

BROADSWORD FIGHTING

NOTE: This is an abbreviated and annotated version of "Some Techniques of Broadsword Fighting" first published in what "may be regarded as being Volume Seven, Number Three, Autumn 1973" which was later renumbered as *Tournaments Illuminated* Issue 28. Duke Paul of Bellatrix had been knighted two years before in AS VI.

POSITION AND STANCE

In choosing a stance for fighting, three things must be achieved: mobility, stability, and comfort.

Even though a wide-spread stance similar to the horse stance of Karate is perhaps the strongest and most stable of positions, it is neither designed nor well adapted for rapid movement. This type of stance could be useful in a situation such as a barrier or bridge defense, where more importance is placed on holding position. In individual combat or melee, mobility is of more importance.

The stance I still teach is based on a horse stance, with the fighter standing up more, and the whole stance turned at an angle.

I recommend placing the feet about shoulder width apart, more or less, depending on what is comfortable. The leading foot should be pointed forward or up to 30° towards the inside. The back foot should be pointing straight out to the side, or up to 45° towards the inside. Your weight should be towards the balls of your feet, and your knees only slightly flexed and the legs pushing slightly out, with the pressure on the inside of the feet. You may bend more if it would make you more comfortable, but mobility decreases if the knees are bent more than a certain degree.

Currently, I teach that both feet should be at the 30° angle from straight forward. Also, the more important emphasis these days is that the stance should be partially "open". To explain, this means that if a line was drawn towards the

opponent, the toe of the front foot should touch the line, and the heel of the back foot should touch it from the other side, or perhaps be as much as four inches past it. In this way, your opponent should be able to see between your legs. This is very important, as it allows the hips to rotate fully, and to supply full power to blows.

One of the major problems that women (or smaller male) fighters have is that they are trained to stand with their feet in line, which restricts the rotation of the hips, and considerably reduces the power that they are able to apply to blows.

Along with this concept, I now also stress the importance of "power transfer links" – mainly the abdomen and the sword shoulder. Both must be tight when initiating a blow. If they are not, the power produced by the legs is not passed to the body, and the power produced by the twisting of the body is not passed to the arm.

The hips should be slightly cocked so that the leading hip is up to give more support to the shield. The abdomen should be slightly forward and the shoulders somewhat hunched. Remember at all times to keep your weight evenly distributed and centered between your feet. FIGURE 1

I don't emphasize the cocking of the hips as much, but it can be useful in supporting the shield. A more important factor in holding strapped shields is to keep the elbow in close to the body, and have the forearm pointed up – nearly vertical.

Also, I would no longer use the word "hunched" to describe the shoulders. They should be level, and kept down, as if someone was pressing down on them. These days, I emphasize that the stance should be upright, and that the fighter not lean. Leaning makes proper body rotation very difficult, and interferes with the movement of both the sword and the shield.



FIGURE 1

The sword is held in the hand which corresponds with the trailing foot, and should be kept behind the body, preferably with the blade nearly straight down. If it is held to the side, two things occur; (1) your blows lose power unless you take a wind-up, in which case you lose speed and (2) your arm and shoulder become open to attack.

I no longer advise that the blade be held straight down. Over time, I have tried to limit the movement of the sword wrist, and that is made easier by having the sword point diagonally across the back, with the tip lower than the hand, and pointing to the shield side. This has the added advantage of moving the balance point of the sword behind the center of rotation of the body, reducing the starting radius of rotation to nearly zero. This makes it easier to start the sword moving.

Also of high importance is to have the sword elbow back far enough to tighten the muscle in front of the sword shoulder, as discussed above for power transmission.

Since the leading hip is cocked slightly forward, the upper part of the shield arm can rest, for the most part, on the rib cage. There is, however, no substitute for developing the shield arm so that it can hold and move the shield for a good length of time. The shield should be held with the top edge just under the eyes, being careful not to let the bottom edge come out too far from the body. I personally prefer not to look directly over the top of the shield, but rather over the edge a bit more towards the shield side. This has several advantages including better vision with a relatively high shield position, an improved arm position which allows for rotation rather than lifting as the primary movement of blocking (rotation being faster and easier), and a body position which gives more support to the shield and good position to the sword. The edge towards your shield should remain as close to the body as possible. The other edge may be held in close, but may be allowed to stay somewhat away from the body, but only if the body is placed so that the shield provides adequate protection in this position.

If the shield is held close, it sometimes gives more protection. This style should be adopted by the beginner unless his own physical characteristics make it extremely uncomfortable. Holding the sword-edge of the shield away from the body should be considered an advanced technique. It affords greater utility for offensive shield techniques. These also are advanced techniques which are used overmuch by beginners.

I quickly moved away from teaching rotation blocking, which was the predominant style in the early days. I now teach that the leading edge of the shield should be held out from the body – about 45° degrees from the line towards your opponent. This aids in the ‘punch blocking’ style that I now teach exclusively. Punch blocking (punching out with the leading edge of the shield to intercept the blow farther from your body) provides a considerably greater “cone of protection” than blocking techniques utilizing a closely-held shield. It also tends to block blows near the sword hand of your opponent, thereby frustrating, to a great degree, blows which change direction.

Also, rotation blocking is simply not able to block some of the techniques that were developed later.

When moving, one should avoid committing oneself to any movement until the last instant. To facilitate this, you should try not to move your weight to a step until your foot has been firmly placed. If done correctly, this technique will allow you to change directions rapidly as well as stop and recover with greater ease. Of course, there are times when this technique cannot and should not be used (as when running).

Another technique that is useful in some instances is to make a habit of never running directly at someone. As a matter of fact, any long run in the general direction of your opponent can be dangerous since it commits you to a course of action and allows your opponent options which he may choose to exercise at an instant particularly to your disadvantage. More of this will be discussed later.

The doctrine of avoiding unintended and premature commitment has become one of the cornerstones of my style. My techniques are designed to avoid unintended commitment. For instance, my “snap” technique is performed more like a punch than a swing. This eliminates unintended commitment to a rotation.

It is important to remember, however, that all techniques and advice in this article are not strict rules, but are guidelines only. A man goes strictly by the book may be lost against an unorthodox fighter. It is best to stick fairly closely to guidelines when you are learning the art, and only diverge from them when you become experienced enough to see both the advantages and disadvantages of that divergence.

OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

It is possible to fight from a single position, turning only to face your opponent. To my mind, however, this tactic can be used successfully only by fighters of superlative skill, and then only against a weaker opponent. This tactic puts you in essentially the same position that you find yourself during shield practice. The offensive fighter has an inherent advantage in that he moves first. The defensive fighter who is essentially a counter-puncher has to cue on his opponent's movement. I am not saying that the defensive counterblow does not work, I just think that if all else is equal, the offensive style is more effective.

The method of the defensive fighter is to wait for his opponent to make a mistake, and then take advantage of it. The problem is to act quickly enough while maintaining a perfect defense yourself. The offensive fighter forces his opponent to err, and since a good fighter will fight in a flowing pattern, he will anticipate the occasions when errors can occur, and will be better able to take advantage of them than could the fighter in the static position.

My method of fighting is to force the fight into a pattern which I control. In the pattern you should fight offensively, but give your main attention to defense. The best combination of blows in the world will not help you if you get killed before it is completed. As I said before, you should develop your blows so that they are precise enough to land where you want them to. With this ability you can start an attack, but give most of your attention to watching for your opponent's counter. Again, as I said before, watch your opponent's sword hand, not his eyes. One of my favorite tricks is to look up and strike low. Train your arm and you won't need to look.

Being aware of, and using the flow of the fight is now a concept that I stress with considerable emphasis. Becoming aware of the flow is one of the important benefits of the structured, rhythmic slow work that I teach. When learned well, it allows a fighter to achieve some degree of anticipation, which can do a lot to make up for a lack of hand speed.

Good mobility is useful both offensively and defensively. I have described a stance which, if used, can provide the basis for such mobility. Once you have assumed the stance described, shift the weight on your feet such that the main pressure is on the insides of your feet and on the balls of your feet, with the primary pressure towards the front. The knees should be pointing slightly inwards so that the feet press out. You should feel a slight tightness in the lower calf and in the front of the thigh just above the knees. In this way, rapid movement to either side is possible, as well as rapid changes of direction.

When moving, your upper body should remain basically upright and level. You should not bob up and down when taking steps, but rather you should float, using your legs to smooth the motion. Don't stamp, but rather place your feet gently on the spot upon which you are stepping. The inside edge of your foot should hit first, and then your weight should roll across the ball of your foot until it is evenly distributed. The object of this procedure is a gentleness which, when developed properly and done at high speed, can provide mobility that can be astounding. The heavy stamping which is generally characteristic of a crouched or wide-spread stance tends to commit the fighter to a course of action which, because of some action of the opponent midway through the motion, may become particularly disadvantageous, but unavoidable.

The concept here is the same that I teach now, but the wording about the inside edge of the foot touching the ground first is incomplete. Actually, whichever edge of your foot is nearest to your body should touch first. With your shield foot, it is the inner edge. With your sword foot, it is the outer edge.

In addition to the caution about stamping, I also caution against "settling in" to a position, as you would in a shield wall, where you have to hold position. Doing so causes you to commit to being in that position. To move, you have to stop committing, then move. This is actually a two-step operation, and is slower than it would be if the fighter had not focused down, in the first place.

There are two signs of improper technique usually observable in those learning this technique of movement. The first is a tendency of the stance to become more wide and the knees more bent; and the second is a tendency to bob up and down when taking steps. If these can be eliminated, you are well on the way to learning the technique. Remember to be careful of putting too much weight on your heels.

While fighting, I try to maintain a certain distance from my opponents. The distance is such that a sword stroke will strike effectively, neither being too close and having the sword swings too short to have killing power, and not

too far away, and thereby glancing off my opponent's armor. Obviously, the maintenance of this distance will not be possible, or even desirable, at all times. It is, however, generally a good policy.

I've changed this, a bit. I now initiate fights from out of range – about six to twelve inches out of range. I close the range with a technique called a "slide step", where the front foot slides forward mid-way through a blow, as the fighter's weight starts to transfer to the front foot. This technique causes the sword to be the first thing crossing into range, and captures the attention of your opponent, making it much less likely that he/she will swing at you, at that point. It also allows the fighter to slide in as much as two feet towards his/her opponent from a position that was out of range.

I do emphasize that a fighter should aggressively try to maintain the range that maximizes their chances of success. Usually, this is the distance at which most of their techniques work. I often counsel shorter fighters to find out what this distance is, and try to stay there. The distance is usually between ranges of a taller opponent, being inside the long range, and outside the close range. I've often met shorter fighters who are taught to fight at extreme close range. This is not a good tactic, since it muffles the shorter fighter's attack, and places him/her in the close range (as is wraps) of a taller opponent.

TRAINING

The following training techniques are experimental. They are in a state of development, and may change, but as for now they seem to be working. I will describe how the forces of Chaos conduct a practice session, in hope that others may find something useful in the description.

After some short individual warm-up exercises, fighters pair up and do slow movement work with sword and shield. I would suggest that helmets be worn especially by beginners and their partners. In this exercise, all movements of sword, shield and body are done at 1/4 to 1/2 time – slower even than live steel demonstrations. Strive for smoothness and style while trying to form patterns of offense and defense. As individual slow motion work develops individual techniques, this type of practice molds the techniques together into a coherent system. After this, some time should be put in on straight shield practice.

I've considerably refined slow work technique. I consider it the most useful and powerful tool for integrating technique and learning to read the flow of the fight.

I teach, and rigorously enforce, the techniques and safety practices of slow work, and no longer recommend that helmets be worn. They provide too much of a temptation to be careless.

I've also introduced the concept of rhythm. Rhythmic slow work provides a framework for all of the techniques, and the flow, used in a fight. This makes the integration of techniques much easier. Once a fighter has learned the techniques and rhythm of slow work, he/she can start a session of slow work, and nearly forget about the rhythm, and concentrate on improving, integrating or correcting an individual technique. One of the other advantages of this method is that the two partners can be working on different techniques during the same slow work session.

A major problem in teaching this methodology is to get the training partners to treat it as a dance, rather than a fight.

Next there is a period of instruction on new techniques and a review of some old ones. During this period, fighters should practice the techniques of movement as described in the last section. Initially this is done individually, but later on the fighters should pair up unarmed and fight as if they held weapons. This should be done about 2/3 or 3/4 speed. Remember, speed is an essential part of only very few techniques. In all other cases it is something applied to a well-learned technique. If speed is used before the proper movements are learned, they most probably will never be learned correctly.

I no longer use the unarmed work, but I do recommend armored practice using varied slow speeds. When you are learning a technique, and how to integrate it into your fighting, working at different speeds, from slow up to fast, allows you more time to think about your technique. As you become more proficient, move faster. Again, this should be done in the rhythmic format.

The next training exercise used has proven particularly rewarding. This exercise should be done in groups of three or preferably four or five fighters of roughly equal ability. Let us call them, respectively, A, B, and C. Fighter A is allowed to strike an unlimited number of blows and is on the offensive. Fighter B is given three blows to use and is on the defensive. If the defensive fighter gets a clear kill or a clear arm wound on his opponent, he gets another blow to use. Double kills or double wounds do not give him extra blows. All kills and wounds are

acknowledged verbally, but the action does not stop, and neither do the fighters lose the use of wounded limbs. The fight continues at full speed for about 90 seconds. The objective of the offensive fighter is to vigorously press the action. It is amazing how long 90 seconds can be.

Immediately afterwards, fighter A retires, and fighter B takes the offensive. Fighter C then takes the defensive. This process can be repeated again and again. It is sometimes wise to use a shorter time period in later rounds. As the fighters develop endurance, it is perhaps useful to increase the initial time period, and perhaps also the number of blows for the defensive fighter. I would suggest one blow added for every 30 seconds added.

I still use this exercise. It encourages lateral movement, offensive shield techniques, and good target selection on the part of the defensive fighter. It encourages combinations, stability during movement, and range control on the part of the offensive fighter. The exercise is most useful after the fighters have attained some degree of proficiency.

More often, I use exercises to train specific techniques, including work on the pell, and with mirrors. I also use unarmored integration exercises, such as the Step-Swing and the 2 on 1 drill.

For armored integration, I also use an exercise to encourage combinations, wherein the attacking fighter must throw a combination of at least three blows. The defending fighter may only strike back after his/her partner's first blow has either landed or missed. The trainer calls "hold" after five or six blows. Usually I run this exercise in the format where the defender fights everyone in the line, then the next person becomes the defender.

I'll also use "restricted" fighting, where specific techniques must be used, and others may be forbidden, or where one or both fighters starts on his/her knees, or where one or both fighters has lost an arm. Usually I run this exercise in the format where two lines face one another, and then rotate occasionally.

Perhaps the most powerful technique that I've developed for advanced training is to first watch two fighters in short bouts. I pick some aspect of each fighter's technique that I think needs improvement. Then I'll design a choreographed short fight that requires the fighter being trained to use the technique properly.

For instance, one of my squires is left-handed, and often fights two-swords. He likes to use a right-hand lead to set up his left hand. Unfortunately, this often leads to the situation where his left sword swings at the same time his opponent swings at his left side. To train him to use a left-hand lead, I use the choreographed exercise where he initiates the action with a left-hand lead, and his partner blocks and returns a right-handed blow to my squire's head. My squire must then cross-block with his right-hand sword, and proceed with a certain combination.

I run this exercise in the format where the person being trained fights everyone in the line, then the next person becomes the person being trained, and the choreographed situation changes as appropriate. I've had amazing results with this method.

After this exercise, fighters are allowed free fighting. We often fight in teams, two against two, or larger. We also usually use maces to reduce injury. Also, we have an enclosed space (a bridge). These fights can be used to build endurance. As a Tourney approaches, more time can be given to free fighting, but it is important that injuries be avoided.

In my early days in the Society, my practices emphasized the use of all weapons. Pursuant to this, we would fight with sword and shield exclusively between Coronations and Crowns, and with everything else between Crowns and Coronations.

Remember that these methods have their uses up to a certain point, then time can be more profitably used in other forms of training. Also, these forms are not the only way to train, and other exercises can and should be used in addition, or in place of several of them.

This is true, but my experience has been that most of the time, people view training as simply fighting – perhaps with pointers from a more experienced fighter. In every other martial art in which I've participated, sparing (with or without pointers) is only a part of the training. The whole of training should include technique practice and exercises that help to integrate these techniques, to improve transitions between techniques, or to develop and improve one of the many other aspects that make up fighting.

CONCENTRATION AND ATTITUDE

I view tournament fighting as the exercise of an art form. It is indeed martial, but it is still art. The joy which I receive is of an aesthetic nature. It is not the thrill of symbolically crushing, slashing and killing opponents. I do not, therefore, fight in a rage or with murderous glee. In fact, I try to empty myself of all emotions and thoughts, so that I may more fully direct my attentions to the performance of the art.

I try to concentrate on, or rather be aware of, the fight as a whole, not as a series of individual parts. In this way I am aware of blows struck and openings in my opponent's defense, and can instantly take the appropriate action without first changing the focus of my attention. This is not to say that the actions are automatic, although their speed and effectiveness will depend, in part, on trained reflexes. Since I do not concentrate on any specific segment of the fight, I do not have to change the focus of my concentration, but rather I am immediately aware of the action and can therefore instantly react.

My attitude during the fight, then, is one of intense interest and awareness. The aggressiveness I use is merely a tool, not an attitude. Likewise, I do not easily fall into an attitude which I have seen cause good fighters to lose to inferior opponents. That attitude is boredom, or perhaps inattention. When fighting opponents of inferior skill, this inattention can be a problem. Guard against it. Likewise I do not allow my emotions to intrude into the practice of the art. Your emotions can cause you to act in a manner contrary to all your training. It can even cause you to forget it. Guard against this. The best fight can be fought as a combination of skill, training, concentration and attitude. I wish you well in your development and use of these tools.

This hasn't changed, although I'm not always as successful as I'd like in preventing my emotions from intruding.

Based on the above, I have tried to develop the perceptual aspects of the art, and have met with some success.

FINIS

Please do not take what I say as the way to do things. Remember, this is a developing art, and even if my style of fighting is the best around at this time (which is highly debatable) it may not be the best next year. Also, this style of fighting is suited to my particular physical characteristics and temperament, and it may not be precisely what another fighter may prefer. The technique will, I hope, prove useful to anyone, whatever way he fights. This article sets down guidelines, not strict rules.

What has developed from my early style is not so much a style as a system of movement. This system can be used as a basis for a style that best fits the physical and mental characteristics of the individual fighter. For someone who has speed and needs power, the system can be used to supply it. For someone who has power and needs speed, that two can be obtained. For someone who needs both, the system will enhance both as far as physically possible (conditional on the effort spent in training – there is no free lunch).

For instance, Duke Radnor and I use the same general system, but he utiizes it in a way that emphasizes speed and flexibility, since he is generously endowed with both characteristics. I use it in a way that allows me to use my strength to generate the speed that I lack, and to use the counter-balancing properties of the sword and shield movements of the system to enhance my mobility. We have developed different styles based on the same system of movement. I tend to characterize his style as elegant, and mine as more of a powerful efficiency.

I would like to thank several people for their assistance in preparing this article, notably Count Stefan de Lorraine, Sir Steven MacEanrig, Sir William of Houghton, the forces of Chaos, and especially Lady Luise of the Phoenix for her wonderful illustrations.

PAUL PORTER resides in the Kingdom of the West, and bases his SCA participation in the Principality of the Mists. He is employed as an IT project manager or business analyst, as the job demands. His main interest is the martial arts, especially SCA fighting.

PAUL OF BELLATRIX (Duke, KSCA, OP) has a persona which has been described as "vaguely Norman", with a time period of "early AS 20". He enjoys teaching the fighting arts, and frequently conducts seminars around the known world.