn'd Gentleman*”, 1670, are very well-known and define the essence of fencing as giving hits without receiving them. Thus, fencing may be briefly defined as the art of wielding weapons with the intention of touching the opponent, by cut or thrust, while avoiding being hit, oneself.

In a real fight – fencing with sharp weapons in war, combat, or duel – the aim of the fight was to kill or wound the opponent in as short a time as possible.

Until very recently, the art of wielding cutting and thrusting weapons had still its place in army: bayonet, cavalry sabre, lance.

Since the 20th century (especially after the Second World War), when we talk of fencing, we mean, nearly always, fencing as a sport. Contemporary fencing, in its athletic form, consists of a fight and preparation for competition between two opponents – equally armed with conventional weapons – according to established forms and rules. The aim of this sportive combat is to score on one's opponent the maximum number of conventional hits, in a given time, while attempting to avoid being hit oneself, or, at least to receive as few hits as possible.

Apart from the modern sport of fencing, one can distinguish stage fencing and various national systems of fencing and wheel fencing for disabled people.

Stage fencing is the art of wielding various types of old weapons, according to the style and tradition of the period depicted in the play, and also in accordance with the specific demands of the theatre. In stage fencing, various factors are concerned such as: knowledge of a variety of weapons; knowledge of the history of fencing; salutes, movements and manners of different periods; as well as the dexterity and general fitness of the actor. Apart from this, fencing is a well-known and efficacious way of achieving the physical fitness and grace of movement of an actor, used in schools of drama, ballet and film.

In several countries, old national forms of fencing are still known and cultivated, such as kendo in Japan, Parikaoba in Georgia, etc.

The sport of fencing shapes many valuable sensory-motor skills (motor habit patterns) and various kinds of sensory-motor reactions. It develops various energy and co-ordination abilities – strengthens and exercises muscles, ligaments and joints; has a beneficial effect on the nervous and respiratory systems and on blood circulation; and improves the general health and functional and adaptive capacity of the organism. It also improves perception, concentration and other aspects of attention (level of attention, divisibility, range of attention, external and internal attention, narrow and wide attention), imagination, quick analytical thinking, orientation in space and time, and speed of reaction.

The practise of fencing does not require large sports grounds or expensive installations and is independent of the season of the year.

Fencing develops lightning speed orientation; the ability to concentrate during a bout; a certain craftiness in misleading the opponent; the ability to observe and reconnoitre the technique, reflexes and intentions of the opponent; and improves such traits as ambition, self-control, self-confidence and positive motivation (the right contents, direction and level of general motivation, plus a motive of success and task involvement in achievement motivation).

A fencing bout is a clash of two systems of tactics. Success in the "tactical battle" depends on: early and good reconnaissance of the opponent (his strong and weak points, style of fencing, favourite actions, and speed); forcing one's own intentions on the opponent; application of judicious tactics, often varying from bout to bout.

The sport of fencing develops unusual co-ordination of movements of the whole body (gross

co-ordination) and hand and fingers (fine co-ordination), resulting, among other things, from the necessity of immediate action in an extremely short time – a fencer usually acts with a strong "deficit of time" – and depending on the development of the situation on the piste. Fencing also requires and develops the ability to keep one's own balance while executing fast, varied, precise, and sometimes very complicated movements – it even sometimes demands strict co-ordination, and sometimes complete independence, of movement of the arms and legs. By cultivating fencing, one exercises all muscles, but – above all – the extensors. Fencing exercises and bouts develop suppleness, flexibility, dexterity, nimbleness, and agility.

Fencing is, par excellence, a fast sport, in every sense of the word (speed of perception, speed of reaction, speed of movement, fast change of action, change of rhythm, etc. – much more complicated than the speed of a runner or swimmer). Speed in fencing is a combination of energy ("physical") fitness abilities and co-ordination abilities. It also increases the speed and accuracy of perception and speed of reaction. Energy abilities are connected with the effort capacity of all organs, systems, and the organism as a whole, whereas co-ordination abilities are connected, above all, with the functional co-operation of the receptors, nervous system, and motor system (muscles).

Fencing develops many co-ordination capabilities, which may be divided into three groups: motor educability (the ability to learn new strokes and to change "old" motor habit patterns), motor control (the ability to precisely direct one's movement), and motor adaptability (the ability to execute and apply various fencing actions in a changeable manner, in very varied and often unpredicted situations). In this respect, fencing (like other combat sports and games) differs considerably – both in its contents, methods of training, and performance – from sports with closed motor skills (like gymnastics, acrobatics, etc.).

As a special kind of motor adaptability, I distinguish lightning-like speed improvisation, the essence of which is to apply, during a bout, a movement or set of movements – based on elementary skills – which have never been executed in such a way during practise.

In directing the weapon with the fingers, one acquires "sentiment de fer" and increases the sensitivity of tactile sense; apart from which fencing increases, to a high degree, kinesthetic sensitivity.

Big fencing competitions frequently last several days, during which a competitor may have many hours of bouting with interludes every day, particularly if he is taking part in more than one

weapon (which recently happens rather rarely) and in both individual and team events – which is a most exacting and difficult test of stamina, psychological endurance, and specific fitness.

Many coaches identify the term endurance with long-distance running, which is, of course, utterly wrong as long distance running is connected with long, monotonous effort, rhythmic movements, lack of an opponent and a change of situation, aerobic processes, and slow-twitch muscle fibres. In fencing, the effort is very short and fast, entailing anaerobic processes, fast-twitch muscle fibres, facing an opponent and constant change of situation, and the effort is not continuous (including the interludes between bouts and within the bouts, themselves). Contrary to many author's opinions, I consider endurance to be a highly specific ability and there are different kinds of endurance: that of a watchmaker, surgeon, marathon runner, figure skater, orchestra conductor, car driver, sprinter, soccer player, typist, film director, singer, pianist, smith, ballet dancer, fencer, etc. I define endurance as resistance to fatigue in a given, specific variety of activity. Long-distance running, of course, does not develop fencing endurance. Fencing-specific endurance, according to me, means resistance to perceptual fatigue (closely watching the opponent; speed and accuracy of perception; a high level, and many other qualities, of attention; fast and appropriate reaction); cognitive (mental), fatigue (trying to assess the opponent's tactics; fast analysis of the opponent's, and one's own, movements; choosing the right tactics; drawing immediate conclusions during and after the bout); emotional fatigue (state of anxiety; stressful situations; desire to win; trying to avoid failure; joy; despair; hope; lack of confidence; etc.); and – for a trained fencer, the least important – “physical” fatigue.

Because of the great significance of precise, versatile and varied technique; experience; psychological factors (self-control, concentration, positive intrinsic motivation, motive of success, the appropriate level of arousal); and tactics; fencing is a sport which may be cultivated from early youth up to a ripe old age. Older competitors compensate for a certain loss of speed and endurance by better technique, experience, more mature tactical solutions and also by fencing-specific motor responses (different varieties of reaction).

There are the following varieties of sensory-motor reactions: simple reaction, choice reaction, differential reaction, reaction to a pre-signal, reaction to a moving object, change of action during its execution and intuitive reaction [Czajkowski 1994, 2005, 2007, 2010].

The development and perfection of a whole complex of physical and psychological traits and abilities – as well as the constant improvement of technical, technical-tactical, and tactical capabilities – are indispensable for a fencer.

In a modern, very mobile, fencing bout, specific energy fitness – strength and endurance, as well as specific speed – and specific co-ordination abilities are very necessary. Capability and skill in manipulating the weapon, and tactical capabilities, are extremely important and, in a certain sense, decisive.

But this is not enough – one also has to have very strong, well-exercised muscles of the arms and legs. Strong and elastic legs are necessary for: mastery of the fencing stance; purposeful displacements on the fencing strip; executing lunges, balestras, and fleches (very important here is the combination of strength and speed – power – especially in executing fast lunges and fleches). Muscular strength of the arms and fingers (plus fine co-ordination) allows long, continued and untiring holding and manipulation of the weapon, brisk beats on the opponent's blade, strong binds, and parrying with the middle part of the blade – as it is not always possible to parry with forte, especially in epee at a long distance.

One cannot overestimate the significance of speed in fencing. Nowadays, one cannot imagine a great fencing champion who would not be very fast. One must, however, bear in mind that speed of assessment of a situation, and speed of motor responses (the latent period of reaction) – combined with sense of timing (sense of surprise) – is, by far, more important, although less visible, than speed of execution of movements (the executory, or effector, period of reaction).

To be able to achieve sudden changes of direction, varied rhythm of movement, and to attain a high turn of speed, a fencer must relax muscles and give suppleness and fluency to his movements while he is executing preparatory movements such as reconnoitring, manoeuvring for the proper distance, trying to catch his opponent by surprise, etc. With fencers with rigid muscles who usually fence as if they were glued to the piste, intention of executing a blade movement is nearly always “signalled” by excessive amplitude and rigidity of movement which not only slows their own actions, but also acts as a warning signal for the opponent.

A beautiful, efficient and fast style of fencing depends on economic and relaxed movements, in which only the appropriate group of muscles contract with adequate intensity and rhythm, and with the proper co-operation (relaxation) of antagonistic muscles.

On the psychological side, motivation and – strictly connect with it – arousal are the most

important basic attributes. One could say that proper training and success in competition are a consequence of the right kind and level of motivation, and the intensity of arousal. It requires the optimal contents, direction, and level of motivation, and the appropriate level of arousal to conscientiously and diligently repeat, again and again, exercises which are difficult and may be tedious. Only ambition and the appropriate level of a motive of success can enable a fencer to make the sustained and obstinate effort needed to improve his fencing capabilities, to overcome difficulties and obstacles, to keep up his desire to fight in spite of fatigue and unfavourable conditions of a bout, and to reach the best possible results in tournaments.

As far as achievement motivation (a set of motives occurring in situations of fight, rivalry, external assessment) is concerned, many coaches think that the best is a very high, nearly maniacal, motive of success ("victory at any cost") and very hard, tedious, murderous effort. My opinion, based on many, many years of practical experience and careful observation, is that the best and most effective – both for the results in competitions and the development of the pupil's personality – are the following component parts of achievement motivation: an optimum, appropriate level of motive of success – desire to win, desire to compete, belief in one's success, but not victory is everything; task involvement – the desire to improve one's knowledge, skills, abilities and capabilities; feeling of independence, responsibility, and self-confidence; and sport enjoyment – getting pleasure out of training and competing, love of fencing (emotional factor) and interest in fencing (mental factor).

So far in trying to characterise fencing as a sport, I have emphasised its general value and attraction, and the beneficial effects on the fencer himself. Let us consider now, more deeply perhaps, what makes fencing such a peculiarly attractive and valuable sport in comparison with other disciplines which, after all, are easier to cultivate, more "natural", easier to understand and appreciate, and which also give pleasure, are healthful and educational.

It seems to me that the specific charm of fencing and its high value in the whole family of various sports lies in the close combination of the following factors:

1. The sheer joy of a fast, mobile and versatile fight with a light weapon in the face of kaleidoscopic, unexpected changes of the tactical situation.
2. Exceptional and decisive significance of psychological traits and intellect in the fencing bout, including psychomotor abilities (psychological processes – like perception, reaction, decision making – strongly connected with motor activity).

3. Rich, romantic and historical tradition of fencing which stirs the imaginations of not only youths.
4. The possibility of cultivating fencing from youth to well above middle age.
5. The exceptionally high social and educational value of fencing as an attractive form of preparation for life and work in the contemporary world; gross and fine motor abilities, a high level of perception, and various qualities of attention (a high level of concentration, range of attention, selectivity of attention, divisibility of attention, shifting of attention) are very practical and useful in modern life, professional work, artistic activity, driving a car, using various apparatuses, etc. Unlike fencing, weight-lifting, running, and so on, develop mostly muscles and physical abilities and are not so useful in contemporary life and work.

The last point underlines the fact that physical culture, of which sport is the most important form in the modern world, serves as preparation for life, productive activity, transport, communication, fighting, etc., and for fulfilling one's role in a society of a given epoch, nation, class and state.

Taking all this into consideration fencing, perhaps the oldest sport in the world, is, paradoxically enough, the most modern of sports – that is, the most versatile and best adapted to the life and activity of the 21st century.

There have been times in the history of mankind when sheer muscular strength and unusual physical endurance and toughness, played a colossal and dominant role in struggles against forces of nature, animals and other people, as well as in primitive productive activity.

Nowadays, however, with a high degree of development of productive forces; an outburst of development of technique at the service of human beings; with a colossal increase in forms and speed of transport and communication; with the steady increase of application of various machines, installations, apparatuses and precise steering mechanisms; with the extreme bustle and hurry of modern life; the following traits, abilities and attributes take on a decisive importance: very fine co-ordination of movement without the use of sheer force; delicate manipulation of fingers; high development of kinesthetic sense; the ability for long-sustained concentration of attention, its divisibility and shifting; spatial orientation and fast reaction in constant and rapid changes of situations; the ability to make instant decisions; the ability to make a rapid and purposeful change of decision while executing an action.

These attributed skills and abilities are more and more necessary in modern industry, in research laboratories, while driving a car, flying, in military

activity, etc. And these are the very traits which are shaped and developed while cultivating fencing.

The task of a good coach is to patiently perfect these qualities in his pupils so that they may transfer them from the narrow field of the fencing strip to their work, life and study. The considerable social and educational value of fencing is not a spontaneous quality, but has to be carefully fostered and influenced by the coach and affected by the attitude of fellow athletes.

It has to be realised that, without suitable pedagogical influence, certain attributes and attitudes shaped by sport, may exert a negative influence. For example: fencers, badly handled, may exhibit such unfortunate characteristics as aggressiveness, egocentrism, selfishness, quarrelsomeness, and lack of consideration for others. This is why the necessity of intertwining technical teaching and pedagogical influence in the process of training is so important. Taking this into consideration, one must realise that the best styles of leadership in coaching – to enhance a rich development of a pupil's personality and allow him to play many social roles in life – are the co-operative and friendly style [Czajkowski 1994].

While doing full justice to the social aspects of fencing and underlining its instrumental meaning, we must not forget its autonomous meaning – a fine glow of achievement, a feeling of physical fitness, longevity and strong muscles are not only important for productive work and its social consequences, but are in themselves of high value for the development and happiness of the individual.

A Polish scientist Andrzej Tyszka, in his most interest essay on the humanistic values of sports, very truthfully says, "A person, as an individual, has a right to health as such, and not only to health as an uninterrupted capacity for productive work – he has a right to joyful longevity in the fullness of strength as such, and not in order to avoid becoming an early pensioner, burdening the social budget. The value of a successful life is independent and can be found, among others, in sports, physical recreation, enjoyment of watching and playing matches. Among the humanistic values of life, sport is not the only one, but not the last of independent values" [Tyszka 1970].

A good lesson and a fencing bout is a pleasant experience which allows one to shake off tiredness and gives a feeling of well-being, optimism and energy – probably because fencing absorbs so much thought, strength and concentration, that it eliminates worries and every day troubles.

Some year ago, Dr. Roger Tredgold [Tredgold 1949], an excellent sabreur and psychiatrist, pertinently summed up the good points of sabre fencing: "Life is full of frustrations today and

many jobs lead to emotional tension which is better relieved in action than pent-up. No doubt many people express on the football or cricket field antagonism engendered against their superiors, or sometimes even against their wives. But the cricket-, tennis- or foot-ball is far less satisfying in this way than the body of one's opponent on the piste and, in my experience, far less easy to hit. And, of course, there can be no doubt that it is more blessed to give (if not to receive) a cut with a sabre than a touch with a foil. This is why most sabreurs – even if tempestuous on the piste – are such very good-tempered equable people off it. . . ."

Carrying this argument a step further one can realise that fencing, even more than other competitive sports, satisfies secret, imperfectly realised, subconscious desires such as the need to dominate; the desire for recognition and approbation; the desire for achievement and success; avoidance of failure, frustration and disappointments; the feeling of belonging to a social group; the need for friendly empathy; the need for security, adventure and aggression.

Let us then briefly consider just what attracts youths and adults to fencing.

The motivation for cultivating fencing is usually many-sided and variable. It varies according to the age, sex and the individual traits of an athlete, and undergoes changes together with the increase of skill and development of a fencer's career. Young people, particularly children, find their way to the salle mostly under the strong influence of emotional experiences connected with romance, heroism and fencing skill displayed by heroes of novels, films and theatre. Among teenagers and young adults, the desire for and joy in energetic motor activity, fighting, rivalry, and an outlet for gregarious instincts, come to the fore. Nearly all adult fencers when talking about the pleasure they get from the sport, underline enjoyments derived from the tactical aspect of a bout such as trying to foresee the opponent's move, trying to draw a given action from him, catching him by surprise, etc.

Some people are under the spell of the personality of great fencers, their successes and travels. They read with interest interviews with fencing stars, become enthusiastic about their successes, and ask for details and impressions connected with their stay in foreign countries (for example, the great Polish sabreurs Adam Papée, Wojciech Zabłocki and Jerzy Pawłowski published several memoirs describing, very colourfully, their adventures on the strip, travels to other countries, museums, sightseeing, meetings with interesting people, etc.) [Pawłowski 1973; Papée 1987; Zabłocki 2006]. An excellent foilist, the Olympic Champion

Gillian Sheen of Great Britain, told me some years ago: "Thanks to my foil I visited many foreign countries and towns and met many interesting people whom I would never have known had I not been an excellent foilist".

Another important motive for the cultivation of fencing is the possibility of raising oneself above average, developing one's personality and emphasising one's assets and value, as well as obtaining recognition and approbation. This motive was particularly important in socialist countries where there was considerable support from the government, political authorities, trade unions, press and society, in general, and where both the authorities and the public were very interested in the results of an athlete's efforts.

But practically in every country, irrespective of system, regime or religion, a leading athlete will usually gain a high social position, become popular and be rewarded with honorary titles and state awards.

Recently, due to the constantly increasing prestige of the Olympic Games and World Championships, and the increasing significance of sport in modern society, this latter motive becomes more and more important. Considering the need for appreciation and recognition, inborn in everyone, this motive for trying to achieve good results in sport is particularly significant in people blessed or perhaps cursed with keen ambition.

Another indirect motive for cultivating fencing is the desire to keep trim, in good health, and physically fit. It is interesting to note that recently in the US, a lot of detailed and interesting research was conducted to choose new forms of exercises for fitness clubs and, strangely enough (though it was not strange for me), it turned out that the most versatile, fitness-producing exercises were those taking from fencing, especially fencing footwork.

Generally speaking, however, the motives are more obvious and direct: pure pleasure in energetic movements, fame, fight, etc.

Some people are impressed by the grace and chivalry of fencing. A certain degree of snobbishness sometimes may play a part – a remnant of the times when swordsmanship was an attribute of the privileged classes. Still others are attracted by a fast, complicated game which, at the same time, is a confrontation of ideas, technique, tactics, quick reaction and motivation.

Dr. Wiktoria Nawrocka, a known Polish sports psychologist, carried out, some years ago, extensive tests of leading Polish athletes from various disciplines of sport and found the following motivation for cultivating highly competitive sports: — desire for success, proving of one's own value,

fulfilment of ambitions, which secures social recognition (51% of tested athletes);

- need for motor activity and those pleasant emotions connected with it (25%);
- need for rivalry and competition (18.7%),
- fascination with the specific character of a particular sport, and overcoming difficulties arising from cultivating this sport (16.4%),
- other motives, like reasons of health, aesthetic experiences, etc. [Nawrocka 1969].

From her examinations and reflections it would appear that "in cultivating competitive sport, the chief role is played by motivation of a sociological nature. It also is mainly responsible for the spontaneous and powerful development of sport in civilised society."

For children, the chief motivating factors for cultivating competitive sports are: sheer pleasure of motor activity, outbursts of energy, a high level of arousal, and a feeling of gaining competence. A good coach should realise this and take advantage of it in the way he organises and conducts exercises with children.

While dealing with children, the fencing master should also cleverly take advantage of children's fascination with swords and the charm of the historical past of fencing.

As the children grow – and with adults – the important task of a good coach is to emphasise and develop the whole, rich scale of various socially positive motives for cultivating fencing while, at the same time, combating negative motivation.

With adults, he should point out the most valuable aspects of fencing as a sport:

1. Consideration of a fencing bout as a fast, versatile, game of skills, abilities, capabilities, conflict, motor responses, dexterity, dimensions of personality and traits of temperament, in which intellect, concentration and motivation play a decisive part;
2. The hygienic and educational value of fencing and its role in adaptation to life and work in modern society;
3. A pleasant and attractive way of developing one's own personality.

An article characterising fencing would be incomplete without the addition of an observation particularly pleasing to those of an aesthetic or dramatic turn of mind. Fencing – as performed by competitors of a high class, of rich and varied technique and constantly new and surprising tactical conceptions, fighting with complete concentration, ambition and motivation to win – takes on the attributes of an art; without losing its character of a sport, it can give the spectators an emotional experience as dramatic and breath-taking as any

theatre or ballet. A fencing bout or the progress of a competition, with its intermingling of victory and defeat, creates tense and exciting situations, revealing to the spectator the feeling and emotions lived, at that moment, by the competitors – their triumphs and disappointments; ambition; courage, indecision or tactical cleverness. In a fencing bout, not only the physical, but the intellectual and emotional characteristics of the fencers are seen: their motivation, arousal, personality, and temperament. The graceful figure of a fencer performing, with lightness and verve, the most complicated manipulations of his weapon, is a sight full of aesthetic emotion.

Summing up, we may state that what George Silver wrote in his *Paradoxes of Defence*, more than five centuries ago (see motto), is very true and up-to-date. A good modern coach will be even able to add, and put into practise, more assets of fencing.

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Charakterystyka dzisiejszej szermierki

Słowa kluczowe: części składowe treningu szermierczego, nawyki czuciowo-ruchowe i odpowiedzi, praca trenerska w szermierce i style kierowania

Streszczenie

Jak panu tłumaczyłem, cała tajemnica robienia bronią polega tylko na dwóch rzeczach, to jest, aby bić, a nie dostawać. Wykazałem to panu kiedyś w sposób doświadczalny; niepodobieństwem jest, abyś dostał pchnięcie, o ile zdołasz uchylić szpadę przeciwnika od linii własnego ciała; a to znowu zależy jedynie od małego ruchu przegubem do wewnątrz albo na zewnątrz
MOLIER, „*Mieszczanin szlachcicem*”

O kierunkach, treści, znaczeniu poszczególnych części składowych treningu, jak również o doborze metod form i środków treningowych danej dziedziny sportu decydują przede wszystkim następujące czynniki: podstawowe cechy danej gałęzi sportu; znaczenie zdolności wysiłkowych oraz stosunek tych zdolności do nawyków ruchowych; znaczenie zdolności zbornościowych (pojętność ruchowa, kierowanie ruchami, przystosowanie ruchowe); liczba i znaczenie nawyków czuciowo-ruchowych; rodzaj nawyku czuciowo-ruchowego (zamknięty lub otwarty; typ ruchowy, typ poznawczo-ruchowy, typ poznawczy); treść i istota taktyki (umiejętności techniczno-taktyczne i taktyczne); procesy psychiczne (szybkość i trafność postrzegania, szybkość i trafność odpowiedzi czuciowo-ruchowych, wybór działania, wycucie zaskoczenia etc.) związane ściśle z działalnością ruchową człowieka.

Jak wiadomo, istnieją gałęzie sportu i konkurencje, w których na plan pierwszy wybija się jedna, dominująca i rozstrzygająca – jeżeli chodzi o trening i wyniki – zdolność sprawnościowa, np. szybkość w biegu na 100 m lub wytrzymałość długiego czasu w biegu na 10000 m. Są inne sporty, w których ważny jest zarówno nawyk ruchowy, jak i zespół odpowiednich zdolności wysiłkowych, np. rzut dyskiem, pchnięcie kulą, skok o tyczce. W innych zaś sportach rozstrzygające znaczenie ma zespół nawyków czuciowo-ruchowych otwartych typu poznawczo-ruchowego, a często stosowanych w zawodach jako odpowiedzi czuciowo-ruchowe przy odpowiednim poziomie ukierunkowanych i swoistych zdolności sprawnościowych (wysiłkowych i zbornościowych).

Szermierka, mimo że posiada wiele cech wspólnych z innymi sportami walki (duże znaczenie nawyków otwartych, stosowanych w walce w sposób zmienny, zależnie od ciągle zmieniającej się sytuacji taktycznej), jest sportem wysoce swoistym i charakterystycznym, w którym przy dużym znaczeniu szybkości i innych cech rozstrzygające znaczenie posiada psychologiczno-taktyczny kierunek treningu. Szermierka różni się bardzo wyraźnie od innych sportów walki: nie ma kategorii wagowych; „brutalna” siła nie jest potrzebna; czas walki nie odgrywa ważnej roli, ponieważ kiedy mija określony przepisami czas walki, wygrywa tren zawodnik, który zadał więcej trafień; w szermierce jedno, nawet najpiękniej wykonane i widowiskowe działanie nie zapewnia zwycięstwa; szermierze nie walczą bezpośrednio (ciosy, chwyt, kopnięcia), ale przy użyciu lekkiej broni sportowej; sędziowanie w szermierce jest o wiele bardziej obiektywne, ponieważ trafienia ważne są sygnalizowane aparatem elektrycznym.

W pięściarstwie czy zapasach np. znaczenie siły jest tak duże,

że bez odpowiedniego poziomu tej zdolności, znaczenie nawyków, odpowiedzi czuciowo-ruchowych i taktyki znacznie maleje, jeżeli chodzi o skuteczność w walce. Istotę szermierki stanowi walka bronią sportową dwóch przeciwników, według obowiązujących przepisów. Fechtmistrz molierowski (patrz motto) liczył chyba bardzo na naiwność pana JOURDAINA, usiłując go przekonać o tym, jak łatwo jest zadawać trafienia i unikać ich. Prowadzenie walki szermierczej nie jest takie proste. Walka na planszy stawia przed układem nerwowym szermierza ogromne wymagania. W konfliktowej grze przy użyciu białej broni spotykają się ze sobą szerokim frontem: sprawność czynnościowo-ruchowa zawodników, ich umiejętności techniczne, wielki zasób różnych nawyków ruchowych, jakość postrzegania i przejawy reakcji, umiejętności taktyczne, emocje, szybkość myślenia i podejmowania decyzji, odporność psychiczna i... obopólna, przeciwstawna chęć trafienia przeciwnika i wygrania walki. Cała walka przy tym odbywa się w błyskawicznie zmieniających się sytuacjach taktycznych, przy stałym niedoborze czasu potrzebnego na zauważenie i zrozumienie ruchów i zamiarów przeciwnika, na wybór odpowiedniego działania własnego i sprawne wykonanie wybranego ruchu. Cała walka szermiercza – zwłaszcza w trakcie zawodów – zabarwiona jest różnymi uczuciami (nadzieja, lęk, obawa, radość, etc.) i rozgrywa się na tle dwóch głównych – wymagających wyjątkowej przetrzutności i podzielności uwagi – zadań taktycznych: uniknąć trafienia przez przeciwnika; trafić przeciwnika.

Szermierz więc manewrując na planszy i realizując dziesiątki różnych, kolejnych zadań taktycznych – „rozdwojonej jaźni”.

Istotną treść treningu szermierza stanowi stopniowe opanowywanie i doskonalenie otwartych nawyków czuciowo-ruchowych techniki szermierczej (opanowywanie i doskonalenie szerokiego kręgu działań szermierczych) wraz z przyswajaniem sobie specjalnych umiejętności techniczno-taktycznych, będących przejawami wysoce wyspecjalizowanych odpowiedzi czuciowo-ruchowych (reakcji), zasad taktyki i umiejętności techniczno-taktycznych i taktycznych, doskonalenie procesów psychicznych (skupienie, podzielność, przetrzutność uwagi; spostrzeganie; spostrzegawczość wybiórcza; myślenie operacyjne; podejmowanie i zmiana decyzji etc.) oraz kształtowanie odpowiednich postaw i cech psychicznych, takich jak: samodzielność, inicjatywa, celowość w działaniu, opanowanie, uporczywość etc. Podstawowe znaczenie w zaprawie szermierza ma psychologiczno-taktyczny kierunek szkolenia.

Można więc – w dużym skrócie i uproszczeniu – powiedzieć, że dla szermierki znamienne są: walka dwóch równo uzbrojonych przeciwników, ogromne znaczenie szybkości przetwarzania informacji przy niedoborze czasu (w tym odrzucanie informacji zbędnych), szybkość i trafność myślenia operatywnego i wycucie zaskoczenia oraz szybkościowej orientacji w sytuacji walki. Ważne jest przy tym uwzględnianie zarówno sytuacji zewnętrznej (odległość, ruchy przeciwnika, działania bronią); jak i sytuacji psychologicznej (stany i zamiary przeciwnika, jego tok myślenia). Wielkie znaczenie posiada oczywiście jakość i zasób nawyków ruchowych techniki szermierczej, rodzaj tych nawyków (nawyki otwarte, czyli zewnętrzne)

oraz ukierunkowany, dostosowany do wymagań sportu szermierczego zespół zdolności sprawnościowych, wśród których wybijają się różne przejawy szybkości oraz swoista, specjalna wytrzymałość szermiercza, procesy psychiczne związane z treningiem i walką oraz znajomość taktyki i umiejętności taktyczne.

Należy zaznaczyć, że szybkość szermiercza jest również wysoce zmienna, mianowicie: jest nierównomierna i nieprostolinijna; występują częste zmiany kierunku i amplitudy ruchu; przejawia się nieoczekiwanie; zawiera często przejście od jednego ruchu do drugiego, nieraz o zupełnie innym charakterze (np. przejście od działania zaczepnego do obronnego i przeciwnie); zawiera przejścia od ruchów wolnych do szybkich i przeciwnie. Dla szermierza ważne są następujące właściwości szybkości: szybkość reakcji prostej, szybkość reakcji z wyborem i innych odmian reakcji złożonej, szybkość wykonania ruchu, umiejętność przyspieszania ruchu, umiejętność dostosowania się do szybkości ruchów przeciwnika, umiejętność szybkiego i sprawnego łączenia ruchów podstawowych w bardziej złożone działania całościowe.

Na wstępie należy mocno podkreślić konieczność zrozumienia i stosowania w treningu jedności, syntezy ćwiczeń doskonalących wykonanie działań (technika i umiejętności techniczne) oraz ćwiczeń doskonalących umiejętność stosowania tych działań w warunkach walki (umiejętności techniczno-taktyczne i taktyczne). Umiejętność wykonywania działań szermierczych i umiejętność ich stosowania w walce z czynnie przeciwdziałającym przeciwnikiem są wzajemnie z sobą związane i współzależne i przedstawiają pełną, sportową wartość jedynie w zawodach.

W procesie treningu szermierza można wyróżnić umownie trzy stopnie trudności:

Opanowanie podstawowych postaw, ruchów i działań szermierczych najpierw w warunkach łatwych, standardowych, potem w warunkach coraz trudniejszych, przypominających warunki walki (zmiennosc sytuacji, zaskoczenie, podzielność uwagi etc.); stopniowe rozszerzanie zasobu działań i umiejętności;

Swobodne i skuteczne przenoszenie cech, nawyków i umiejętności z lekcji do walki ćwiczebnej;

Przenoszenie cech, nawyków i umiejętności z walki ćwiczebnej do walki w zawodach (swobodne i skuteczne ich stosowanie w zawodach).

Najtrudniejsze i najważniejsze jest oczywiście stosowanie nawyków i umiejętności w zawodach. Jest to zarazem „próg trudności”, na który trener ma najmniejszy wpływ, łatwiej bowiem nauczyć jakiegoś działania niż „zmusić” ucznia do skutecznego stosowania go w zawodach. A pamiętać przy tym należy, że jedynym sprawdzianem, sprawdzianem prawdziwym i „bezlitosnym” wartości zawodnika (oraz pracy i metod trenera) są zawody. Tylko takie działania szermiercze i umiejętności taktyczne można uznać za w pełni przyswojone przez zawodnika, które potrafi on skutecznie stosować w zawodach. Uprawianie szermierki wymaga i kształtuje wiele nawyków ruchowych, zdolności wysiłkowych i zbrońnościowych, procesów psychicznych i umiejętności.