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Z. Czajkowski on Fencing : a Review

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REVIEWS

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Z. Czajkowski on fencing (a review)

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Zbigniew Czajkowski (2010), *Fechten verstehen. Die Einheit von Theorie und Praxis*, Verlag Bergische Bücherstube, Overath, pp. 479.

There is no doubt that the book “Fechten verstehen” will be of great interest to amateur and professional fencers in Germany. I don't know any book on fencing, recently published in the German language which contains such a huge spectrum of so many aspects of fencers' training which is both scientific and methodological. The book contains a lot of theoretical and practical advice. As the author often says, the unity of theory and practice, knowledge and practical coach's abilities are extremely important. And as the coach and students must remember, the principle of unity of theory and practice is one of the most important principles of training. And this is especially important in such a complicated sport like fencing. The coach who knows a lot and cannot teach pupils will not achieve good results.

I remember, when I was reading the book “Fechten verstehen” I wondered which category of sport specialization the author had in mind writing it. Is it a scientific approach or practical approach? I came to the conclusion that Professor Zbigniew Czajkowski, with all his scientific approach is above all a coach. As Nikolai Ozolin wrote: “Every great coach walks his own way” (often quoted by Zbigniew Czajkowski). Zbigniew Czajkowski not only has its own way, but leads with him the whole cohort of pupils. And there are a lot of them, not only in Poland, but in many other countries and continents. They have accepted his very logical terminology and division of fencing actions. This allows me to call fencing master Czajkowski a great

coach who unites theory and practice. There are very few such coaches. The coaches with immense knowledge and passionate attachment to their work.

It is enough to read a few pages describing the author's work and achievements to come to the conclusion that the author is an outstanding personality. His first book was published in 1951 (“New Fencing”) and since that time he has written more than 30 books, more than 40 booklets and hundreds of articles. The author has been connected with fencing since 1935 – competitor, coach, activist, author, and scientific worker. I am lucky to have a chance to read many of his books and articles, not only recently, but learning to understand fencing in all different aspects of this unique combat sport.

All the author's books, like all last ones, are full of life wisdom, very useful for the coaches, full of methodological and practical recommendations. But the most important is the fact that all his books stimulate the readers to think and analyse the knowledge in practical aspects.

However, I have to admit that I do not agree with all Professor's views. Reading his books and articles I tried to verify his views and advice in practice. Very often I came to the conclusion that they are right and coherent. Sometimes however – not very often – I concluded that my different views and presented applications of them are right.

For whom is this book written? I think this book is written to all who are fascinated with combat sports and, above all, with fencing. The author presents his views in a simple, easy to understand language, so the readers without difficulty will understand what it is fencing, technique, tactics, and psychology of fencing bout.

The author presents his views very clearly and keeping such logical order that it may be an excellent textbook for physical education and sport students. But the most important value of his book is that it is written with such deep and rich knowledge and presented in such a way that every professional fencing coach may find in it how to plan, organize, and conduct technical, tactical, physiological and psychological preparations of his pupils.

Now a few words on the book's content.

The first chapter contains characteristics of fencing, a very specific branch of sport. Of course, describing any kind of human activity we ought to describe the conditions in which given activity occurs. Fencing – above all – is a combat. More exactly, fencing rules, principles and ways in which fight of two athletes' occurs in fencing bouts are as important as technical and tactical capabilities and various traits of personality (temperament, variety of motivation, psychological endurance, various aspects of attention and perception etc. etc.).

The second chapter. I think this chapter is extremely important. It is devoted to fencing terminology (in fencing very complicated) and characteristics of fencing actions. The author presents elementary classification of fencing actions (offensive, defensive, counter-offensive) and tactical classification of actions (foreseen actions, unforeseen actions and partly foreseen actions) in a very logical way.

Very often when talking with various coaches I have noticed that many of them do not use proper, logical terminology, but primitive slang, which they also use teaching their pupils. In discussions with other fencing coaches often – after long exchange of views – we come to agreement that we have similar views, but do not use the same, clear and logical terminology. Professor Czajkowski often quotes the old Chinese philosopher Confucius: "The first step towards wisdom is ability to give proper names to things".

The fencing coaches who know Z. Czajkowski's books accept and use his very clear and logical terminology. This is beneficial for teaching pupils and contact with other coaches.

The third and fourth chapters – very important and interesting – are devoted to tactics, and very interesting discussion of sense of surprise (*scelta di tempo*, *á propos*). The author discusses the interrelationship of technique and tactics, describing the interrelationship between technique, tactics and psychological factors (perception and various qualities of attention). Discussing the tactics, he describes the preparatory actions which facilitate the choice and execution of real actions. He also describes how to mislead the opponent.

I have just finished writing book on tactics in fencing and many times I took some advice from Professor Czajkowski's books.

To apply successfully an action in a bout the fencer should fast perceive and understand opponent's movements. Here extremely important are various aspects of attention concentration: level of attention, divisibility of attention, external and internal attention, shifting of attention etc. To score a hit, to avoid being hit, to win a bout, the fencer must apply a chosen action, use appropriate speed, and sense of surprise. The fencer should fight in the "zone of risk". It means that he must act in such a distance which makes successful attack or defence possible. According to the author's views, the fencer may take advantage to apply successful action from the following situations:

Low-level of attention which may be the recall of normal psychological change or as a result of fatigue or of being sure the situation is not dangerous for him.

Coming near to the opponent and being ready to retreat when the opponent is ready to attack and programmes his offensive action.

Too high level of arousal (according to Yerkes-Dodson's laws).

It is extremely important to guess the opponent's state of attention and intentions, foresee his intentions and actions, not betraying one's own.

Extremely important for fencing coaches is the fact that an athlete a lot of attention gives to the sense of timing (feeling of surprise, tempo). The author quotes many definitions and descriptions of famous fencing masters. His remarks help a lot to understand the psychological aspect of sense of surprise (*scelta di tempo*). His extremely interesting remarks on sense of surprise will help coaches and competitors to understand the complicated phenomena of sense of surprise. The author thinks that sense of surprise and times of sensory-motor responses (the latent period of sensory-motor response) are inborn and one of the most important factor of fencer's talent. But when the reaction time (latent period of sensory-motor period) may be measured by special apparatus, the sense of surprise may be assessed by the way the fencer acts in a bout. Quoting Robert Ainé (year 1837) Professor Czajkowski points out that there are two varieties of sense of surprise: one which depends on watching carefully the opponent, and the other one: foreseeing the opponent's action. It is very important to know and understand it. In my practical work, conducting exercises I follow Professor Czajkowski's advice.

In the next chapter Professor Czajkowski describes various types of fencers: two extreme types: "the warrior" and "the technician". He

describes the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and emotional reaction to success or failure. The author gives practical advice to understand the psychology of his pupils: the extrovert and introvert and he advises how to teach them.

In the following chapter the author in a very interesting manner describes coach's work, personality, leadership style, knowledge and practical capabilities. He also describes the role of coach's personality: his temperament, love of fencing and work, taking care of his pupils, punctuality, sense of humour, good relations with pupil's parents, how he influences his pupils etc. Very important is not what the coach knows, but his ability to teach. These remarks and advice may be very useful for the coaches.

Well, let us try to analyse coach's profession, disregarding the views appearing in papers and TV. Above all, it is obvious that coach's work requires love and competence to what and how he is doing. To achieve good results it is necessary to work very hard and to be devoted to his branch of sport and to his pupils. And to do it successfully the coach has to work hard from the first day of his job. And the coach should not be motivated externally, he must not expect to receive a lot of money and high prizes. The most important motive of coach's work is love of his sport and desire to train well his pupils. I wonder how many such young men and women are ready to spend many years of hard work for the benefit of their pupils and the chosen branch of sport. There are such young coaches who are ready to give plenty of time and effort for the benefit of their pupils, neglecting other areas of life or even their own families.

The last two chapters are devoted to directing the process of training, various stages and period of training.

No doubt that Zbigniew Czajkowski's many years lasting practical experience as a chief coach of Polish fencing and also many years lectures and conducting coaches courses in Academy of Physical Education in Katowice plus many courses in different countries all over the world resulted in sufficient experience to make his book extremely interesting and of great value to every fencing coach.

Z. Czajkowski o szermierce (recenzja)

Słowa kluczowe: szermierka, teoria Czajkowskiego, trenowanie

Streszczenie

Jest to recenzja niemieckiego wydania książki profesora szermierki, dr. Zbigniewa Czajkowskiego *Rozumieć szermierkę. Jedność teorii i praktyki* (w tłumaczeniu na j. angielski samego Z. Czajkowskiego). Autor recenzji omawia nie tylko treść książki, ale akcentuje też bogaty dorobek trenerski i naukowy autora książki. Boris Touretski ocenia, że książka Czajkowskiego będzie dla trenerów szermierki bardzo przydatna. Podkreśla on teoretyczne oraz praktyczne rady zawarte w książce, gdyż jedność praktyki oraz teorii są niezbędne w osiągnięciu sukcesu przez trenera i jego uczniów. Zaletą książki jest według autora recenzji konsekwentna i jasna terminologia, która umożliwia prawidłową komunikację między różnymi trenerami i ich uczniami. W pierwszym rozdziale znajduje się charakterystyka szermierki, drugi dotyczy terminologii, trzeci i czwarty- taktyki, kolejne dotyczą typów szermierzy, pracy trenera oraz treningów. Według B. Touretskiego książka jest godna polecenia dla trenerów szermierki, ale także dla innych osób zainteresowanych tym sportem, którzy chcą się zapoznać z techniką, taktyką i psychologią fechtunku.