

A TREATY ON A CROWN CHAMPION SYSTEM AND HOW IT COULD WORK IN THE SCA

By Count Sir Henri.

A champion system is defined as one whereby two consorts enter a Crown Tournament with a third person who acts as their Champion/fighter. If the fighter wins the Crown Tournament, the two consorts step up as the Royal Heirs. More details below.

I am Count Sir Henri, I was 21st King of Lochac, I am a member of the Order of Chivalry, I am currently The Champion of Lochac, I fence and am in the Guild of Defence. Additionally, I dabble in combat archer and actively encourage its integration into our War forces. I'm also currently serving as Seneschal of the Barony of St Florian and do various arts and sciences projects to improve my experiences for myself and my friends, household and Barony etc. I have travelled and have participated in events around Lochac and attended several Pennsic Wars. I go through this not to try and imply my view is any more important than anyone else's but to show that my view is based on a wide range of experiences within the SCA and is not formed solely on the experience of a 'stick jock' that only participates in heavy fighting.

Recently, there has been considerable discussion around the Kingdom on and off for a year or more regarding ableness / inclusivity in the SCA. These things are important and one of the drivers for the SCA being so successful worldwide. As we've grown we have seen new Orders added with the most recent one being the Order of Defence. We've also seen changes to incorporate same sex couples being treated equally under Society law. The precedent is there and although the SCA is often described as a big ship, even the largest of vessels can change course to keep up with the times (and mundane law).

As these once smaller elements gather a greater portion of our membership base it is only fair to start to question the status quo. No system can be maintained without constant upkeep and re-evaluation. Initially we only had the Order of Chivalry. We now have Laurels, Pelicans and the Order of Defence. Is it not fair then to also question the makeup of the game and where the seat of power lies. Are all the streams of endeavour in the SCA actually represented fairly or at all?

For many years the fencers were the purview of the Queen of Lochac. They were effectively ignored by the Kings, we had a tourney in the Queens name at Rowany Festival but for the most part fencing ran nearly independently. Is this fair to the fencers, especially when such a large portion of our membership base participates in this field of endeavour?

In recent years there has been some good progress bridging this gap. Kings have actively participated in the fencing tournaments and wars. There's also been members of the Chivalry pick up the fencing blade and start competing in that arena. However, the SCA world is still governed solely based on the Heavy field when it comes to determining Crowns.

Similar stories can be said of the Laurels and Pelicans where their work, while crucially important to the running of the Kingdom holds no sway over the determination of our Crown.

Before going much further I want to go back a step and share my journey of discovery as I came to support the Champion system.

Like many who remain opponents to the champion concept, I was initially very dismissive. Similarly, I also had an overall response that, 'of course we are inclusive, anyone can get authorised and compete'. I too, was somewhat affronted that there were vocal people who wanted to enter our game, and change it, thereby (to my mind) belittling something I had trained for over 15

years to achieve, sometimes three times a week, in order to win a Crown tourney. How dare they take away my glory, my achievements by watering it down so that others may attain the same goal without applying the same dedication and hard work. I also dismissed the idea from the point of view there was no suitable alternative that would be any better - so why bother discussing it.

However, I like to think that while I have strong views on most subjects I always endeavour to listen to the views of others and if sufficient facts are present then I reassess my opinion. Over a series of discussions I have changed my position. The turning point was when, through several conversations, it was proven to me how we weren't inclusionary to the extent that we could be and that there was a valid alternative system that fitted well into our current structure.

The alternative is as elegant as it is simple.

Any two people can enter a Crown tournament, one or both can fight as under the current system - or, they may choose a Champion to fight for them as a Consort Pair (ie: a pair can't have two champions between them). If their Champion prevails, they become the Royals Heirs and eventually step up as King/s and Queen/s. The Champion becomes The Champion of Lochac and follows all the rules that the current second place combatant would normally fulfil.

Lets now address some of the concerns or issues regarding this format.

The most commonly tabled negative is the propensity for this to be used to 'buy' fighters, which could shift the balance of our game. Currently this can happen. Currently Crown entrants do not have to be mundane partners, they do not have to go through any financial checks, and anyone can approach a fighter and offer to pay that fighter to enter a Crown Tournament for them. People quite often aren't aware of this fact or don't seem to link the two. No further checks and balances would need to be implemented for a situation where a Champion represents a Consort Pair, as there are no checks and balances required at present and the system we have has been working for many years.

There is also quite often the misaligned argument that it is the threat of the work of ruling the Kingdom at the end of the tournament that stops people from cheating or buying their way through. I disagree with this concept otherwise we would see cheating in all major tournaments. It's not the threat of work at the end, it's our culture. It's the fact you don't want to be that person who is reputed to have done that. You're SCA game will be destroyed, no one will talk to you and you will be an outcast. Peer pressure is what makes this whole system work and it has done so for over 50 years.

What about we're already inclusive there's no need to allow a Champion system. This objection is predominately put forward by heavy fighters in my experience. As I describe above the SCA is made up of many different aspects but only heavy fighters get to play in this field and vie for the Crown. Not everybody in our game can physically fight heavy, not everybody can find a heavy consort or is prepared to separate from their mundane partner in game to play consort to someone else. Yes, the rules are the same for everyone, but they quite obviously do not allow everyone to participate.

What about my dedication, my hard work for years to learn the skills to win that Crown. Well what about the person that comes in and wins after having only been fighting for 6 months? It's happened before. Our inability to get good as fast as others should not be used to stop other people from participating.

Then there's the agreement: the Consort Pair haven't earned the right to Reign, therefore they don't deserve to. They didn't win the tournament. So what? They've spent the time to develop a relationship with, and earn the respect of a fighter with the skills good enough to win. That doesn't come over night. More importantly though, actually winning the Crown tournament is only a

small fraction of what it means to do a Reign. Winning the tournament gets you the Crown. Maintaining respect and dignity and earning your County or Duchy is about the hard work you put in for the 9 months of the Reign after the tourney is won. That's the hard bit, the actual work. While a Champion may have done the fighting to win the Crown Tournament, the majority of the work is still done by the Consorts as Crown and nothing would diminish that fact.

But they can just buy a fighter. Maybe, as I mentioned earlier, that can happen now. Not so long ago, there were concerns about two Knights being able to abuse the newly implemented same sex couples rule. While, as Knights, we can be an arrogant bunch, we for the most part try to uphold the SCA ideals. To my knowledge this hasn't happened to date and there's no reason to expect this to change under a proposed Champion system either. If something like this did happen there are many Knights that could and would contest Crown to implement further sanctions and rules to tighten checks if required. These would then be applied to all entrants of course.

What about my achievements being watered down by these 'imposters' who haven't earned the right to rule? Like I said above, the majority of the work is the actual ruling so they will have earned their position by doing the work. Also, who's to say their contributions prior to stepping up are less than mine? Is my 15 years of heavy fighting more important than someone who has spent 15 years serving the Kingdom, is possibly a Pelican, an inspiration to many? Not according to some, but I'm sure you can see where I'm going. What about someone who's really new and knows nothing about the SCA? Well, for starters I see the Champions as being responsible enough to not fight for a Consort Pair if they don't think they are qualified to do the job justice (more next on this). Secondly the Crown, as always, have the right to refuse entry to who express their intention to contest for Crown, so if the current Crown do not deem that the Consort Pair have the relevant experience, they don't make the list. Simple.

As mentioned previously Champions would continue to be a part of this whole process. For the most part the Champion would step aside after the tournament has been won - but their reputation is riding on the Crown's performance. Any bad deed by the Crowns is a reflection on the fighter that put them there. This is a considerable burden and will greatly limit cursory mercenary fighters.

But Champions will now have nothing limiting how many Crowns they enter and will just keep putting in whoever they want? It still takes effort, time and expense to travel and to actually win a Crown Tournament. Even amongst the best fighters in the Kingdom there is no one that can win that reliably against all the others, all the time. The same limit on current Crowns would apply in that Champions would also not be allowed to contest the Crown after they won as per current rules for Champions. If for some reason a dark spiral of sub-par Royal couples does result then this can be remedied by a good fighter or many good fighters competing, winning and then implementing further checks or changes. All of this is no different to how we operate now. If you pay close attention, you'll see a spike in Knights entering Crown after a Reign where things occurred that they didn't like, in order to help readjust things. This is nothing new but for the most part not widely acknowledged.

Why can't these people just serve as Seneschals or B.O.D. members or as B&B's and stop going on about this. Everyone likes to dream right? Everyone wants a goal to aspire to. While I agree those other roles are actually just as, or more, important in the stability and continuity of the Kingdom, these roles don't have the same renown. They also don't offer the same experiences - experiences of the Crown that are unique to our game. Why should the wonderful experiences available to the Crown be limited to just the field of heavy combatants?

Some argue that heavy fighters make good leaders as proven by the dedication to the SCA and their commitment to training. This is an ideal that just doesn't match reality. It's great that the Royalty can foster these ideals in people but reality is there is a continual string of near disasters and mess ups that are sometimes avoided through good support networks in Royal Households or through the Royal and other Peerages. Heavy fighters are human and fallible just like everyone else. Being a heavy fighter does not guarantee that you will be a good Crown or have the ability to inspire the populace (there's significant documented evidence to prove the exact opposite in fact). Additionally, it can easily be argued that Crowns made up of Pelicans or Laurels could be better placed to assess and promote the arts and services that our society thrives on - not just the martial combat side of the game.

Typical war numbers consist of approx. 1/10 of the any site numbers. Add in tourney fighters, fencers and archery you'd still struggle to get to 50% of members or attendees. So where is the fair representation?

I go on about opening the field but still talk about it being a Heavy tournament. This is on purpose. To date, amongst my discussion, even the most ardent supporter of the Champion system believes in change, but acknowledges that there are advantages to the Heavy Tournament format. There's tradition, there's the spectacle, while it doesn't guarantee experience it is generally a good filter to narrow the field to a more experienced person in the SCA, heavy fighting has a way of being the glue of the Society binding people together through camaraderie and importantly it allows for a clear victor. I'm a supporter of the Champion system but my support hinges on still determining Crown via a Heavy combat tournament. Maybe this view will change over time, but for now I'm happy with this and would like to continue to see fencing, service and A&S entry requirements.

We don't have to cater for everyone. No, no we don't. But can we try harder to cater for everyone and not upset our game? I believe so. All changes need to be assessed on whether they will add enjoyment and new members or whether it will cause more harm than good. All the above sees the same traditions and formats maintained but adds the ability for more people to fill the role as Crown. I believe this diversity would be a good thing. Or do people seriously believe that current Crown tournaments that may consist of a limited field of as few as eight fighters, is truly show casing the best of our Kingdom? There are many reasons a fighter may not contest Crowns but in my view the Crown tourney should be the hardest and best fought tourney in the Kingdom calendar. They should be on the must do list of as many fighters as possible to go to and compete to rate themselves amongst their Peers and test the mettle of any who would also compete. This scheme could instantly double the numbers of entrants. The fact the winner may only then become Champion rather than Crown is irrelevant. Instantly these tourneys step up a notch which improves our tourney game across the Kingdom. I've heard complaints from some that this will make it harder for them to win so it isn't fair. Suck it up, train harder. Earn that renown you want so badly. If it's simply the Crown you want though, as you think you can do a good job of it, that's fine - get a capable Champion or get better. You'd now have the same opportunity as everyone else.

In closing there's many arguments against a champion system but most seem driven out of fear or a lack of understanding of the current system. I fully encourage all discussions regarding concerns so that a good system can be developed to be out forward as a proposal. I write this to clear the air and summarise multiple different Facebook threads that can be hard to navigate. I hope that by doing so it allows for some traction to be made in this area both in Lochac and across the Known World. This last bit is important, because even if all of Lochac wanted this change we are still just a small cog in the large SCA machine. Friends and contacts from other Kingdoms would also need to understand and support this idea so that it can get momentum. While this is potentially a very small change to Corpora in quantity of qords it is a change and I'm under no illusions will be a quick or painless process. The more people that actively talk about, discuss and promote this idea the better chance we have of seeing it come to fruition.

Yours in Service,

Henri.