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BOOK REVIEW

Zbigniew Czajkowski, *Taktyka i psychologia w szermierce (Tactics and psychology in fencing)*, Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego w Katowicach, 2nd edition, revised and updated, Katowice 2007, pp. 456.

Zbigniew Czajkowski's book consists of a preface, introduction, 23 chapters divided into numerous sections, 47 figures, 20 tables, 299 cross-references and a comprehensive list of references consisting of 316 items. The chapters cover a wide spectrum of issues related to psychology and tactics in fencing. They include sensorimotor responses and motor habits; technical and tactical skills; psychological processes in fencing training and combat; choice of actions and timing; motivation and arousal in sport; cognitive and executive factors in fencing training and competition; classification, tactical significance, application and effectiveness of fencing actions; basic tactical skills and preparatory actions; combat tactics with general and specific guidelines; fencing exercises, lessons and training bouts; tactical preparation; tactics in modern fencing – changes in technique and combat style; individualization in fencing training and competition; fencers' attitudes to fencing, training, opponent's fight and results; psychological and tactical types of fencers; training and implementing fencing technique and tactics as well as development of motor skills in subsequent training stages; theories of leadership, leadership skills and abilities and management styles of fencing coaches; the impact of psychology and social relations on the effectiveness of fencer's preparation and educational qualities of sport; the significance of emotions in sport practice; and the importance of interpersonal relations in sport coaching. The book also contains an afterword and a list of references.

The reviewed volume is a thoroughly revised and updated 2nd edition of *Taktyka i psychologia szermierki* (Tactics and psychology of fencing) published in Polish in 1984 and *Understanding Fencing: the Unity of Theory and Practice*, published in English by SKA SwordPlay Books,

Staten Island, NY in 2005 and 2006¹. It contains new chapters and sections devoted to motivation in teaching, perfecting and implementing fencing actions in relation to timing as well as the notions of motivation and stimulation during training and competition; the impact of various psychological factors on the knowledge of the sport preparation process, and application of sports techniques and tactics at various training stages. Zbigniew Czajkowski makes his readers (coaches, sports theorists and enthusiasts) aware of the significance of the unity of learning and action, knowledge and skills, and theory and tactics. The main assumption of Czajkowski's work is that we do things most efficiently and effectively if we know how things work, how to explain them to others, justify and teach.

In my opinion one of the most interesting parts of the book is Chapter 21 considering the importance of emotions in sports practice. The author, who highly esteems emotional psychology and social psychology, provides valuable theoretical observations to all, training and non-training readers. Our emotions are often underestimated in the process of one's perception by others. Emotional psychology affects our thoughts, choices of action, behavior, frame of mind and even health. "A bad mood and depression have a negative impact on the human immune system and can greatly reduce immunity to diseases. Now and then, illogical decisions and ill-considered "emotional" actions can reach through the sensory centers to the amygdalae. One should keep it in mind and try to control or even direct one's emotions. The components of emotions

¹ Czajkowski's *Understanding fencing: the unity of theory and practice* was recognized by the International Fencing Academy as the best fencing textbook of the last decades. It has been currently being translated into German and other languages.

include arousal (emotional stimulation), direction, contents, quality (modality), strength and intensity. Strong emotions increase arousal, which leads to a higher level of muscle tension and mental (cognitive) processes as well as secretion of hormones into the bloodstream. Control of emotions can be helpful in winning even over the most formidable opponent. On the other hand, losing temper on a chance hit from a weaker opponent may lead to some ill-considered actions resulting in the opponent's subsequent hits.

Another chapter worth the highest appraisal is Chapter 8 (based on a monograph with a similar title published earlier) on motivation and arousal in sport. It includes the basic information about motivation and discusses factors of effective preparation before competition. The author emphasizes the usability of the Yerkes-Dodson law in sports rivalry as well as in everyday life. He recalls the old rule that difficult tasks should be performed at a low level of arousal, whereas easy tasks at a high level of arousal. According to Czajkowski motivation arouses us to act in a specific way and influences our attitudes. The motives behind our actions are aimed at fulfilling our diverse needs that we may be completely unaware of. An optimal level of arousal is necessary for well-being and effective action. Fencing or any other combat sports require a medium level of arousal. Playing golf, billiards or taking a penalty kick in football require a low level of arousal. It would be also interesting to analyze the correlation between the level of arousal and sport results in view of other psychological traits. According to M. Tomczak, a very high level of arousal does not bother individuals with a very strong nervous system, and it can even facilitate their attainment of high sports results².

In Section 8.4 on children's motivation in sport the author states that appropriate assignment of tasks is an important motivational factor in children and in adults. Success in sport not only depends on abilities but also on enthusiasm. As Charles Buxton wrote once, the winner is he who gives himself to his work body and soul.

In Section 8.7 on athletes' motivation Z. Czajkowski notes that we do things more

effectively if we enjoy them and want to do them. Ambitious but realistic tasks constitute a tremendously important motivation factor for athletes. He also stresses that self-confidence has a positive impact on any competitor in a difficult situation during competition. It reduces the fear of failure and the excessive level of arousal. The "dictate" to attain high sports results can lead to screening out talented children who simply develop their skills slower. Self-improvement and training rather than scoring tasks should be emphasized in the case of children.

A crucial role in motivation and arousal in sport is played by the coach (Section 8.9) who has a huge impact on athletes through his ideas, communication, actions and personality. The coach should not only know the athlete's age but also his temperament, personality traits, and emotional stability or instability in order to relate to him, motivate, explain and work on training plans (Section 8.10). The coach should also help the athlete accomplish his personal goals. Czajkowski distinguishes different types of fencers, each with its advantages and disadvantages.

In *Taktyka i psychologia w szermierce* Z. Czajkowski reflects upon his personal experiences as a competitive fencer (e.g. world bronze medalist in team saber in 1953), coach and sport theorist. He stresses the significance of positive skill transfer and specialist training since "running around the pitch does not improve one's soccer skills." Czajkowski also developed a classification of sensorimotor responses into simple and complex, including choice, differential, intuitive, foreseen and unforeseen ones.

Czajkowski accurately observes that the directions, content and significance of individual fencing training components as well as the choice of training means and methods are determined by the specificity of fencing. Although it has a number of elements common with other combat sports (open motor habits variably applied in combat, depending on a given tactical situation) fencing is an extremely unique sport, in which – apart from speed and other aspects – the most fundamental role is played by psychological and tactical training.

In Chapter 3, which includes general observations about fencing tactics, Czajkowski again draws important conclusions. He claims that the most difficult but crucial aspect of fencing is to master the transfer of abilities, skills, habits and

² M. Tomczak, *Psychospołeczne uwarunkowania rozwoju sportowego w okresie dorastania – na przykładzie szermierki* (Psycho-social conditions of sport development in puberty: the case of fencing) AWF Poznań, Poznań 2009, in press.

knowledge from training to real competition. He underlines the significance of tactics in combination with fencer's psychological preparation. He points to the need of incorporation of tactics in all aspects of fencing training and competition from the earliest training stages.

Tactics according to Czajkowski plays a decisive role in fencing. Fencing technique, especially on a high level of training, is subsidiary to tactics. Fencers' trained sensorimotor responses serve as a bridge spanning technique and tactics (p. 23). The choice of an appropriate action on the basis of earlier observations of the opponent and the choice of a proper tactic, depending on a situation on the strip, are crucial in combat. Czajkowski enumerates tactical means of fencing combat as well as the basic varieties of fighting styles and tactics, i.e. "fencing philosophy." His new approach consists in historical considerations of the transformation of the main tactical directions in fencing.

Following Raoul Cléry Czajkowski observes that speed is as much important for effective fencing combat as tactics. He provides numerous valuable training instructions, e.g. mastering a proper movement before its precise execution, or the necessity to develop speed in all kinds of warm up, fitness, technical and tactical exercises.

New methods of training habits were discussed thoroughly by Czajkowski in one of his previous works *Nauczanie techniki sportowej, wyd. II* (Teaching sports technique, 2nd edition) COS, Warszawa 2004. Also Chapter 4 devoted to habits and sensorimotor responses discusses the nature of habits and points to their significance in human activity (not only sport). This chapter could have been shorter and illustrated with respective case studies, e.g. of Olympic fencing bouts, which could make modern coaches use more intuitive actions in training bouts and fencing lessons. A helpful aid would have been a glossary of terms at the end of the work or in a separate chapter.

According to Borys Turecki, "Understanding how training affects the development of special movements, and how they are controlled by the brain, is immensely important in coach's work as it allows avoidance of numerous errors in fencer's training." The significance of sensorimotor habits grows with the fencer's length of training and sports level. Z. Czajkowski stresses that motor habits and sensorimotor responses associated with

technique and tactics are the fundamentals of fencing training.

Chapter 5 is about technical and tactical fencing skills. The author observes that the central processing of information determines the proper application of technique and tactics in sports combat. The main objective of fencer's tactical preparation consists of selective perception, understanding, recognition, and differentiation of stimuli. Proper stimuli should be accepted whereas the improper ones or false information should be rejected. In my opinion this chapter should include a glossary of specialist terms, which would be a useful guidance to the general reader.

In Chapter 6 concerning psychological processes in fencing the author provides a definition of attention. He also states that the intensity of concentration determines the quality of our perception. For a fencer the perception speed is of key significance. By watching the opponent's fight a fencer must perceive his moves and actions and see through his tactical intentions. Intellectual activity and constant assignment of new tasks are crucial to maintain interest and concentration of attention. Czajkowski also warns that one must never practice carelessly as a careless approach to training takes root in human mentality very quickly and becomes a destructive habit.

It was noticed a long time ago that certain situations in fencing combat were more convenient to execute hits than others. The question of proper choice of action in fencing combat and of timing is discussed in Chapter 7. These abilities are commonly referred to as "tempo" or "scelta di tempo" in Italian, "l'à propos" in French, and the "choice of time" or "timing" in English. Timing in fencing is closely related to the speed and accuracy of fencer's reaction, technical-tactical skills, level of operational thinking and working memory. Timing in general plays a decisive role in many other combat sports and sports team games. Chapter 7 also contains a historical section in which the origin of the term "tempo" in fencing is explained.

Chapter 9, which focuses on cognitive and executive factors in fencing training and combat, reveals that there is a certain optimal level of factors of motivation, cognition and execution determining effective action in fencing. It means there is a certain peak level of knowledge and skills for each learner at any stage (see Section 9.1 on the optimum of knowledge and practical skills). In a

very clear and logical manner Czajkowski presents some obvious, but at the same time, useful and accurate aspects of learning and teaching. He emphasizes the philosophy of concurrent knowledge acquisition and implementation, which appears to be a rare skill among the sports community. The authorities of physical education faculties are also duly reminded of the necessity of constant application of training theories in sports practice.

Chapter 10 of the textbook is devoted to the typology, tactical significance, implementation and effectiveness of fencing actions. It presents the classification and proper terminology of particular actions in fencing training and combat. The knowledge of terminology is crucial for fencers and coaches who must draw correct conclusions from their observations of fencing bouts. The evolution and the current usage of Polish fencing terms is presented in the chapter in a vivid and accessible way. Section 10.3 points to the fact that the efficiency of certain fencing actions has been subject to numerous changes. At present, many different preparatory and real actions are used in some fencing weapons. Czajkowski provides a paradigm which can be used to determine fencers' "tactical inclinations."

Chapter 11, which concentrates on the basic tactical skills in preparatory actions, emphasizes the crucial role of observation of the opponent's movement and using or creating situations leading to successful hits in fencing bouts. The preparatory actions fulfill various functions in fencing: reconnoitering the opponent, concealing one's own intentions, hindering the opponent's concentration of attention, drawing certain actions from the opponent, maneuvering and pushing the opponent back.

Chapter 12 contains a number of valuable general and specific tactical hints. For example, "If you lead in a bout one minute to the end, you must not be passive by upholding the score by all means: you must fight on cautiously but actively and offensively".

Chapter 13 concerning fencing exercises, lessons and tactical preparation contains an interesting observation that the coach should not pass all to his fencers as ready-made products. The fencers should rather be guided by the coach to acquire certain practical skills with their weapons, develop their initiative and curiosity. Czajkowski discusses the stages of fencing training, preparatory

training tasks and the division of the training cycle into training periods.

Chapter 14 discusses tactics in present-day fencing and evolution of fencing technique and style over the last years. Czajkowski emphasizes the fact that elite saber, epee and foil fencers most often use simple actions with a high speed and good timing.

Chapters 15, 16 and 17 are set in a thematic order and discuss various aspects of individualization of fencing training, education, tactical preparation and fight. Chapter 15 concerning the individualization in fencing training and combat accounts for the role of diverse personality traits and experiences individual fencers. It neatly presents H. Eysenck's dimensions of personality (psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism), which should be well-familiar to any teacher, not only the fencing coach. One can also make use of the currently popular Big Five model of personality by P. Costa and R. McCrae (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism).

Chapter 18 treats of teaching and implementing fencing technique and tactics as well of developing skills and sensorimotor responses at particular training stages: introductory, basic, competition and championship.

Chapter 19 discusses the theories of leadership, talents, leadership skills and styles of fencing coaches. It stipulates that the most fundamental principle in training should be the unity of theory and practice, knowledge and skills, and learning and acting.

Chapter 20 tackles the problem of influence of different fields of psychology and social relations on the effectiveness of sports preparation and educational values of sport. It discusses the impact of fencer's personality dimensions, temperament and many other psychological phenomena and processes (attitude towards sport, self-confidence, fear, etc.) on sports activity and results.

According to Czajkowski, the role of sports psychologist is to be able to answer questions: How are an athlete's activity and competition results affected by his or her personality dimensions and temperament traits? How is an athlete affected by different psychological phenomena and processes? Zbigniew Czajkowski has a high regard for cognitive psychology due to its intellectual contribution to human values, but he also emphasizes the virtues of Freudian psychoanalysis.

The latter explains man's subconscious aspirations, feeling of inferiority and frustrations. On the other hand, behavioral psychology focuses on man's reaction and external behaviors.

Chapter 22 is devoted to the significance of interpersonal relations in coaching practice. Ignorance of these relations is a serious transgression which lowers the effectiveness of training and competition results.

In the final chapter Czajkowski underlines the significance of the unity of knowledge and practice and encourages readers to study fencing treatises and adopt a creative and active attitude towards the subject.

It is a pity the author does not use the most updated literature. Perhaps he wanted to emphasize his tremendous knowledge, erudition and the power to inspire people to read other fencing treatises.

Zbigniew Czajkowski's textbook is a synthesis of the author's deep reflections, and his heuristic efforts deserve the highest appraisal. The long list of references points to the author's extensive fields of research. It should be added that the contents of many chapters have already been published in numerous articles in international journals and books (30). Despite the fact that the same contents can be found in different chapters, the repeated parts points to their significance.

In summary, the outstanding qualities of Zbigniew Czajkowski's book should be emphasized. It is an important contribution to the theory and psychology of sports training and practice in Poland and abroad.

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