

FENCING ACTIONS—TERMINOLOGY, THEIR CLASSIFICATION AND APPLICATION IN COMPETITION

by Zbigniew Czajkowski

Motto: *"Being able to give proper names to things is the first step toward wisdom."*

Confucius

"To look is not the same as to see, to see is not the same as to perceive. We perceive, really—on a higher, conceptual-functional level—only what we know, understand well and can give a name to."

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Introduction

For the understanding of fencing actions, and especially of tactics and their application in a bout, and for the effective and rational conducting of fencing exercises it is necessary, to fully understand the theory of training, to know and understand the classification of fencing actions and their application in fighting. This is especially important in countries where there are many foreign fencing coaches (for example, the United States) who use the terminology of their schools—which vary in meaning from school to school and is also sometimes outdated and confusing. One cannot describe modern fencing—teaching, training and tactics—using only the 19th Century terminology of Luigi Barbasetti, great master as he was in his day, simply because many present concepts, practices, exercises and tactical skills were not known at that time. In this paper I am going to give my views on modern fencing and a modified classification of fencing actions—a basic classification of fencing actions and a classification based on tactical intentions. My ideas on the subject are based on nearly seventy years of the practice of fencing, my experience as both a competitor and coach, as a lecturer at the Fencing Department at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice and innumerable courses, seminars and workshops for coaches conducted in Poland and many countries abroad.

Risking the accusation of having a lack of modesty, I shall quote David Tischler, the famous professor at the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture—and an excellent fencer and coach in the past—"The terminology and classification of fencing actions introduced some years ago by Professor Zbigniew Czajkowski is very logical, comprehensive, takes into account the modern development of fencing and has great practical value."

In a bout, the fencers thoughts and attention are concentrated on many elements such as: watching the opponent, general assessment of the opponent's style and strength, reconnoitring his movements and intentions in various stages of the bout; the planning of one's own actions, the concrete, detailed, practical tasks in order to score the next hit, misleading the opponent about one's own intentions, etc. These objects of the fencer's attention are only a few examples of the whole complexity of tactical tasks which occur in a bout in close interrelation with each other.

Observation of the opponent plays a vital role in tactics. It becomes more precise, comprehensive and penetrating when the fencer has learned to see, perceive and understand the opponents movements, psychological state and intentions, very often gaining the information from barely discernible cues such as change of stance, certain delicate movements, preparatory actions and so on. It is particularly important to understand the opponent's intentions, guessing and foreseeing his tactics. To achieve this, it is indispensable to have a combination of tactical perception and the knowledge of fencing theory as well as the necessary level of self-control to see and think calmly in spite of emotional tension. Without the deep understanding of the tactical significance of various fencing actions, watching a fencing competition is very superficial, not very useful and may become even boring as the blade actions and movements of the two antago-

nists are rather incomprehensible.

A fencer who can foresee his opponents intentions will not easily be taken by surprise and may prepare better his/her own plan of action. After the successful reconnaissance of the opponent, one may plan one's own actions, taking advantage of one's own strong-points and the opponent's weak-points.

Before discussing the application of various fencing actions in a bout, it is necessary to introduce certain classifications of them. Here I am going to describe and discuss two systems of classifications of fencing actions:

1. The basic, fundamental, classification of fencing actions
2. Tactical classifications of fencing actions (from the point of view of tactics; the psychological base of choosing certain fencing strokes in a bout; fencer's intentions).

The Basic Classification of Fencing Actions

All fencing actions applied in a bout may be divided into two main categories:

1. Preparatory actions.
2. Actual actions (real or ultimate actions).

Preparatory Actions

Preparatory actions are the numerous and various fencing actions not intended to score a hit, directly or indirectly, but facilitating and preparing the successful application of actual (real) actions. Preparatory actions serve the following purposes:

1. Assessment of the opponent and orientation in the psychological and factual situations in the bout.
2. Concealing one's own intentions.
3. Misleading the opponent and using tactical feints.
4. Drawing certain actions from the opponent and trying to influence his movements.
5. Maneuvering, gaining the feel of play, gaining the initiative, preparing one's own attacks and other actions.
6. Hindering the opponent's concentration, assessment of distance, etc.

Actual Actions

Actual actions are ultimate, specific actions intended to ward off a hit or to score a hit, directly or indirectly (see below: discussion of first and second intention). From the point of view of the most elementary tactical application, the actual actions can be divided into: **offensive actions**, **defensive actions** and **counter-offensive** (offensive-defensive, counter-attacks).

Offensive actions comprise:

1. Attacks.
2. Ripostes.
3. Counter-ripostes.
4. Counter-time.
5. Renewed offensive actions (remise, reprise, redouble).

Counter-offensive actions comprise:

1. Point-in-line (arm straight and point threatening the opponent's target).
2. Counter-attacks (stop-hit, stop-hit with opposition, derobe, stop-hit with evasion, and compound counter-attack-feint of stop-hit, deceive the parry and feint of derobe, derobe—which is called feint in time).

Defensive actions comprise:

1. Parries.
2. Evasions.
3. Retreats (defence with distance).

(The basic classification of fencing actions is represented on **Table 3.**)