

THE RIPOSTE



The Staff of THE RIPOSTE

Extends to You its Best Wishes for a Happy
New Year and a Successful Fencing Season.

The Riposte

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In the following open letter Joseph Levis, as Captain of the Olympic Team, takes issue with George Santelli's recently expressed views. THE RIPOSTE is happy to serve as a vehicle of fencing opinion, but wishes its readers to keep in mind that neither this nor previous articles necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the staff. Lack of space has forced an abridgment of "Joe" Levis' fine letter, but the editors have been careful to conserve the essential argument of the original.

To
Mr. Leon M. Schoonmaker, Chairman
American Olympic Fencing Committee

This communication which is made public through the RIPOSTE, is written on the stimulus of an article which has recently appeared in that publication. It is written in the interests of fencing to refute certain statements and inferences in an otherwise well-thought up and constructed article.

Ofhand, from that article, it would appear that the American Team just missed some third places through the lack of a non-playing Captain, or through the errors of the Coaches, Manager, or Committee. No American amateur on the Olympic Team will point to anything but the fact that we were outplayed and outclassed by nations of superior speed, strength and competitive skill.

No Captain, Coach, Manager, or Committee could manufacture medals for its team once it was selected. They can be a factor, but success is essentially up to the team. Our handicaps were in ourselves: in our own limitations of natural talent and ability. For this reason, our future teams should be conceived, not one year in

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NADI REQUESTS AMATEUR STANDING.

The Italian Fencing Federation has submitted a petition that its president, Mr. Aldo Nadi's older brother Nedo, be reenstated as an amateur. The request is made with the guarantee that Mr. Nedo Nadi, who has been the Olympic Coach and Captain of the Italian Team as well as one of the World's outstanding professional fencers, will never again participate in a fencing competition. It was also pointed out that Mr. Nadi has not fenced actively for several years. Mr. Strasse, president of the Italian Olympic Committee, sent in a recommendation that the F.I.E. accept Mr. Nadi as an amateur.

The reason given with this request is to allow Mr. Nadi an equal standing in the F.I.E. Congress. As president of his country's Federation, and as their delegate, Mr. Nadi has been denied a voice in matters which have come before the Congress because of his professional rank. Had Mr. Nadi been an amateur last year, it is quite probable that he would have been elected the new president of the International Fencing Federation.

The petition will be brought up for a vote at the next meeting of the F.I.E., and the Board of Governors of the Amateur Fencers League of America has had to decide how the U.S. will cast its votes. After much discussion and a close vote, the Board has decided that in its opinion Mr. Nedo Nadi is not qualified for reenstatement as an amateur. We won't know the final decision on the matter till some time next spring.

LEWIS REPEATS IN N.Y.A.C. FOILS MEET.

Norman Lewis, N.Y.U. senior, was successful in his defense of the N.Y.A.C. College Invitation Foil laurels which he won last year. This year's field was not as strong as had been expected, several of the best fencers from various colleges failing to appear. Dan Bukants, of CCHY, won the silver medal while Sidney Kaplan, his team-mate placed third after tying with Larry Laughlin of Columbia. James Castell and Milton Soroka were the other finalists

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JOSEPH LEVIS' LETTER

(Continued)

advance, but four years in advance, and perhaps even more, in order to develop these natural talents and abilities to a point of superior continental class.

One of the primary things we have learned in fencing is not to leave openings on a mordant attack as long as a RIPOSTE could serve us in reply. It was said that the Captain, loaded with tasks, passed the responsibility of selecting Teams to the coaches; and that in one or two cases, for fear of early disaster, a coach did not render a decision in accordance with his conviction. With the exception of two Epee Teams selected by John Dimond (whose reputation for courage of convictions is well known and respected) the line-ups of every American Team were submitted in the person of the Captain after consultation with the respective coaches. Certainly a coach appointed by the Olympic Fencing Games Committee is qualified to suggest a wise team for the consideration of his Captain.

In two or three matches in the sabre and in all, or almost all matches in the foil, the Captain and coach were at variance as to the third or fourth man, or both. And in all these cases it was the Captain's choices that went in. It was the Captain, therefore, not the coaches, who accepted the responsibility and used the authority in Team selections

The next point is important to future Captains. It has been said that our key-men were not spared in early

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A PROGRESSIVE MOVE

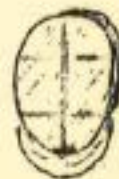
One of the most important moves yet made by the new Fencing Coaches' Association has been the decision to hold summer school courses. It was agreed at its last meeting that a Summer School would be established under the direction of Prof. George Santelli for the benefit of teachers, coaches and professionals; the school to be conducted from July 12th to July 21st, 1937, both dates inclusive. The work is expected to cover the theory and methods of teaching classes and individuals in all weapons. Registrations should be addressed to Prof. Santelli at the Salle Santelli, 434 Lafayette St., New York City, on or before July 1st, 1937.

Another move in the same direction was the decision to have a gathering of professional fencers for a day of general activity in which practical methods, theories and other business could be worked out. At this meeting everyone could contribute and receive great help. The date has been set for Sunday, July 18th, at 2 P.M. in the Salle Santelli. Both of these items should prove of special interest and benefit to our younger professionals.

The Association further agreed to send notes and ideas on professional matters of interest to the members, to their secretary, who would include such notes in a bulletin to be sent out to the members from time to time. This bulletin to serve as an exchange medium. Whenever such notices are of particular general interest, the RIPOSTE will try to bring them to your attention.

FROM THE STAFF

In keeping with its policy, THE RIPOSTE has made small, gradual improvements from time to time when it felt that they could be made permanent without endangering its existence. We sincerely hope this new format meets with your approval.



LEVIS REPLIES TO SANTELLI'S ARTICLE ON THE OLYMPIC GAMES (Continued)

matched and consequently were worn out for important matches to follow. Key-men are those around whom the rest of the team is built. If we had six key-men in a weapon like the Italians, French, and Hungarians, then certainly everyone could be spared. But how many key-men did we actually have?

No foreign fencing team could be considered a snap. They all came to the Olympic Games to fight to the end; and any one of them can prove to be a surprise. Witness the defeat of our American Sabre Team in Amsterdam in 1928 at the hands of Poland, who at that time was far below its present class. In that match, only one key-man was employed and the American team was eliminated. The key-men must be in the ranks to guard against such surprises, to offer courage and confidence to the new men entered with them in the match, and to bolster their performance.

Argentine had one key-man in foil, Larraz; he was used in every match, team and individual, and then repeated in Epee. England had one key-man in Lloyd; he fenced in every team match. Casmir was the German key-man, and he fenced in every foil and sabre match where Germany had any degree of chance. At Amsterdam, in 1928, Brockenridge used Calnan, Lewis and Peroy in every foil match. At Los Angeles in 1932, Calnan used himself, Lewis and Every in all foil matches except one post-mortem match. None of these key-men gave overwork as the reason for not doing better -- and I know that no member of the 1936 Team has fished for this or any other alibi. These men had to fence: without them their teams were not sufficiently strong to be certain of victory in any match, preliminary or final.

The physical endurance of our fencers is equal to that of foreigners. How can we say that any American fencer, sabreman, or epeeist, weakened on the second day of competition because he was assigned to eight bouts on the previous day? Certainly this would be a most serious reflection on those of us responsible on the physical condition of our men.

(Next Column)

Up to the crucial Austrian match, our two key-men in foil, had fenced eight bouts each; the third and fourth men had fenced four bouts each. Yet the two key-men scored the only four wins for the American Team. The next day, in an important match against Hungary, which we won, but not by a score sufficiently large to put us in the final, our two supposedly worn out key-men won six out of a total of nine American victories. Were our key-men over worked? It looks as if our key-men improved as they went on. The few easy bouts through which they coasted in the early matches warmed them up for the important ones to follow.

I recommend to future Captains of Olympic Teams, that they use not less than 50% of the key-men in any kind of match where there is any degree of chance.

It was said that the Captain failed to reach the finals of the individual because he was employed in too many Team matches. This is ridiculous, because those who have said it were not even on hand to witness his last round. The record in this round, showing a 5-0 victory over Lemoine of France, and 5-4 defeats from de Bourginon of Belgium, Guaragna of Italy, and Casmir of Germany, would not indicate that he failed to reach the finals because of lack of physical reserve, but rather of a kind of psychological turn of events yet not understood by himself. In his entire fencing life he had never felt more prepared than at Berlin, even up to the semi-finals. He, of course, could not feel his best in the semi-finals after four days of Olympic competition; but no other competitor in that round was any better off.

Thanks to the physical training received from Grasson, our fencers were prepared for this kind of heavy duty. Despite the comments in the above mentioned article, "Bobby" followed a correct plan of training, in accordance with the plan that I approved. Once our team left New York, our coaches ceased to be coaches and became coach-trainers, if any "coach" at all. The European name for professionals that accompanied

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LEWIS' ARTICLE (Continued)

Olympic Teams is just "trainers" because, after all, with highly developed fencers, training is the only function they are able to effectively perform.

At Berlin, with three coaches, we were the most highly coached team of the Games. Hardly another nation, including Italy, France and Hungary, employed more than one trainer. If in 1940, our team is well prepared before departure, only one trainer will be necessary for all three weapons.

The money so saved can be put to sending live-wire officials who can look out for the team's interests behind the scenes, at composition of pools and juries, at special meetings on protests, and who can make friends with other officials while the Captain and team are at work on the field of play. We were short on officials; and while we are not going to say we lost because we did not have sufficient influence on the sidelines, yet it will be well to keep this point in mind for the future.

Now it has been said that it was an error to select a Captain who was short in age and experience. The Captain at Berlin was 31 years of age and was in his third Olympiad, with 14 years of active competitive fencing--a close parallel to the age and experience of Calnan, the very best Olympic Captain of all times. Whereas we know cases close to home where maturity comes very late in life, yet certainly in this normal case age and experience can not be a consideration. There must have been other personal considerations in that article.

In the argument for a non-playing Captain, it has been said that a Captain cannot compete satisfactorily through several grueling matches, and, at the same time, be bothered with the daily details and red tape of the Captaincy. From the moment the Olympic fighting begins, there are no so-called chores for a competing Captain. Those duties have been already assigned to, and are automatically assumed by coaches, managers, masseurs, and special officials.

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N.Y.A.C. REGAINS CARTIER TROPHY

The New York A.C., holders of the Cartier Cup in 1935, scored a decisive come-back this year by defeating the University F.C. 5-3 in the final round of the tournament. The winning trio, consisting of Leo G. Nunes, John R. Huffman, and Darnell Every, proved too strong for the defending team made up of Warren Dow and Miguel and Jose de Capriles. Darnell Every was easily the star of the evening, sweeping through all his matches without a set-back and scoring the deciding victory in the finals. Warren Dow carried the brunt of the burden for the losers: the de Capriles brothers were not doing very well, and it was only Dow's remarkable fencing which kept them in the running. The defeat suffered at the hands of Every in the final round was Dow's only set-back.

Earlier in the Evening, the N.Y.U. team (Gold, Lewis and Soroka) scored a surprising upset by defeating the seeded Fencers Club trio (Alessandroni, Wesselman, Cantor) in the quarter-final. Lewis and Gold staged unexpected victories against Alessandroni who was decidedly off his game.

MISS DALTON WINS FOIL MEET

Miss Madeline Dalton, of the Salle d'Armes Vince, won the first of four competitions to be held for the Santelli trophy donated by Warren Dow.

The tournament is open to all girls who have not attained a senior rank, and attracted all the top notch juniors except Miss Carol Alessandroni and Miss Carol King.

The large field was finally narrowed down to a final of 8 and the final round-robin ended in a triple tie between Miss Dalton, Miss Barbara Cochrane of the Salle Santelli, and Mrs. Dolly Funke of the Greco Fencing Academy. Miss Dalton defeated both her rivals in the fence-off, and Miss Cochrane defeated Mrs. Funke. Miss Dalton's fencing showed a marked improvement. Her point was more accurate and she used a counter-riposte game to the best advantage. Not far behind this trio came Miss Grimmelman, N.Y.U., Miss Cerra, Vince, Miss Stewart, Hunter College, Miss Kass, Brooklyn College, and Miss Petchesky, N.Y.U.

LEVIS' ARTICLE (Continued)

In fencing we compete as a Team. Despite the fact that individual members of the fencing team compete separately, their performances are inter-related, because the individual bouts follow one another. The moral of one competing member does affect the morale of his team-mates. Victory may be bought on team spirit alone, as was done against the French at Los Angeles, and this is one reason why a captain or leader should be in the ranks.

It is much easier for a captain to lead his team to victory from the front of the ranks than to attempt to direct its destiny through remote control from the side-lines or rear guard. When there is not a capable man available as a competing captain, then I suggest obtaining a capable non-playing captain; but having a capable playing captain and passing him up, then that is only passing up the best advantage any captain could give-- that is, "leadership through personal example".

Perhaps we should give the non-playing captain the name of manager, then we could save the expense of one more man. But if we did this, the manager or committee should immediately appoint one or three field leaders for all or each of the three weapons respectively. This would be analogous to professional baseball where the manager is the master tactician and yet employs a field captain to lead maneuvering.

In conclusion to this point, may I recommend, in the interest of most effective results, that you adopt the policy of a contending, competing Captain.

With the possible exception of Pinchart in 1932, I have never seen any coach work any harder than each of our three Olympic coaches. Each was profoundly sincere about his job. Curiously enough, each pursued a slightly different system of training, yet each with his own method, developed his squad to a maximum point of efficiency.

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NOVICE TITLE TO MISS KING

Miss Carol King, of the Salle d'Armes Santelli, was an easy victor in the Novice Foil competition held at the Fencers Club. Miss King was not fencing as well as she did last year, but her ease at passing the point and her constant shifting of distance proved too much for her less adept rivals.

Miss Basso, of the Metropolitan Fencers Club, gave a particularly good account of herself. She had a very bad leg which had to receive medical treatment during the competition. Despite recent minor operations on her foot Miss Basso managed to finish close to Miss King at the top.

SHORT NOTES

A young chap from Maryland entered the N.Y.A.C. College Invitation Tournament late in December. He was extremely interested in fencing, but all his teaching had been confined to the reading of three books on fencing. There had never been an opportunity to receive a regular lesson from a fencing instructor. This self-taught boy, however, gave a pretty good account of himself. He won two bouts and just missed qualifying on touches. When it was all over, he commented on the fact that the college fencers, considering the instruction they receive and the opportunity for competitive experience, showed very poor form and very little promise-----

One of Mr. Joseph Vinco's pupils has told us that Mr. Aldo Nadi is taking lessons in foil from Mr. Vinco...We wonder if Mr. Nadi is contemplating a match soon.

We are very pleased with the enthusiastic way our information bureau has been received. Numerous letters have come to us with various questions and in most cases we have been rewarded with an appreciative comment. If anything is troubling you we will be only too glad to help you as best we can.

Jan. 7, 1937 Foil, Senior Individual

Salle Santelli - 7:30 P.M.

Jan 10, 1937 Jr. Sabre Team Championship

Fencers Club - 2 P.M.

Jan. 17th - Salle Santelli - 2 P.M.

Sr. Epee Indiv. (Electrical)

LEVIS ON THE OLYMPICS

(Continued)

With the conditions inflicted upon them, (such as Alessandroni's injury and Huffman's injury) and with the type of material available to them, their teams secured the respectful final positions of a tie for fifth place.

In view of the greater intensity of competition at Berlin, their Teams closely approached the performances of the 1932 Team, whose record of 1 second place and 2 third places yet stands.

Respectfully submitted,

JOSEPH LEVIS.

GIVE IT A BOOST !

Fencing this year has shown signs of growing rapidly. Not only have we been getting larger entries to the various competitions, but there seems to be more general interest in the press. People are taking more interest in it. This can be very helpful to the sport, but those of us who are active in it shouldn't be content with just participating in the tournaments. Why not come to competitions even when you are not competing? Why not interest some of your friends? Bring them down. Boost the sport. Help it to grow. There is no reason why we shouldn't have good crowds at our events. There will be a good foil competition on January 7th at the salle Santelli, and on January 31st the Fencers Club will hold the National 3-Weapon Championship. These are excellent competitions. Why not initiate your friends by taking them to one of these?

MISS STEWART WINS COLLEGE INVITATION

Miss Mildred Stewart, the present Intercollegiate champion, swept through a field of 23 to win the invitation meet held under the auspices of the Women's Intercollegiate Fencing Association.

Miss Stewart fences for Hunter College, and captained last year's championship team. Miss Stewart went through the first two rounds fencing very erratically, but she steadied down in the final round and gave the best performance we have yet seen from her. In her first bout, (in the finals) she defeated Miss Maria Cerre, her team-mate who placed second. Miss Cerre has a much steadier technique, but Miss Stewart fenced very cleverly, either closing the line and stop-thrusting her opponent on the march, or parrying both her attacks and reprieves of the attack before going out with the Riposte.

This was Miss Cerre's debut as a fencer for Hunter College and she seemed to be trying too hard. He tied with Miss Grinnelman and Miss Zarzoli, but took the silver medal on touches. Miss Grinnelman, of N.Y.U., placed third and Miss Zarzoli finished fourth. Miss Grinnelman was very light on her feet, and her ability to recover from her lunge as quickly as she went out seemed to baffle most of her slower rivals. Miss Zarzoli's fencing showed much promise, as she has very good legs. Her technique, however, is very immature and will require a lot of training. Miss Abbate, of N.Y.U. placed fifth, and Miss Deutsch, of Hunter, finished sixth.

The tournament was held at the Park Avenue annex of the Hunter College, and was followed buffet snack.



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XI. DIRECTING

The theory of right of way (1)

Foil and sabre are conventionalized weapons--that is, there are standards of correctness which govern the award of touches. These are important in the case of simultaneous hits, because the fencer who is "right" has the advantage.

In its simplest terms (though not always) the correct phrase d'armes begins with the attack, which has the right of way; if this is parried, the riposte is in order; after the riposte is parried the counter-riposte has the right of way--and so on. In brief, the conventions contemplate an orderly sequence of actions, with the right of way alternately passing to each fencer after his parry.

These conventions have a fundamentally sound basis, which becomes apparent if we imagine a fight with sharp weapons. Suppose that "a" threatens "b" with the point, so that "b" is imminently in danger of being wounded. If "b" is a normally careful individual, his first reaction is to ward off the thrust. Only a fool will throw himself against a menacing point.

This argument is amply demonstrated in the heat of discussion between two of our best known professionals some years ago. X made a sudden thrusting motion with his fingers, directed at Y's eyes; and Y immediately brought up his right arm to parry or block the threat. It was an instinctive and sound reaction to an unexpected situation; and it proved X's contention that the parry is the natural and elementary answer to the attack.

Let us therefore first example the concept of the "attack", with "a" in the role of the attacker and "b" and the defender. If we keep in mind the foregoing discussion, it must be apparent that a correctly executed attack must result in a threat. Therefore, the attack with the foil begins with "a"'s forward motion of his weapon, so that the point threatens "b"'s valid target/

The point is the only threatening part of the foil; and since touches

count only on the valid target, the threat must be directed against that target. When "b" is so threatened, he is required by the conventions to parry or beat the threat out of the way before starting an offensive of his own. If there is no threat, no parry is required.

The most elementary situation, from your point of view as a director, is therefore the following: "A" attacks correctly, with a simple movement (either a direct thrust or a disengage). "b" is surprised, and instead of parrying he simply sticks out his arm. Both touches land. "b" is wrong according to the convention, because it is his fault that simultaneous hits have resulted. Therefore you award the touch to "a".

You have to establish first, however, that "a" attacked correctly--in other words that he made the first threatening movement in the instant of time immediately preceding simultaneous hits. And your best guide is to remember that the threat is to be made (in foil) with the point of the weapon, directed toward "b"'s valid target.

Some times, of course, an inexperienced fencer genuinely believes that he is making an attack where in fact none exists. For instance, he will move forward, or lunge with his arm bent in the guard position of the French school (elbow close to the body, and the point well up, threatening at best the opponent's mask, which is not valid target.) Such a movement, no matter how tempestuous, is not an attack because there is no threat.

It follows that the mere movement of the legs, independently of the threat by the weapon, is not an attack. This is true of the direct lunge, or the advance, (patinando) or jump (balestra) combined with the lunge. Such leg movements only serve to bring the body of the fencer within the desired distance. Frequently, there are part of an attack if properly coordinated with the threatening weapon.

But if "a" comes within distance without threatening "b" with the point of his foil, the movement is not an attack, but an "invitation". "a" really is "daring" "b" to come out and hit "a". If "b" takes

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XI. DIRECTING (Continued)

the dare, he initiates the attack, he has the right of way, and "a" must parry. If simultaneous hits result under such circumstances, "a" is wrong for failing to parry, and the touch must be awarded to "b".

Your first real advance as a director will be made when you are clearly able to distinguish between an attack and an invitation. Mastery of this idea will help you over another difficult hurdle: the convention of the right of way provides that if "b" (the defender) has his point in line (arm extended and point threatening "a"'s valid target), "a" is required to beat or press "b"'s blade out of the way before starting his attack.

This requirement is strictly logical. If "b", while on guard or otherwise immobile, is really threatening "a", "a" would be foolish to run himself against "b"'s point. Before "a" goes forward, he must ward off the threat--on exactly the same reasoning that requires "b" to parry "a"'s attack under the circumstances first discussed.

In foil, therefore, the right of way belongs to the fencer who threatens his opponent by placing the point of his weapon "in line" with the opponent's valid target. And this is true independently of any leg or body movement by any fencer. It is thoroughly possible for "b" to threaten "a" even though "b"'s legs are in the "ouguard" position. Actually, the full or rigid extension of the arm is unnecessary. The threat of the point--sufficiently close to being a touch to require the parry--is enough. Thus, in the customary guard position of the Italian school, with the elbow fairly well out and the point "in line" with "a"'s chest, "b" is threatening "a". Were "a" to lunge at "b" while "b" remained immobile, both men would be hit. Therefore the simultaneous hits result from the fault of "a", and the touch should be awarded to "b".

Consequently you will find that most fencers of the Italian school are taught to start the attack always with a beat or pressure in order to accustom them to remove the existing threat

before initiating their own attack.

In the French school the foil play differs. "b" would keep his elbow close to the body and the point high while on the guard position. If "a" attacks by a direct thrust or disengage, he can do so with impunity because "b" cannot score a good hit without making a definite movement out of the guard position.

These differences in style between the basic methods between the French and Italian schools arose out of the construction of the weapons, but unfortunately, in the modern game, you cannot simply look at the weapons and decide whether a beat is required before "a" attacks. The two schools today have borrowed extensively from each other; French foils are held with the point in line, Italian foils are kept close to the body to such an extent that there is little difference in style and technique among the top-notch fencers of the leading countries of the world.

Rather you must look at each specific situation, and find out who initiates the threat. If "b"'s point is in line, "a" must "beat" or take the blade; not otherwise. Just one more point. Suppose both "a" and "b" are in line in the instant immediately preceding "a"'s motion of the body which closes the distance and results in simultaneous hits. The situation may arise often if two inexperienced fencers following the Italian school in the "guard" position are pitted against each other. Who gets the touch?

Obviously the simultaneous hits result from "a"'s act. He is at fault because it was his forward motion, without a beat, which caused both touches to land (While "b" did nothing). Therefore, as director, you must award the touch to "b".

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