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**EN-GARDE: FOCUS AND ATTITUDE TRAINING OF FENCERS**  
**USING ACTING TECHNIQUES**

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*Abstract*

This paper focuses on presenting the process of implementing mental training methods using non-specific means, namely techniques specific to the Improvisation Theatre, as well as the Improvisational Theatre principles. We have started from the hypothesis according to which using the means of Improvisation Theatre to educate/ develop focus and attitude as means of psychological training for performance athletes is both possible and beneficial. The experiment involved the sabre and epee Olympic teams. In order to identify possible areas of action/ intervention of non-specific training deriving from the Improvisation Theatre techniques, as well as the opportunity/ need for such training, and also to identify the most impact-intensive games for the athletes, the Feedback-questionnaire survey method was used. Feedback questionnaires were prepared before each session in accordance with the aimed objectives and completed by athletes and their coaches at the end of each session. The hypothesis of the research has been confirmed: using the means of Improvisation Theatre to educate/ develop focus and attitude as means of psychological training for performance athletes is not only possible and beneficial, but also needful. The investigated athletes were able to transfer the knowledge and complementary training to both the specific sports training sessions and competitions.

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**Keywords:** Fencing, focus, attitude, improvisation, psychology.



## 1. Introduction

“Fencing is a perfect metaphor for life” (Anthony De Longis, cited by Evangelista, 1996, p. 18). Indeed, it is. Every rule, every principle taught in fencing fits perfectly for coping with everyday life. Fencing is the sport where attitude and focus are dynamic elements that support technique in a dialogue with the opponent. If one watches fencing, he will see that the fencers talk to each other without words, using the language of sensations, motor skills, and attitude, a form of dance and storytelling on the fencing strip. The free arm always tells the full story. “Language of fencing is a language of physical movement and mental responses overlaid and coloured by emotional content” (Evangelista, 1996, p. 44).

Studying the scientific literature of fencing, we have found out that the *maitre d’arme* who introduced the private contact lesson (training technique that is still essential nowadays) in fencing was Ralph Faulkner, a former actor who suffered a knee injury during an action sequence. The most efficient recovery techniques were by fencing, and soon after starting to practice this sport, he won numerous titles and honours, participating in two editions of the Olympic Games. Eventually, Faulkner left amateur fencing competition and found out he enjoyed teaching. He opened a theatrical/fencing school – Falcon Studios – providing training to many successful stars. Therefore, the link between acting and fencing is no new but insufficiently explored and exploited.

### 1.1. Theatre and fencing

Fencing teaches to focus on the immediacy of each moment, on the “here and now”. “Instead of confusing yourself with a lot of jumbled thoughts that set the stage for failure, you develop the ability to relax. Alert but calm. At once aware of the big picture and the smallest detail” (Evangelista, 1996, p. 4). Fencing is about vigilance, about lucidity. It is not about being relaxed, but about being patient and capable of fast exchanges (lunging, parrying, riposting). It is all about “seeing and doing” (Covaliu, 2013) with the ability of thinking in an abstract manner, of problem-solving without hesitating. Fencing develops the ability to leave oneself alone and be solution-centred and get the job done to achieve the goal of giving before receiving. Wise (1971) argues that, in fencing, analytical and discriminating minds have never been encouraged to practice lively, because of the risk of injury (bruises broken bones, eye loss), but fencers who are capable of being in contact with their sensations, emotions and instincts. For a fencer to be efficient, it is necessary to have a clear mind, the capacity of extending his making limitations and have the certainty that his body will be there for him at any moment.

Every time the fencer picks up a foil, a sabre or an epee and steps onto the fencing strip, he has to face a new, uncharted, provocative territory, where the option of doubting the decision is not an option. “True fencing takes place between the brain and the sword hand rather than between the tip of the weapon and on opponent’s chest” (Evangelista, 1996, p. 41). An excellent fencer is solution-centred and can always find ways around any purely physical game, because fencing is mostly strategy and psychology with technical support. “Le sentiment du fer”, the mask, the sword, all these give the fencer incredible power to face the situation and get into the role of beginning a dialogue with the opponent.

According to Strasberg and Chaillet (2008), the first step in forming the actor’s control over his physical and mental resources is relaxation. Because this ability seems to have little to do with the final achievements in acting, it is often ignored, but it is fundamental to any expense of will and energy on its

part. In a state of physical or mental tension, or both, the actor cannot think, the commands he gives to himself are not transmitted, the sensation is stifled, and the expression is inhibited. The relaxation process serves to free the actor from the additional pressures he has accumulated before the act begins, to release him from blockages or interferences that can inhibit sensory responses. Physical and mental energies are relatively easy to train, but sensory control is much more difficult. Relaxation is not a static state or effort. Often, in the initial stages of training, the actor is subjected to powerful eruptions of unconscious impulses. He must learn to continue relaxing, to force his will and to maintain his effort to control the action of nerves and muscles. "Schilder has shown that every single thought before formulation, has gone through a prior wordless state" (Fenichel, 2005, p. 41), a fact that is almost palpable in a fencing bout.

Fencing is considered to be one of the most complex sports acknowledging the importance of sensorial qualities and the strategic intelligence of each fencer. In fencing, all the instincts and sensations create a space where the fencer feels the opponent almost organically. Fencing, like acting, is not some cold, impersonal mechanism, but a highly personal expression of mind and body is filled with emotion and physical exertion. Both Improvisational Theatre and fencing are challenging, most of the times unpredictable, always changing, always bringing the element of surprise which the protagonist has to take and make the most of it.

In the first stage of actor's formation, as we have shown before, the actor-student must escape the feeling of being viewed, to "make peace" with himself and to learn the relaxation to move on to the next step. Concentrating on the tasks he has to accomplish within the artistic act because everything an actor makes on the stage requires concentration. The first stage of actor training, in current practice, involves exposure exercises, theatre plays borrowed from the "arsenal" of the Improvisational Theatre, or various working methods of some major pedagogues in the field. During this period the actor-student learns to listen actively, to listen to the reality, to act naturally, unforcedly, to concentrate on pure actions, to react quickly, spontaneously to stimuli, to listen to his intuition and to develop his distributional attention. An essential aspect of preparing the actor in his first stage of training is to train and harmonize soma and psyche.

An already consecrated actor wishing to specialize in the Improvisational Theatre must undergo a training program in which to engage in spontaneity, a different type of creativity, courage, self-confidence, and others, rapid access to intuition, flexibility, acceptance and active listening.

Developing the ability to improvise requires a sustained workout of cognitive mental processes (memory, attention, language, thinking, imagination), sensory (sensation, perception, and representation), and emotional (motivated). An improvising actor must be able to react spontaneously to any suggestion made by the public or by the scene partners. He has to have the capacity to make decisions in fractions of a second (and not to delay decisions), to keep his attention for a long time, to overcome failures quickly, to let himself alone and assume the lead role. Alternatively, the actor must give up the temptation to use secure solutions to compensate or mask the willingness to engage fully in the collective creative process. Also, he must take into consideration to grasp any discomfort of the partner and balance the situation (to support or to -and provokes the partner, as the case may be), to keep in mind details of action and space.

Intelligence is the essential quality of a fencer because it facilitated "reading" the opponent intentions and adapting to tactics variations during a bout, adapting instantly to any circumstances (Thirioux, 1970). Also, fencers have the capacity of transferring information easily between what they during specific and

non-specific training and other life activities. Clery R. (1965) talks about “force d’ame” (force of the soul) meaning the capacity of the athlete of enjoying the game and perceiving every stimulus as a challenge to extend his limits. Focus in sports performance is not a state of effort. The key is to be concentrated and not being conscious of it.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Improvisational theatre and fencing have similar characteristics among which: (1) Fencing, identical to Improvisational Theatre, requests attitude, strategic intelligence, spontaneity and capacity of facing novelty; (2) Both involve feeling almost organically the opponent (or the partner of the stage) to understand what he is saying, to respond and to build a dialogue; (3) Fencers, like actors, train regularly and systematically to perform in front of a public, on the fencing strip; (4) Focus, attention, and flow are essential to both activities to perform; (5) Spontaneity and the capacity of leaving oneself alone, with a lucid mind free the instincts towards performance in the case of both activities; (6) “Here and now”, the focus on the immediacy of the moment is the crucial factor to success.

## **3. Research Questions**

The central question is: Are improvisation techniques useful for developing focus and attitude for fencers?

The secondary questions of the study have a more exploratory character:

1. How could improvisation techniques be transferred into specific training sessions?
2. How could the fencers benefit from the improvisation training sessions?
3. Is it possible for the fencers to transfer knowledge from the Improvisational Theatre sessions into specific training and performance?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study was carried out with the following objectives in perspective: (1) Familiarising with the actors training techniques; (2) Increasing reaction speed; (3) Improving the ability to select significant stimuli; (4) Stimulating the ability to work on multiple concentration points (distributive attention); (5) Boosting the capacity of focusing; (6) Increasing the decision-making capacity; (7) Developing the ability to create a productive attitude; (8) Improving the ability to integrate and teamwork, reporting to the group.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Participants**

14 elite-fencers, either European, World or Olympic medallists participated in the present study. They were components of the Olympic Women Epee Team and the Olympic Male Sabre Team. The proportion was six women to eight men.

### **5.2. Research methods**

Considering the fact that we find more useful to gain expertise and tacit knowledge through experience (Nash & Collins, 2006) and the present paper approaches a matter of applied sport psychology,

we find Robson's (2011) perspective centred on his concerns for practical matter with high regard to reality and the human experience in action more useful. In this sense, we considered qualitative, exploratory methods being more appropriate: observation and feedback questionnaires where open questions allowed the participants to express their truth and provide in-depth knowledge.

Improvisation training sessions were structured as follows:

### **5.3. Activities**

(1) Warm-up - consisted of mental activation exercises, rhythm exercises, coordination, knowledge of assuming space, connecting to the team; (2) The actual training - consisted of activities to increase reaction speed, exercises to improve spontaneity and decision making, exercises to strengthen concentration in the process and new, stressful and awkward situations. (3) Debriefing - an exercise that favours the transfer of knowledge and facilitates the assimilation of information and experiences in the context of their performance.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Exercises and observations**

**Exercise 1:** "The Brownian Movement": A simple activity, in which the task is to move randomly through space, at the same pace the whole group, so that the entire area is filled evenly. When the group began to operate on these rules, the leader gave verbal commands to which the group had to adapt quickly.

*Objectives:* Diverting attention from other parasitic thoughts, pursuing equally awareness of group membership and focusing on simple actions. From the perspective of these aspects, the exercise was used in the warming up part, aiming to bring the minds of athletes to a point 0.

*Remarks:* The technique used was the dynamic flow of actions, the changing of the algorithms of games constantly in and through the Brownian movement, avoiding the possible points that could have become obstacles in acquiring the flow condition (Csikszentmihalyi). The dynamic flow of actions is a specific feature in the fencing, and the exercise is also considered useful by the coordinating coach, associating with the fencing tasks.

The transition from one exercise to another has occurred smoothly, without a visible break in training. The breaks were active, following the rhythm and keeping the attention on the task

**Exercise 2:** "10-9-8": The group enters the same rhythm, a common rhythm unimpeded by someone, but results from the coordination of the participants and the spontaneous entry into the natural rhythm imposed by the task. The movement is random, space must be permanently uniformly covered, and the coordinator counts loudly "3,2,1 and!", then jointly and verbally countless, the group must make ten steps forward, then 9 with back, then 8 in the front, then 7 in the end and so on up to 1 and theoretically, they should all stop in one step. It is believed that the exercise begins to work when the whole group stops during one as if it were one person. Participants are not allowed to speak, to try to impose their own rhythm through the sound of footsteps.

*Objectives:* Maintaining the initial pace adopted both during the moments of movement, during the 10, 9, 8, and the rest periods.

*Remarks:* Exercise did not work, suggesting that there was at the time a block in the ability to maintain rhythm without external stimulation. This is associated with the fact that the group at that time operated “after dictation”, without being able to “improvise” and adapt to the rhythm imposed, but not being able to keep the inertia of the rhythm. Because they are devoid of hearing support during the resting period, they lose focus and begin to recruit with the group.

**Exercise 3:** “7-7-7-7”: Everyone stands in the circle, almost shoulder to shoulder. Each participant must strike his hands in a row so that the group follows the following algorithm: 7 consecutive beats from the palm to the right fellow until the 7th beat is reached, after which, starting with the 8th round, a beat, followed by 7 consecutive beats from random hands (over a circle, from one player to another), accompanied by 7 beats to the left, and then again 7 beatings in random hands (over circle). Without pausing or interrupting the game, the same algorithm continues, this time counting to 6 (6 beats to the right, then six random, then 6 to the left, then six random... and so on until you get to the right of a right, one random, one left and last beating stops the game.

*Objectives:* getting into the rhythm, keeping focus focused so the exercise can flow fluently.

*Remarks:* This is considered to be one of the essential moments of the session because, as we watched, the play has become a game, and the whole group has reconsidered the crossed situation, trying to find solutions and mobilize. What until this point had been categorized as a mere improvisation game became a personal bet from which no one wanted to get lost. The energies have been organized, attention and stake have increased, and the effort required to keep all points of focus under control has awakened the whole group.

**Exercise 4:** “White-Black”: face to face, playing in pairs. In the mirror, the players set together where the white is and where the black is, for example, face to face, the black is, say, to the right of one or the other to the other (in the mirror, I recall) and the white is to the left of the first, respectively, to the right of the other. Each of the two players must, at random and independently of what the one in front of him, does, at the pace previously set by the two teammates, a gesture similar to the hitchhiker either to the right or to the left, time in which he says the code set before: “White”, if he points to the side where the two agreed that he is white, respectively “black” if he looks on the other side. This happens independently of what the colleague does in the mirror and the random one, but if the two drop at the same time on the “white” (in the mirror). Every beat of the ball pulls the sounds of “Huu!” For “white” and “Huu-Huu!” For the moments when they both fall on the “black”.

*Objectives:* entering into the rhythm, keeping focus, collaboration, exposure.

*Observations:* The rules of the exercise, although few, were assimilated/taught over a reasonably long period, and the operation of the activity for each pair was limited in duration, maintaining attention concentration was achieved for very short periods in the case of each pair. After exercising in pairs, each pair was followed by the other participants while playing the game, and this type of exposure increased the

level of motivation within the “exposed” pair, at the same time as a significant level of discomfort over the fact that “protagonists” felt to be regarded/ judged/subjected to comparisons.

**Exercise 5:** “Help!”: The whole group is standing in the circle, the players are organized so that the circle diameter is maximum as long as all the available space is available. A player looks over the circle to another player by calling “Help!”. The second player must call out the name of the one who shouted “Help”, when the first one is heading over the circle to the other at a constant pace, with the intention of pulling him out of the game by touching his palm. All the way to the first, the second player has to do what the first one did in the game, that is, to look at someone else in the circle, shouting “Help”, for the third to give permission to save him by calling out his name. If the third does not do so in time (until the player 2 reaches his palm), then the player two is eliminated, and the game restarts from the right of the one who has just left.

*Objectives:* multi-point operation and speeding up the reaction to changing intentions: ask for help to save you-that is, you defend yourself, then you go to eliminate, that is, attack. Teamwork, speed reaction, distributive attention, assuming responsibility within the group.

*Observations:* We noticed that the participants had difficulty in acquiring the rules and in their application, and the sequence of actions was often different from what was stated as a rule. The speed of reaction, the ability to segment the steps/ intentions/action, posed serious problems to athletes. But at the level of the group, once they have understood the stake, they have been seriously involved in the game and have begun to function as a team.

**Exercise 6:** “The palm circle”: The players sit in the circle, knees, shoulder to shoulder so that the palms rest on the ground, but they do not support the body. (it is necessary for the palms to be lifted). The legs cross: I spend my right hand on the left of the one on my right, and so until a circle of crosses is made. Everybody must beat each palm once in a row, so that the cross palm circle works in the first regular phase on the circle, and in the more complicated way, all the palms sustain, one by one rhythm established in advance, rhythm to repeat it as faithfully as possible. When a player decides to change the direction of the circle, instead of beating once, he will beat twice when his turn comes, and the palm on his left will lead the rhythmic circle in the opposite direction to the initial movement. If someone breaks the rule, he is required to “remove” the hand that broke the rhythm/ game.

*Objectives:* To train cooperation and sense of rhythm, both the rhythm itself and the common rhythm of the group.

*Observations:* At the level of awareness of your ability to focus attention and speed of reaction, this game is considered to be the most enlightening. The game was impacting, and the athletes’ responses to their successes/ failures were telling, making them mobilize and want to stay in the game for as long as possible, even if they had lost, half the chances of winning (they had been forced to take out one of the hands).

**Exercise 7:** “Automatic StoryTelling”: The group is divided into two teams, a team will leave the space, and the second will have the task of inventing an exciting and creative story to share. The job of the

second team is to guess the story created by others, using the technique of questions that only answer “yes” or “no” answers. These questions are put by each team member, in turn, the opponent in the other team (the teams stand face to face, each team member 1 facing the direct opponent from group 2, who will ask the question). Each participant has the right to ask three questions (in the first phase, all the first team puts the first question to the partners, the second is asked the second question, and finally the round of the third questions). After the three rounds of questions/answers have been completed, which were followed by all the participants, team one should advise, agree and delegate someone to tell the story invented by the other side. The team remaining in space does not invent any story, but has to follow three simple rules throughout the game, the answers being dictated by an algorithm: (1) Any question that begins with a voice or a whim is automatically answered in the affirmative. (example: “Is there a love story?” - “Yes”); (2) Any question that begins with a consonant automatically receives a negative answer. (example: “Someone is trying to oppose love stories?” - “No”); (3) After two consecutive questions beginning with a consonant, even if the third question starts with a consonant, the automatic answer will be a positive answer. (example: “Do you love him?” - “No”, “Does her father hate him?” - “No”, “Does her mother hate him?” - “Yes”).

*Remarks:* Although the purpose of the exercise created by Keith Johnstone is to demonstrate to a person who does not consider him/herself creative/imaginative that he can easily create an exciting and exciting story when he feels he is not responsible for what he says and that responsibility (Johnstone, 1981, p. 113), after the end of the exercise, in the discussion, comparing the experience with the performance sport, the idea was that some athletes strive too much to discover what is in the mind of an adversary (given that sometimes there is nothing to discover, because “the story” is only in the mind of the one who seeks to find out, explores meaning). This is a game that runs after an algorithm and is unrepeatable, can only be done once in the first session, because once the algorithm reveals the game cannot be played anymore.

**Exercise 8:** “What are you doing?” This was the last exercise of the session, and his choice as a closing exercise was based on the relaxation of the specific algorithm, as well as on the opening and tattooing of a sensitive subject: public exposure, a matter to be developed in the next session. Naturally, smoothly, athletes have gone from group exercises or pairs to individual activity. One player stays “on stage”, while others are “the audience”. The player exposed to the “spectators” look begins to mimic physical action, which he repeats/continues without interruption. Someone else (from the public) asks him, “What are you doing?”, and the protagonist must not stop from the mimic action and say he does something else. (Example: a player mimics that he is repairing a rubber flap, he is asked what he does and must, without stopping from the mimic action, say that he is doing another action, for example to say, not repaired from repairing to rubber, to answer: “I dance with my girlfriend” or “swimming”. After that, the one who asked, goes over to the questioner and mimics the action the first one just said, and someone else asks him again “What are you doing?”, and the algorithm is resumed.

*Objectives:* subjective/objective differentiation, maintaining the initial action concurrently with the imagination and enunciation of another step, exposure.

*Observations:* This was the moment when the athletes showed the highest resistance, the fear of exposure being, I consider, the most important hindrance. The difficulty of the exercise lies in the fact that once a new action is imagined (in response to the question “What are you doing?”), the body tends to do

the further activity instinctively (which would violate the rule of the game). Even though the mind understands the rule, the body follows known patterns (automatisms), and the purpose of the exercise is reached when the participant can organically distinguish the difference between action and enunciation, intention and masking.

## 6.2. Findings

Analysis and interpretation of the survey results by questionnaire

Question 1. Do you think the Improvisation Theatre is useful at performance level and high performance in sports? 100% of participants considered improvisation training to be valuable for fencing performance. Examples of answers provided by study participants: “Yes, because it relaxes you, it stimulates your creativity and forces you to use your brain”; “Yes, I think it is beneficial because in performance sports you meet very often with new situations that you need to answer in the shortest time”; “Yes, it helps you develop your creativity, react in limited situations with spontaneity, as it does on the floor. You learn to play, to get to know each other better”; “Yes, I think it is very useful at the elite performance level”; “We certainly have a lot to learn and would be good in high performance”.

Question 2. What did you like the most and why? Most of the participants have expressed that it has resonated with games with a high degree of novelty, where the ludic is the fundamental element. Teamwork was another essential element for the participants. Examples of answers: “The fact that for two hours I disconnected from training camp and got rid of stress”; “I enjoyed the games very much, but especially the dialogue at the end”; “I liked all the games because it was something new and discrete”; “Coordination and synchronous exercises. The part of the mim game. The ultimate story in which we formed a team even with people we know less”; “I liked the game with my palms on the floor, because it was fun, but at the same time you had to be focused on the one next to you, and on your hand”; “I liked the fact that you must come into a state of relaxation; “I liked the fact that it is developing the reaction and execution speeds; they are also necessary for us to”; “I liked working in a team because in our sport we need excellent communication”.

Question 3. What was your most inconvenient? Why? “Being present, sometimes relaxed, I lost focus, I was thinking about something else, and I was not present”; “When I got exposed”; “I did not feel uncomfortable at all, I can say I felt at ease all my time”; “The game in which we try to find the story because I did not know what questions to ask”; “I did not feel uncomfortable at all. Whatever does not come out first, that is, everything, relaxes the atmosphere and creates comical moments”; “I was uncomfortable playing when we had to mimic what the one in front of me said because I had to go out before everyone”; “The most awkward thing was when I had to be in the spotlight, and it seemed to me that I was not the mistress of the situation and that I was" awkward”.

Question 4. Where did you feel the most involved? Palm play has triggered the highest activation at the mental level, approaching the specifics of the practiced sport. Also, Automatic Storytelling was the exercise that determined a higher level of assumption by the principle of pleasure. Testimonials supporting: “In the story of the end. I was tired, and it was hard for me to focus”; “In creating the story, which, by the way, does not even exist”; “In the game with the palms down”; “In the game where we all stood in the circle, with our palms on the floor”; “In the story of the end and play with hands, which requires extra

attention”; “The most involved I felt in the game where we had to create a story”; “I was only involved in the exercise in which the story was created (the one at the end)”; “The most involved I felt when I created the story on the team”.

Question 5. When do you think the Improvisational Theatre is useful? In what period of training? “During the accumulation period (in cantonments), but I think you in the precompetitive period”; “I think it would be most useful in the last few months before the objective competitions”; “When we do not have heavy and many workouts (restoration period)”; “Anytime. Particularly intense moments and loading before the big competitions”; “Yes, in the training period, because it takes us out of our usual comfort zone and draws our attention to some things we forget”; “Personally, I think it is necessary to be included in all periods. I think there is a need for consistency over a long period. I think it would be necessary at the level of cadets and junior level also”; “I think it is useful to us in any training period”.

Question 6. What do you think you can train through the Improvisational Theatre? By summarizing and synthesizing the answers of athletes, the following can be trained: (1) Response speed and ability to react to limited situations; (2) Creativity and spontaneity; (3) Attitude; (4) Ability to deal with your own emotions; (4) Attention and concentration; (5) Ability to deal with the new and the unpredictable; (6) Trust in and in own actions. Examples in this sense: “Speed of reaction, creativity, socialization”; “Reactions, spontaneity, leave outside the training, the contest, the problems, do not panic if you are wrong”; “Psychic, Response Speed, Trust”; “Speed of reaction and the fact that you can relax and detach yourself from certain pressures”; “Creativity and reaction in stressful situations. Plus concentrating and maintaining it throughout the exercise (assault)”; “I think through the Improvisational Theatre I can train concentration and teamwork”; “I can learn to be more relaxed, to work with my emotions, to work the speed of reaction, execution, attention, to work in a team”; “It would help me get out of the way without the partner realizing that I have a problem”.

7. How do you make an improvisation exercise a specific training exercise? Most believe that exercise training exercises can be included as such in training, but the most relevant response is: “I would turn specific training into an exercise of improvisation, that is, I would make an effort in the form of games and fun”. Practically, we report that at a high-performance level there is a strong need to return to the basics, to pleasure, to the joy of training, playfulness, game and play. “I think he does not need transformation, it is a perfect workout as it is”; “On the piste, even if there are well-defined actions, in many situations you have to improvise depending on the opponent's reaction. For example, you are building something, looking at something and changing the end at the decisive moment”.

Question 8. What is the idea with which you left the experience of the improvising theatre in the training camp? The idea that was imposed was to be present “here and now”, but also to be determined in deciding. Examples in this sense: “I have to be always in the present moment and to relax, but that nothing I do is wrong”; “Even if you are wrong, do not think how it would have been better” or “Oh, my God, what a mistake I made!”; “Keep going with confidence!”; “Be present here and now!”; “It is important to be credible in what you do, say and practice”; “That you cannot be wrong if you accept the challenge. And if you started something “with the left”, you can improvise, and the final result is in your favour”; “There are other methods that can help improve the athlete's performance and motivation, even relaxation”; “That you can come out of any situation if you are the master of yourself”.

## 7. Conclusion

Exercises centred on increasing concentration and reaction speed were more difficult to assimilate into the group. Their expectations regarding improvisation training were primarily centred on fun and play, which triggered an initial blockage.

Removing athletes from the specifics of sport and bringing them to another complementary area highlighted the existence of automatisms that did not allow immediate activation of a non-specific task. For example, in distributive attention and reaction rate exercises, where our expectations were high, the results were not adequate. Mental super saturation regarding rules and development on qualities specific to the sport practiced, especially when the pressure of the effect was high (Olympic year) caused an unconscious rejection of tasks similar to those of training.

All of these issues gave us the following information: (1) Improvisation techniques formulated as training can be training complementary to psychological training; (2) Improvisation training becomes a necessity in the conditions where there is over-saturation, too much, and may have a discharge function, especially in precompetitive periods where emotional tensions and result pressure are high; (3) Improvisation training can become an option when the ability to engage and connect to the environment is blocked; (4) The unpredictable, the novelty, the defining elements of the competitive activity, become de facto states which, through exercise, lose their urgency and negative value. They are resigned through improvisation training as challenges, stimuli for activating the spontaneity and creativity necessary for performance. (5) The exercises that have remained meaningful in their minds and that they have “joyfully taken up in the specific training, until the end of the training, are the strongest character of the play, “What are you doing?” and “Automatic storytelling’.

The Improvisational Theatre techniques prove to be useful and beneficial for improving focus and attention for fencers and can have a great impact on strengthening a productive and functional attitude.

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