

Educational Activities of the International Fencing Federation (FIE) “FIE Budapest Coaching Academy”

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The International Fencing Federation (FIE - La Fédération internationale d'escrime) became a central, umbrella organisation in fencing after being established in 1913. Currently it is represented by 153 national fencing federations worldwide¹. Through developmental projects in various areas the FIE actively promotes fencing to strengthen its position as a global sport. For example, it provides material help to smaller federations, supports veteran fencers, international fencing training camps, fosters anti-doping campaigns, promotes the principles of Fair Play. FIE activities also reflect gender issues. To be specific, the federation held *FIE International Women's Referee Training Session* and also *All Women Coaching Course in Foil (Asia & Oceania)*. Namely the latter project of coach education in fencing is one of the key points in the strategy of development over the last years. The FIE had organised a number of official international coaching camps (academies), however, it failed to realise its vision of a permanent coaching school.

A permanent coach academy was first established in Africa. The effort to popularise and promote fencing to make it a global sport led to the opening of the *International School for Fencing Masters* (EIMA) in Dakar, Senegal in 1999. By 17 Jun 2016 as many as 111 students had graduated from the school².

2016 represents another milestone in the educational activities organised by the FIE. After almost three years of negotiations that preceded the opening of a permanent FIE Coaching Academy in Budapest, the educational programme was opened for first students in 2016. In contrast to the *International School for Fencing Masters* (EIMA) in Dakar, Senegal, which operated in the mode of 18-week intensive course (4.5 months), the Budapest coaching academy usually lasts 3 months (12 weeks although one course in its history took as long as 4 months).

In Budapest Corner Hotel Angyalföld was chosen as the centre of educational activities of the FIE. It is a multifunctional object whose founder is the 13th district of Budapest. The complex is placed in the proximity of the Danube and Margaret Island in 45 Lomb street, Budapest 1139. The facility has everything that is needed for lessons: the gym, where the fencing lessons take place, is equipped with fencing apparatus, there is also accommodation, catering, and a conference room for theoretical classes. The place is conveniently placed near underground stations and public transport stops which makes commuting easy.

FIE coaching academy is an intensive programme with highly structured teaching comprising 360 lessons. At the end of the course the students take a final exam consisting of a written test on theoretical subjects and a practical exam from fencing. In terms of organisation the academy is divided into two strands. The strand of practical lessons is provided by FIE experts (renowned coaches): sabre - Ioan Pop (Romanian member of the FIE Hall of Fame, Olympic medalist), since 2019 Ákos Bodoky (Hungary) took over from him, Béla Kopetka (Hungary) responsible for épée and Zoltán Bernát (Hungary) for foil coaching.

The theoretical lessons are provided in cooperation with the FIE by the University of Physical Education, whereby the instructors, academic staff of the university, come to the coaching academy to teach theoretical subjects to the trainees. The staff of the University of Physical Education

¹ <https://fie.org/fie/structure> accessed on 16th Nov 2019

² Creating coaches to develop fencing in Africa, <https://fie.org/articles/380>, accessed on 5th Aug 2019

have considerable experience in training fencing coaches, providing three types of formal programmes of education for fencing coaches. The first one is an accredited bachelor programme for fencing coaches. The second one is the prestigious International Coaching Course (ICC), whose strategic partner is also the Olympic Solidarity. The International Coaching Course (ICC) is a 3-month full-time course in English. The third programme in the education of coaches is FIE Budapest Coaching Academy. The cooperation between FIE Budapest Coaching Academy and the University of Physical Education is officially recognised by the Ministry of Education, whereby an internationally recognised, legally approved programme for the graduates of the coaching academy is created. There are in total 60 lessons of theoretical subjects. For 2019 the following subjects have been put forward: psychology, physiology, sport theory, biomechanics³, pedagogy. It is noteworthy that in 2016 and 2017 the academy included a subject called "strategic management" in place of biomechanics.

As mentioned above, practical lessons are taught by FIE experts. Despite the effort to clearly determine the competences of the trainees (hold a level-3 coaching diploma, have at least seven years' experience of coaching, hold an FIE or national licence, be in good physical health), there are significant differences in technical and tactical abilities of the participating coaches⁴ and that is why there are extremely demanding requirements on precise mastery of the basic fencing technique (methodology of footwork, bladework, basic tactic). Significant attention is also paid to the training of coordination skills that are indispensable to fencing. Last but not least, in terms of content the course aims to enrich the arsenal of games and training exercises which develop specific qualities of young fencers such as the sense of distance, rhythm and timing in a playful, enjoyable way.

Apart from the written test the applicants have to take a practical exam. It is conceived as a presentation showcasing practical skills in the form of an individual fencing lesson on an assigned topic ranging between 15–20 minutes, supervised by the examination committee. The committee is composed of FIE experts (teachers at the FIE Coaching Academy) and guests, such as former elite athletes, officials of the fencing federation, representatives of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) or University of Physical Education⁵.

In conclusion, I would like to shortly describe the application procedures. The International Fencing Federation (FIE) addresses the individual national federation in an informative letter, they then inform potential applicants in the coaching community who meet the requirements of the FIE. Based on national selections applicants have then officially applied and the FIE conducts the final selection of the participants. The courses in 2019 were divided according to individual weapons (sabre, foil and épée), and the format of the course was following: 8 students per weapon, 6 from Europe, 2 from Panamerica/Asia-Oceania. To be specific, for foil held from July 22 to October 21, 2019, the participants were 6 male and 2 female coaches from these countries: Scotland, USA, Croatia, Turkey, Serbia, Lebanon, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Apart from the FIE requirements mentioned above, the application form for this year also included a provision that after graduation from the FIE Coaching Academy a successful applicant will be a fencing coach at her/his National Federation for two years. The whole course is taught in English, so it is essential that the participants speak and understand English. Successful applicants from the national rounds also had to undergo a medical check-up. From the obligatory

³ The lecturer of the subject was József Tihanyi, PhD, DSc., scientist, member of the national team in high jump, Olympic athlete, legendary coach of Hungarian high jumpers.

⁴ E.g. the participation of an Olympic medalist the the OG in Athens – Zsolt Nemcik (2016), world champion medalist – Cosmin Hancenau (2017), Olympic medalist from the OG in Sydney – Wiradech Kothny (2019).

⁵ Members of the examination committee were: József Navarrete – Olympic medalist, World and European Championship medalist, the current coach of Hungarian junior national sabre team. Bence Szabó – member of FIE Hall of Fame, Olympic gold medalist. Dr. Krisztián Kulcsár – the chair of the *National Olympic Committee* (NOC), Olympic medalist, world champion in épée.

documents provided for the application procedure the FIE requested the following: passport or ID copy, recent colour photo, university diploma/enrolment copy, doctor's certificate proving the candidate is in good health, short biography (experience in a weapon, name and location of the club, name of the coach), reference letter from the national federation, stamped and signed by the federation's president.

The strategic plan of the FIE contains further development of educational activities and aims at fostering fencing education worldwide. The plan proposes the establishment of a new coaching educational centre, similar to the one in Budapest⁶, in each continent. These activities are provided by the FIE free of charge. The financial report for 2017 implies that the FIE invested 597,162 CHF⁷ in Schools and training for Fencing Masters International Fencing Federation. From that 68 participants attended the Coaching Academy in Budapest⁸. However, this number decreased in the following years due to a modification in the format of the course whereby the participants in individual weapons were divided and the number of times the course was run was also reduced from the initial three to two or even one in 2019.

⁶ FIE Budapest coaching academy, <https://fie.org/development/courses/31>, accessed 5th July 2019

⁷ <https://static.fie.org/uploads/20/100188-6.%20documents%20financiers%202017%20ang.pdf>, accessed 19th Nov 2019

⁸ <https://static.fie.org/uploads/20/100286-100264-5.%20Rapport%20Annuel%202017%20ang.pdf>, accessed 19th Nov 2019