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**Guy Windsor:**

Hello, and welcome to this, the 9<sup>th</sup> class in this longsword course. We're getting onto the subject of more advanced training, where the purpose is to push yourself to the point where you start making mistakes. Your equipment is here partly to help you absorb those mistakes, but a couple of really important things. Firstly, the most important bit of safety equipment is your common sense and your good training. The thing is, no matter how much equipment you're wearing, you can still get badly injured. Just think about how many knights in medieval battles, in full plate armour, still died. Your equipment helps, but it does not keep you safe. Second thing to bear in mind, there's a concept called risk homeostasis that you should become intimately familiar with. The thing is, the more you reduce the apparent risk, the more risks you are likely to take, which is why for example, sitting in a nice safe car with lots of crumple zones around you and antilock braking and all of that sort of stuff makes you just as likely to do something stupid and kill yourself. Because you feel safe, because of your equipment, you go faster. You take more risks. So, you are more likely to get hurt. In my opinion, the best safety device for a car would be a stainless steel spike sticking out of the steering wheel so that drivers were absolutely petrified of anything that was likely to make them come to a sudden stop. People would be driving at 10 miles at hour, and nobody would die.

Your equipment is what will allow your partner to play harder and to actually aim their strikes at the proper target. So, the equipment you're wearing basically determines the acceptable target area. This is, of course, anti historical, because historically, when you're trying to murder somebody with a sword, you avoid their defensive equipment. In our practice, we actually aim for the defensive equipment. We aim to strike the mask. We do not aim to wiggle the point under the mask. I'll just take you through the equipment we have here so you can get an idea of what you should be wearing for different kinds of practice.

Firstly, obviously, the sword. As I've said before, it should have a rubber point on the end. This is always true. It should flex in the thrust. Now, there are lots of different kinds of swords you can get. This is one by Arms and Armor, and it's my personally preferred training longsword, but there are plenty of other manufacturers. As long as it's a little bit giving in the thrust, but remains rigid here, so when you're making your parries, the blade doesn't start to wobble. You have a reasonably safe sword. However, of course, because the blade flexes, you will tend to thrust harder. So, the actual impact may well be pretty much the same. The equipment does not keep you safe. Here are a couple of masks. This is my Terry Tindall mask, which has a suspension harness in it, and it is, in my opinion, the absolute best thing you can get for training with a

longsword. I'll provide links where you can get this stuff in the notes. [Here: <http://www.horsebows.com/fencing-masks.php>] However, these are quite difficult to get hold of, and they are quite expensive. I value my head, so I bought one straightaway. Most people these days are using a fencing mask with ideally, sometimes without, this padded back of the head protection, which is a good idea if there are going to be any strikes comes towards the back of your head. Here's the thing. As you up the intensity level, chaos will be generated, and you cannot guarantee that you won't be turning your back on your opponent at some point, and you cannot guarantee that they will not in the heat of the moment, belt you in the back of the head. This is a pretty good idea. A decent quality mask, this is your face. This is your eyes. This is your head. Do not economize on the safety of your most important bit.

Let's talk about protecting your hands. In competition circles, this sort of thing is apparently preferred. It is mostly plastic and frankly I can't stand them. I think they're horrible. I don't like the feel of them. I don't like the way they—you can't really manipulate the sword properly holding them. I don't think they give particularly good protection, and I have just never liked them. I much prefer these. I have a pair of these, which I've been using now for a dozen years or so, and I've never had a finger broken in them. However, you should bear in mind that every gauntlet of every kind has some sort of tradeoff between the amount of protection you get and the weight of it and the amount of mobility that you get. What I do with these is, I take a proper fencing glove that fits like a glove, and I glue it in and stitch it in so you get the feeling of the fencing glove. In my pair of these, I can pretty much play the piano. If I could play the piano at all, I could play the piano in these gloves. Still, when you get a sword across the fingers, it might hurt, but it will protect you considerably. On the subject of mass, the mass is part of the protection, because what any kind of impact protection does, in part at least, it spreads the impact over a large area, but also, the mass of the protection itself absorbs the blow. The more weight there is, the more the energy is dissipated through it, so the less of that force comes through into you. A little bit of weight is probably a good idea. These are not too heavy.

These are noticeably lighter, but that's maybe one of the reasons why most of the really nasty hand injuries I've come across—not my students and not under my supervision under the last dozen years or so have happened when people have been wearing things like this. Gauntlets. Good pair of nicely fitting steel gauntlets, very good idea. The thing is tournaments and tournament organizers have every right to determine the equipment that is legal within that tournament. Most tournaments these days do not allow steel gauntlets. I have never understood why, but that's just a fact, and if you want to take part in tournaments, you have to respect their rules. You might need to get a pair of each. For ladies, obviously, a little extra protection in the breast department is a good idea, and you can actually get similar things for gents as well. While we're on the subject of chest protection, your two basic options are a fencing jacket with some kind of plastron over the top. This is, again, my preferred solution. Or a padded jacket. The

reason I don't like the padded jacket so much is, the padding is much more flexible than the plastron. Getting whacked in the ribs with a padded jacket can really, really hurt. Getting whacked in the ribs with this, you'll notice you've been hit, but it doesn't do you any harm. I find this a better solution to this, but these are very popular, because it is an all-in-one solution. Again, they're tournament legal and awful lot better than nothing.

Throat protection. A gorget, very good idea. This one is Zoë's, and it's made of steel. You're not likely to get a point coming through there any time soon. Zoë also wears a pad, a linen pad underneath it, which helps absorb some of the impact. So, strikes to the throat don't hurt so much. In a perfect world, I would prefer a gorget to have a lip around it so that a point that's coming in can't slide up and catch under the chin. A rolled lip is ideal in my opinion. It is a good idea to have elbow pads, and these also extend down the forearm a little way, which if people are striking over your arms, it's probably helpful. If you're going to be doing styles which emphasize strikes to the legs, such as for example the Bolognese, you are going to want something for your partner to hit. Shin pads, and in any case, knee pads are a good idea. I have been cracked on the kneecap once with a sword, and it's not an experience I'd like to repeat.

Last but not least, these are my very sexy underwear. This provides some sort of padding for the thigh. Again, if you're getting cracked with a sword on the thigh, wearing one of those underneath your trousers, probably a good idea. It absorbs some of the impact. The amount of equipment that you wear will depend on what sort of hits you want to take. At a minimum, protect your face and head and your throat and your delicate bits.

Of course, gentlemen, I didn't get around to showing you a plastic cup, because frankly, that should be obvious. We've shown you at least one kick to the nuts in this course, so it's reasonable to assume that anyone who is kitted up for free play is properly protected against all legal strikes. So, make sure that whatever free play rules you fight under, take into account the equipment that you have and are wearing. You might agree, seeing that neither of you are wearing groin protection, you will not whack each other in the nuts. That's reasonable, but to be honest, I would always tend to kit up one layer past where the rules stop. This is a good general advice.

You don't need to get all of this at once, and you don't need to wear all of this all the time, but it's a really good idea to start accumulating the necessary bits and then seeing what that allows you to do. For example, if you've got decent gauntlets, you can practice keeping your hands safe, because your partner can strike at your hands because you're wearing the gauntlets. In summary, this is the sort of equipment that you're probably going to want to be getting, but just please remember that it's not your equipment that keeps you safe. Your equipment exposes you to more risk, because your partner will assume your equipment will keep you safe, and they will hit you. It is good common sense and good defensive technique that keeps you safe. It is not good

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equipment that keeps you safe. Bear this in mind, and get the equipment that you need for the things that we are about to do. I will see you on the next class. Cheerio.

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