



## Modern Saber Fencing by Zbigniew Borysiuk published by SKA SwordPlay Books, NYC, Staten Island

by  
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*Modern Saber Fencing* by Zbigniew Borysiuk (SKA SwordPlay Books, New York, USA) is a product of the author's many years of experience as a fencing coach and a researcher of talent identification, mental and motor coaching, with particular interests in information processes, perception, sensori-motor reactions, spacial and temporal anticipation as well as selection in sport and fencing training at all stages of an athlete's development. The greatest asset of the book is the wealth of photographs and presentations of technical and tactical actions by elite saber fencers on a DVD. This book should be extremely useful in fencing training and attract the interest of the fencing community, including collegiate fencing clubs, in the United States, Poland and other countries.

### *About the Author*

Zbigniew Borysiuk holds a doctoral degree in physical culture sciences and is a first-class fencing coach. He is a graduate of the University of Physical Education in Warsaw. With his AZS Warsaw Club team he won a bronze medal in the Polish National Championships. Later, he became a very successful fencing coach in Opole. His trainees have been members of the Polish National Team at the cadet, junior and senior world championships level. One of his best students, Dariusz Gilman, became Cadet World Champion and Junior European Champion in saber. Zbigniew Borysiuk was a member of the Coaches' and Instructors' Training Committee of the Polish Fencing Union. In 1993 he was on a coaching contract in Scotland, preparing Scottish fencers for the World Fencing Championships in Essen, Germany and Commonwealth Fencing Championships in Montreal, Canada. At the same time he organized training courses in all fencing weapons: saber, epee

and foil in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Since the mid-1990s he has been working with Professor Zbigniew Czajkowski from the Department of Fencing, Academy of Physical Education in Katowice, where he has been conducting research in exercise physiology and sport psychology of novice and advanced fencers. He is currently an assistant professor in the Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy of the Opole University of Technology, where he develops his research and teaching interests in motor learning, physical exercise analysis and motor control.

Zbigniew Borysiuk has published extensively in such indexed journals as *Journal of Human Movement Studies*, *Biology of Sport*, *Człowiek i Ruch/Human Movement*, *Journal of Human Kinetics*, *Medycyna Sportowa*, *Sport Wyczynowy i Rocznik Naukowy Ido-Ruch dla Kultury /Movement for Culture*, *Gymnica*, and *Brazilian Journal of Kinesiology*. He also is the author of a number of interesting books, e.g., *Psychomotoryczne i osobowościowe uwarunkowania poziomu mistrzowskiego w szermierce (Psychomotor and*

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personality determinants of the champion's level in fencing) (2002), *Współczesna szermierka na szable* (Modern saber fencing) (2005) *Struktura czasowa procesów informacyjnych w wybranych sportach walki* (Temporal structure of information processes in selected combat sports) (2006) and a volume of conference proceedings *Movement and Health*.

### *Origins of Modern Saber Fencing*

The main reason of writing *Modern Saber Fencing* was, in my opinion, transformations in saber fencing that have taken place in the last several years. These changes include the introduction of electronic scoring, which had been used in epee and foil before for a long time, as well as new reforming tendencies in saber evolution forced by the media, in particular, television. A number of rule changes have been introduced in saber fencing aimed at shortening bout duration, making fencing bouts easier for spectators to understand and clarifying the refereeing criteria. Some of the most spectacular saber technique elements (i.e., the fleche and cross-over steps) are now prohibited. All these changes in saber fencing brought new developments in tactical and technical preparation of saber fencers, mostly based on speed and endurance training involving anaerobic and mixed exercises.

The main source of inspiration for the author in preparing the book was his numerous observations, notes and video recordings of different fencing training sessions and competition bouts. Borysiuk's in-depth analysis of these resources and conclusions are the results of his many years of coaching practice in Opole and work with the Polish national junior and senior saber teams. A greater part of his coaching activities took place in the 1980s and 1990s (i.e., at the time of the greatest transformations in saber fencing). Together with many other Polish fencing coaches, Borysiuk began his work with the cadets in the era of non-electric saber. His junior and senior trainees achieved their first fencing successes with the electric saber.

Borysiuk's valuable coaching experience provided him with "a fresh view" of used training methods. Opposing the traditionalists, who defied the inevitability of evolution in saber fencing, the "new saber" soon became an integral part of all fencing competitions. It is important to remember, as shortly before the introduction of electronic scoring, there had been a real possibility of withdrawing sa-

ber fencing from the world championships and the Olympic program.

A significant component of the book is the presentation of state-of-the-art technological advancements in present-day sport training theory, methodology and motor control. These developments have been effectively used in fencing research, which lends credence to the author's valid conclusions.

The book has a clear and logical structure. Particularly significant and useful is Chapter Five devoted to the methodology of saber training, consisting of a number of outlines of actual individual fencing lessons taken from the author's training registers at different sports levels: from the introductory to championship levels. A welcome innovation is Chapter Six on nutrition for fencers.

### *The contents*

*Modern Saber Fencing* consists of twelve chapters set in logical order: from the historical transformations of saber into a modern Olympic weapon, to talent identification and training methodology. The key parts of the book are descriptions of the scientific foundations of fencing involving information processing and perceptual training. The other chapters focus on diagnostic tools in fencing research – in particular, surface electromyography (SEMG) and aerobic and anaerobic power tests – types of sensorimotor responses and timing in fencing.

Chapters One and Two are devoted to the author's reflections on the Olympic saber fencing tournament in Beijing in 2008 and transformations of saber fencing compared to the historical evolution of all fencing weapons, respectively. Borysiuk makes an assiduous analysis of developments in the late 19th century, which involved a significant shift towards competitive saber and refereeing rules very similar to those used in modern saber fencing. Borysiuk emphasizes the Polish contribution to the historical development of saber fencing, especially the achievements of the Polish saber school in the past. First and foremost, however, he stresses the impact of the Italian and Hungarian schools in the 1920s, which triggered the proliferation of competitive saber in Europe. These two traditions were the basis of success in the modified Polish saber school in the late 1950s and 1960s, including Jerzy Pawłowski's Olympic gold medal in Mexico City in 1968, in addition to his three-time World Championship titles, as well as numerous medals in team competitions.

Chapter Three is a detailed analysis of changes in saber technique and tactics in the late 1980s and the 1990s following the introduction of electronic scoring. The chapter contains interesting tables illustrating technical and tactical actions of top world saber fencers, complete with profiles of combat styles of selected fencers. The author concludes that the mentioned changes reduced saber bout times, limited the sabreur's repertoire of technical actions and made saber combat less attractive to the spectators. However, these new developments constitute a compromise between tradition and modern requirements of objective refereeing. Without the evolution, saber could have been marginalized as a fencing weapon.

Chapters Four and Five are the most crucial parts of the book, describing technical-tactical preparation and training methodology of saber fencers. They include detailed descriptions of basic saber fencing positions and actions, as well as outlines of individual fencing lessons at the introductory, based on advanced competitive training levels. Furthermore, Borysiuk presents other forms of fencing training, such as paired exercises, queue exercises, exercises with a fencing dummy and footwork training. He also discusses in detail the tactical significance of offensive, defensive and offensive-defensive actions; and distinguishes between fencers' technical, tactical-technical and tactical skills on the basis of classification of fencing actions and the concept of motor habits based on his Basic Classification of Fencing Actions.

Chapter Six on nutrition for fencers is a kind of novelty in fencing literature. It reveals the importance of proper dietary habits and nutrition supplements for fencers during training and competition. A great asset of the chapter is the presentation of relationships between various nutritional aspects, including body hydration and fencers' energy expenditures during training and competition. The author reveals bad dietary habits in fencing diet and condemns the use of stimulants and alcohol, as well as banned performance-enhancing drugs.

Chapters Seven and Eight concern talent identification in fencing based on the talent identification paradigm from sport training theory. Borysiuk defies the so-called "sport champion" model of talent identification, by pointing to specific predispositions of the best fencers. In his opinion, fencing talent identification should rely, first of all, on psychomotor abilities rather than on pure physical capacity parameters. He demonstrates modern tools for assess-

ment of fencing predispositions and thinks that the process of talent identification should also account for experts' opinions and athletes' ontogenetic development. According to Zbigniew Borysiuk, each fencer represents an individual temperament and personality profile, as well as morpho-structural predispositions. All these components should be considered by coaches in fencing training.

Chapter Nine describes diagnostic tools and methods in fencing research. It includes a number of instructive illustrations and reveals extremely useful selection and assessment tools in five areas of determinants of fencers' sports level: somatic build, energetic predispositions, psychomotor predispositions, personality traits and temperament and specialist preparation. Zbigniew Borysiuk then proposes a set of seven most useful tests for recruitment of prospective fencers.

Chapter Ten titled "Reaction time and movement time. Types of sensori-motor responses. Fencing tempo (the 'sense of timing')" is concerned with implementation of a system measuring psychomotor reactions based on surface electromyography (SEMG) in a fencer's examination. Borysiuk presents here the results of many years of research of novice and advanced fencers simple and complex reactions to three types of stimuli: visual, tactile and acoustic. He also examines fencers' responses to spatial and temporal anticipatory signals and their times of sensori-motor responses. His original and innovative research concept can find a practical implementation in perceptual training and learning motor habits using intrinsic and extrinsic feedback

Chapter Eleven describes information processes, stimulation and perceptual training; and examines fencers' characteristic reactions to different types of stimuli (visual, tactile, acoustic) using a novice-expert paradigm. It also discusses the use of reactions in fencing training in the context of different psychological types of fencers. The author concludes that the examined parameters display a significant variability in a fencer's ontogenetic development and depend on the numerous experiences gained by fencers during training.

The final chapter is a description and commentary to the extremely useful DVD which accompanies *Modern Saber Fencing*. The author systematically demonstrates how to learn teach and develop all technical and tactical fencing actions at all levels of fencers' advancements in implementing various training forms and methods.

## Conclusion

The main concept of Modern Saber Fencing is included in the book's subtitle: "Technique – Tactics – Training – Research". The book is a great accomplishment of the author and the publisher, who presented an effective application of scientific research in fencing training at different fencers' sports levels. The first five chapters of the book are concerned with training methodology, while the remaining seven chapters are research-oriented. The book has been written in plain American English, and is a great resource for researchers, coaches, fencers and parents, as well as the general reader. An important asset to the volume is the preface written by the U.S. National Women's Saber Coach, Edward Korfanty.

The book's undeniable quality is the wealth of illustrations showing the most important technical actions in modern saber fencing. An outstanding role in presenting saber technique for the photographs was played by the European Women's Saber Champion, Aleksandra Socha and her colleague from the AZS Warsaw Club, Monika Kościucha. The accompanying DVD should be praised for its high quality and professionally made footage. The DVD contains demonstrations of various exercises with fencers from the Polish Olympic Saber Team prepared by

the national coach, Arkadiusz Roszak, and the author himself. The footage also contains footwork training techniques, tutorials and technical-tactical paired exercises carried out by the author with two saber fencers from the Polish National Team - Wojciech Marczak and Jan Karkosz.

It is my great satisfaction to note that Zbigniew Borysiuk's publication will definitely meet the expectations of the fencing community. Olympic fencing, especially women saber fencing, is currently in its heyday. Saber fencing is becoming very popular among female fencers from Poland, Korea, China, Russia and the United States, who achieve numerous international successes.

The book reveals the author's emphasis on problems related to the coaching practice and research into sport theory and practice. Since it can be treated as a valuable training manual or an updated report on the implementation of the newest diagnostic techniques, I simply hope it will attract a great interest of the entire fencing community, as well as of young inspiration-seeking researchers in the areas of fencing, combat sports and other sports based on open motor habits patterns (open sensori-motor skills).



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