

Backyard cutting

What is all this about Freestyle Cutting?

Well this is a tricky one so I'll start by saying that in a way, I'm not really qualified to say, what with it being an open group of people and I can only speak for myself and my opinions. Having said that, it *is* an open group and what every member takes from it is unique to them and I truly believe that's the best way for it to be.

So, *Freestyle Cutting* is the sport if you like, that really got me properly into the whole swords scene. I wanted a katana for ages, way over 10 years even before I actually went ahead and got one and it went up on the wall and I cut a few milk bottles but that was really it.

When I first started cutting, I chose the easiest of targets simply because I lacked any skill. I could swing the sword but up and above that, I was clueless. The idea of using tougher targets made me wonder if I should be cutting them at all and about the damage it could do to my sword or even the damage I could end up doing to myself. The only thing I did know was that I was no longer content with cutting milk bottles. I saw that some people were using larger/different bottles of course, but it was the same sort of affair. They'd cut the bottle, water would go everywhere and that was it.

There was never any real sense of going anywhere with it. That's the sort of impression I get when I see people just chopping at bottles in their garden. For me, that's where we all start but it's not where the game ends.

This all changed when I found this freestyle cutting group. I wasn't sure what it was all about but after watching a few videos, doing some reading and chatting to them online, I understood very quickly what they were trying to do. They were trying to push the boundaries of backyard cutting into what more closely resembled a sport. Instead of repeatedly doing the same tired cuts on the same targets, they were trying new things, new techniques, new cutting patterns. Before this, the idea of stacking up bottles never occurred to me simply because it was so far out of my league. Certainly, the idea of stacking up four bottles to cut would of seemed insane, and that's the thing with FSC, just as you think that the line has been reached where it's not possible to further complicate the trick, someone tries something that's not been tried before and manages it. What's more, these people were heads and shoulders above the sort of skill that I possessed or seen before in other amateur cutting videos and that raising of the goalposts is what I needed to really start improving my technique. It really helps in anyone's early progression I've found, if you know where you're attempting to get to.

"Freestyle cutting is a modern approach to swordsmanship. It is at once a group of cutters, a syllabus of techniques, and an evolving philosophy. Freestyle cutters may come from martial arts backgrounds of all types, or none at all. The motivation is to cut at higher level for the sheer joy of landing the cuts and improving one's technique. "
freestylecutting.com

The important thing to remember is that the whole point of FSC revolves around what is essentially trick cutting, like I mentioned before. That means that there is no martial aspect involved. There's simply no comparison with iaido, kendo or indeed any sword art that is derived from an actual combat perspective. Although martial artists can practice FSC, FSC isn't a

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martial art and although they both contain similar elements, they are not related.

In a way, the only thing that we as cutters are interested in, is the separation of the target into two or more pieces. I mean it sounds kind of clinical put like that, but that's what it is. Actually doing it however, is anything *but* clinical. The feeling that you get when you've pushed yourself to try something for ages and with all that practice you know you actually have a chance at succeeding at it....and then you do! It's amazing!

Me, completing Part 3 of the freestyle cutting, bottle curriculum.

FSC is kind of like Backyard tameshigiri. Backyard cutting or backyard tameshigiri however is an ambiguous term. I mean, in a way FSC is actually backyard cutting but what I find is that FSC is more structured in what it does. It's members, myself included work hard to push our abilities to the next level, performing cuts and combinations that before someone tries them, didn't even exist.

The group has a curriculum that everyone is encouraged to complete which is structured so as to take the practitioner from the simplest cuts to the more advanced multi-cut patterns both on water bottles and mats. At first glance it looks like you could probably train intensively and hammer these cuts out in no real time, but in practice you'll find that it takes a considerable amount more time than you originally thought. Some of the cuts will involve pulling muscles if you're not careful, some are tricky to get down fast enough and practically all of them require practice, practice and more practice in order to train in the reliability that you'll need to progress with. There's no point being able to do a cut once. You need to be able to do it on demand. They also try to organise regular competitions amongst members which include physical exercise challenges as well as cutting exercises and this again, pushes the group's abilities ever forward.

This whole attitude towards cutting does its best to make damn sure that this rather peculiar hobby is a whole lot more than just cutting through things in your garden. It's wickedly enjoyable, it's a structured course and it's a system of self-improvement. I mean what more could you ask for?

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