

## Keep it Straight

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Walking around the different venues, I couldn't help but notice the great variety of Epee guard positions which epeeists either following their coaches' advice or their own have come to adopt. To wit:

1.The "Monkey" whereby the fencer holds his hand below his front knee, about 10 inches off the piste and moves from side to side, bouncing up and down. Not very effective but bothersome as hell. I mean, can't the guy stand still a minute so I can hit him?

2.The "I'm cool," whereby our protagonist holds his weapon down from the elbow on and keeps backing up away from us so that the cameras can get a better angle. He is said to be patient; I say that he has no idea what to do and is definitely susceptible to a feint to the hand slip down to the knee or foot as he counter-attacks into thin air.

3.The "Come-and-get-me" whereby our opponent holds his weapon almost foil-style except that his blade is parallel to the piste and he moves his forearm sideways back and forth. Watch out for this dude. That arm can extend as fast as or faster than it can move sideways.

4.The "Beginner" guard: a stiff arm, shoulder to wrist, which clearly says, " Stay away from me!" but has the opposite effect on the experienced fencer.

5.The "When-you-open-up-I'll-be-there" guard: the arm is almost fully extended and relaxed at the shoulder, elbow and wrist. Raise your hand for a flick toward that tempting forearm and that hand is toast; try to take that blade: touch against you.

I obviously prefer this last guard scenario because it more closely falls in line (pun intended) with today's Epee style: the straight line. Raise or lower your point more than a few inches and here comes your adversary with a straight thrust or opposition to your forearm or shoulder or chest even because you gave him the opening by simply creating an angle between your blade and your arm.

Answer a beat with a beat and he's off like a shot because to answer that beat, you move sideways and raised your point. Answer that same beat with a Counter-of-Sixte Opposition and you get the touch because you proceeded forward with your parry and even if he deceives that parry, he's still in danger.

Keep your arm extended but relaxed with your blade parallel to the strip and that guy over there can't take your blade without you derobing and hitting him before he can lunge or fleche... And if he lunges or fleches naked, i.e., without your blade in his possession, he more than likely is committing suicide. That doesn't mean you should never parry; but do it with your arm extended and always riposte with a prise de fer.

Some drills you might work on:

- Feint straight with a casual advance, explode with a fleche or lunge to the crook of the elbow (the "saignee" for you traditionalists); the saignee is a nice target mostly because in a counter-attack action from your opponent, it comes toward you.
- Feint with a flick to outside the arm - your opponent will counter-attack - parry counter-of-quarte opposition with your arm extended.
- Practice never to bend your arm once you get it extended; you get in trouble? Use your feet to get you away but don't shorten your arm!

There are a lot of combinations possible using just a straight arm and I'm sure you already thought of some which you're dying to go and try. Go ahead then, and remember: Keep it straight and fence toward your opponent, not yourself!