

September 3, 2013

An Open Letter to Practitioners of Historical European Martial Arts

When on August 23rd I received approval for my October moniteur clinic and, since my new title would be used in the clinic advertising materials, gave my consent to Puck Curtis to post online his congratulations for the certification I had received in July from the United States Fencing Coaches Association, I expected some controversy. However, the extreme vitriol I have since encountered has been extremely disturbing. Speculation, personal attacks, and peremptory demands for me to explain myself have flooded social media and various fora. Aspersion have been cast on my integrity and good name. I cannot remain silent, and have therefore decided to post this response. The following is a personal statement of my motivations for participating in this program, and does not reflect USFCA policy or that of the Historical Committee.

It has long been my belief that to grow and flourish, the study of Historical European Martial Arts needs both greater professionalism and recognition from established organizations. Being an academic, I live in a world where credentials are very necessary. Many others have seen how such recognition would be beneficial to their own efforts. This is why I, already being a member of the USFCA, joined a project already in progress to begin a historical certification for that organization's membership. My reasons for doing so were several.

First, it has been my hope that the USFCA certification could establish both an impartial credential and an invitation into a collegial community outside the politics and divisions that so plague HEMA.

Secondly, I hoped it would help to both establish professional standards and give real benefits to HEMA instructors who wished to join the USFCA and learn what I believe to be a very effective pedagogy and method of tactical analysis.

Thirdly, I hoped to interest sport coaches in HEMA and the martial heritage of Western swordsmanship in general.

Fourth, I hoped that I could bring my knowledge and skills to bear in making the certification the best it can possibly be. However, please recognize I am only a junior member of this committee, with limited power to affect policy, decisions, or materials. The final product will be the product of the expertise of the entire committee.

In all of this, my desire was to serve the American HEMA community at large. It was humbling for me to named one of the initial examining masters, even in the knowledge

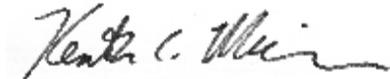
that this recognizes me as no more than a master coach who has command of a certain pedagogy and approach to fencing and not a “martial arts master” in the sense that some historical fencers understand it. I do not claim to be the sole authority on the reconstruction of historical systems of fencing, do not believe my title alone gives me special authority in such matters, and hope that those who come after me and who are certified in this program will both surpass me in understanding and skills and continue to help the program grow and improve.

I recognize that the term “master” is offensive to a number of HEMA practitioners. To them, I apologize, but this is the title used within the USFCA, which comes honestly by its use.

To my European colleagues, I am also sorry. You exist in a very different regulatory environment from those of us in the US, UK, and Canada, and there is the danger that your national governing bodies will create some sort of interference for you. However, this is a matter quite out of my control and that has nothing to do with me or my participation in this initiative.

I realize that this brief note does not answer all questions. It is only a personal response. I cannot publicly comment on USFCA policy or committee work, nor discuss other committee members, their personal information, or their credentials. To do so would be a violation of the trust placed in me. Those wishing official information should contact Maître Cole Harkness at cole.harkness@gmail.com.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Mondschein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ken Mondschein, PhD, Maître d'Armes Historique