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Analysis of Bouting at the Beijing 2008 Olympics

Factors of the Performance of a Successful Action in Fencing

Most of the time, when an action is successful, it is because a number of key performance factors are present. Likewise, when an action is not successful, it is because a number of the key factors are not respected. If we identify the factors that guarantee the success of a hit then we can create a methodology to optimize or enhance the probability of success of the action.

The Logic of Choosing an Action

Choosing an intelligent action is important and is based on two possible scenarios. One scenario is to choose an action in relation to the preceding action, by knowing the reaction of the opponent, (*i.e. immediately before the action or during the action*), or secondly, by having a bout strategy for the opponent.

Sabre: The fast exchange of actions after the “allez” is approximately 2-6 seconds, therefore the choice of the action must be made based on the previous action in the bout.

Foil and Epee: The exchange of action occurs later, after hearing the “allez”, approximately 20-60 seconds, and therefore the choice of action is more often influenced by the current reactions of the opponent rather than the previous action.

In the three specialties of fencing: foil, epee and sabre, all of the choices need to be based on an individual bout strategy.

Factors of Performance of an Action in Fencing

The success of an action in fencing is determined by a minimum of six different factors. These factors have a higher and lesser degree of importance, depending on the role they play in the success of an action.

Key Factors

- The logical choice of an action
- The technical coordination
- The distance
- The timing
- The rhythm
- The authority

The Technical Coordination

The ability to execute an action technically correct influences the probability of success of a hit. Nonetheless, the success of an action also depends upon the correct distance, the correct timing, the correct rhythm and the authority with which the action is executed. All these elements are also important for the correct execution of a technical movement, not just the ability to perform the technical movement in isolation.

The Distance

Each technical action in fencing has a specific distance within which it can be successfully executed. The fencer must play with the distance until it is suitable to execute their action of choice. The focus is to play with the distance.

The Timing

The timing of a fencing action is very important in relationship to the distance. Nonetheless, for the touch to have efficacy, the fencer must execute it at the right/correct time or moment in the exchange of movement.

NB -Be sure that you don't confuse "timing" with "speed". While speed is an important factor in gaining the time, it is possible to execute a hit very fast, but at the wrong time.

The Rhythm

This is a factor that is important in establishing the difference between the preparation of the action, and the actual execution of the action. Very often the speed of the preparation is slower than the final action. *E.g. slow-fast* It is important to make your choice of action in relation to the rhythm that you want to execute the final action in.

The Authority

This factor is defined by the intensity and the speed with which a fencer executes an action. It is the final element that links all the other factors together and guarantees the success of a fencing action in the end. It is the ability of the fencer to show that they have consciously and logically chosen the action, considered all the key factors, and have made the decision to score a touch with confidence and conviction.

Analyzing the Fencing Action in a Combative Scenario

Analyzing only those who score the touch

- All the key performance factors
- Only one performance factor

Analyzing only those who receive the touch

- All the key performance factors
- Only one performance factor

These are examples of grids showing a) the management of the performance factors and b) the percentage of well executed or improved actions. This evaluation can be used by both fencers in training and by coaches as a tool to better analyze the key performance factors.

A- General management of the key performance factors of a fencing action

Fencer	Logic of the Action	Technical Coordination	Distance	Timing	Rhythm	Authority
X vs O	+++++	-----	--++-	--++-	+----	+++++

This grid shows the effective or ineffective use of the key performance factors in each hit of a bout. It permits an analysis of each action and how each performance factor influenced the success of the hit.

B- Percentage of actions that were well executed

Fencer	Touch Given	Touch Received	Actions Well Done	Actions to improve
X vs O				
Action #1				
Action #2				

This grid focuses on one or two actions and shows the percentage of actions that are well done in a bout.

Conclusion

First it is important to understand that these key performance factors are all important in guaranteeing that a fencing action is executed with success. However, at the highest levels, the most important factor is the correct logical selection of the fencing action, based on analysis of either the previous action (sabre) or within the bout (foil/epee). Secondly, analyzing the performance of fencing actions is important for both the fencer and coach because the fencer must understand the key factors and know how to use them, or know what to improve. Finally, the logical choosing and executing of a fencing action must have a goal; and that goal, is that the fencing action chosen is well done.

Results are the consequence of actions well done.