

# Fencing For Parents



## Introduction

The sport of fencing is a uniquely classic sport. It has history, drama, romance, style, art, plus all the advantages of an active physically demanding sport. Mentally it is mind consuming, allowing not a moment's break.

Fencing is also fast and athletic, a far cry from the choreographed bouts you see on film or on the stage. Instead of swinging from a chandelier or leaping from balconies, you will see two fencers performing an intense dance on a six foot-by-40 foot strip. The movement is so fast the touches are scored electrically - more like Star Wars than Errol Flynn.

## The Youth Program

The youth program of the US Fencing Association (USFA) is designed to provide an introduction for your child to one of the most fascinating, exciting and safest sports. Fencing develops discipline, balance, coordination, and sportsmanship. Fencing helps the youth develop quicker reflexes and an ability to make lightning fast analyses of tactical situations.

Since the first national youth tournament held in 1985, the youth of America have changed the face of American Fencing. College coaches are now recruiting American fencers with years of experience as opposed to searching the freshman ranks during registration for the tallest most athletic looking people.

The youth fencing program has developed a very large foundation for our pyramid of fencers, the apex of which cannot be higher than the base is wide, meaning the wider the base the higher we can reach. Large fencing programs are appearing across the United States as an alternative to the all-time favorite team sports. There is no predetermined method to pre-select great fencers so all fencers must be given equal chance and attention. Children develop at different mental, emotional and physical rates and their goals change accordingly. There are those who exhibit no talent during their first four or five years of fencing and then become dynamite competitors, while others may show the competitive spark from the first day.

## Benefits of Fencing

There are many benefits to participating in youth fencing. Children learn good sportsmanship and self-discipline. They learn to compete independently as well as for a team; they learn to enjoy winning and profit from defeats, while becoming physically fit and healthy; and, most importantly, they learn to make complex decisions, analyze problems, and think fast. These ideals help children reach their potential in many areas other than fencing.

Remember that the primary motivating factor for entering sports, particularly among adolescents, is the desire to have fun. The following pages will help you assist them in reaching this goal. Don't forget, Olympic Champions have fun too.

## Bill of Rights for Young Athletes

We believe youth have the right to:

- be treated with dignity by all involved.
- fence as a child and not as an adult.
- fence regardless of skill level.
- fence at a level that is commensurate with each child's development.
- fence in a safe and healthy environment.
- have proper preparation for fencing.
- have qualified adult leadership.
- share in leadership of fencing.
- have equal opportunity to strive for success.
- have fun fencing.

## Your Role as a Parent

As a parent, your primary purpose is to support and encourage your child. Parents greatly contribute to the success experienced by their children as well as other children in the youth program. Parent's attitudes are often adopted by their children, who consult them for advice and approval. Parents, be aware of this and strive to become positive role models. Most importantly, this includes showing good sportsmanship at all times and respecting coaches, officials, and opponents.

Get your child to the club to train regularly. School obligations come first, so utilize school holidays for maximizing training opportunities. Training two months a year at a camp will yield very limited results. A consistent training curriculum is strongly encouraged.

Ensure that your child has a small snack before training and competitions and brings a water bottle to the club and tournament.

Be careful about weight training before it's appropriate age-wise. Consult with your child's doctor before starting any rigorous training program. Over training for short periods of time followed by long periods of less or no training is certain to result in injury.

Have realistic expectations of your child's ability. Don't rush into competition until his training is well under way; then start fencing locally. Until your child is consistently finishing well in local and regional competitions, he is not ready for national tournaments.

Chauffeur, gofer, and credit card holder.

It is important to let your child establish his own goals and play the game for himself. Help your child establish and achieve the goals he sets for himself. Avoid imposing your own goals or the coach's goals on your child. "Success," sometimes interpreted as "winning," comes at different ages for each fencer. Success in youth fencing is achieved if the program helps the child love fencing. Great achievement will occur when the child loves the sport.

The best way to help your child achieve his goals and reduce his fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make mistakes. When your child makes one, remember that he is still learning. Encourage his efforts and highlight the successes and the things your child did well. Your child will have good days and bad ones. Help him through the bad days and celebrate the good days he is fortunate to have. Fencing is a continuous struggle to improve from first-day beginner to Olympic Champion.

Be careful not to emphasize winning to the exclusion of your child having fun and learning about himself while enjoying the exciting sport of fencing. Encouraging a healthy environment that emphasizes learning and fun can develop a more positive self-image, an invaluable asset throughout your child's life.

At fencing tournaments, take time to meet new people, visit different cities and see what they have to offer. Many lasting friendships have been formed between fierce competitors. Enjoy the full experience of competition by taking advantage of all the opportunities for growth.

## Fencing - the Game

Fencing is played on a metal strip, or piste, which measures approximately 2 meters wide and 14 meters long. Points (or touches) scored in a bout are registered on an electronic scoring machine. The machine receives an electrical impulse when the spring tip of the foil or epee is depressed or, in Sabre when there adequate contact with the opponent by the blade. The strip is grounded to prevent touches being accidentally scored on the playing surface.

In the preliminary rounds, each fencing bout is fenced for five touches, with a time limit of 3 minutes. In the later rounds, for all events except the Youth events, each bout is fenced to a maximum of 15 touches. The bout is separated into three rounds of three minutes, with a one-minute rest period between rounds. In the event that the score is tied when time has elapsed, the referee will randomly determine priority (with a coin toss or equivalent) for one fencer. Fencing will continue for one additional minute. The first touch to score ends the bout. If the score remains tied at the end of the additional minute, the fencer with priority will win.

In Youth events, the later rounds are fenced best two out of three 5-touch bouts, of three minutes each, with a one minute rest period between bouts. In the event of a tie score at the end of time, the bout will proceed as outlined above.

After the preliminary rounds, the fencers who are promoted will be seeded into a direct elimination table. In some formats, the winner advances, and the loser is out. In other formats, it requires two losses to be eliminated. In the format that is most common in National competition, the direct elimination continues until 32 fencers remain, and then, two losses are required to be eliminated.

## The Weapons

Foil, epee, and sabre are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. Foil and epee are point-thrusting weapons. Sabre is a point thrusting as well as a cutting weapon. The target areas differ for the three weapons, though all three are scored electronically.

The foil has a flexible rectangular blade, approximately 35 inches in length, weighing less than one pound. Points are scored with the tip of the blade and must land within the torso of the body.

The valid target area in foil is the torso, from the shoulders to the groin, front and back. It does not include the arms, neck, head and legs. The foil fencer's uniform includes a metallic vest (called a lame), which covers the valid target area, so that a valid touch will register on the scoring machine. A small, spring-loaded tip is attached to the point of the foil and is connected to a wire inside the blade. The fencer wears a body cord inside his uniform, which connects the foil to a reel wire, connected to the scoring machine. A touch on the valid surface will register a colored light on the scoring machine. A touch on the non-valid surface will register a white light.

The epee (pronounced "EPP-pay"), the descendant of the dueling sword, is similar in length to the foil, but is heavier, weighing approximately 27 ounces, with a larger guard (to protect the hand from a valid hit) and a much stiffer blade. Touches are scored only with the point of the blade. The entire body is the valid target

area.

The blade is wired with a spring-loaded tip at the end that completes an electrical circuit when it is depressed beyond a pressure of 750 grams. This causes the colored bulb on the scoring machine to light. Because the entire body is a valid target area, the epee fencer's uniform does not include a lame.

The sabre is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword, and is similar in length and weight to the foil. The major difference is that the sabre is a thrusting weapon as well as a cutting weapon (use of the blade). The target area is from the bend of the hips (both front and back), to the top of the head, simulating the cavalry rider on a horse. The sabre fencer's uniform includes a metallic jacket (lame), which covers the target area to register a valid touch on the scoring machine. The mask is different from foil and epee, with a metallic covering since the head is valid target area.

Touches that arrive on the valid surface register a colored light on the scoring machine. Off-target hits do not register on the machine.

### The Strip

There are five lines painted on the strip. Two meters on either side of the centerline are the on guard lines. The fencers begin each touch of the bout behind these lines. Three meters behind the on guard line is the beginning of the warning area. This two-meter area is brightly marked and serves to remind fencers they are approaching the end line of the strip. A fencer passing the end line with both feet is counted as touched. The

The sport involves three skills: blade work, footwork, and tactics. These skills can be learned at any age and a good fencer is always striving to improve them. Physical size is not considered an important factor due to the nature of the game and the variety of ways in which touches can be scored. Successful fencers come in all shapes and sizes.

1. Blade work is perhaps the most difficult of the essential skills to master. It permits a skilled fencer to deceive his opponents and reach the target despite the opponent's attempts to defend himself.
2. Footwork, the most physically demanding of the skills, is the one which permits a fencer to move into appropriate positions and distances to allow him to effectively utilize blade work to touch the opponent and to allow him to "get away" to avoid the opponent's attack.
3. Tactics consist of the plans and counter plans utilized by fencers to coordinate use of blade work and footwork against the fencing style of opponents.

### The Tournament

**The Individual Competitions:** At an individual event, all of the entries are seeded based on past performance in the USFA and international (Federation Internationale d'Escrime or FIE) competitions. They are divided into pools of five to seven fencers, which are balanced for strength and club separation based on the seed. Each fencer in the pool will fence a bout against each of the other members of the pool. After completion of the pool, a predetermined number of its members will be elevated to the next round.

After the pools are concluded, the promoted fencers will be organized from best record to worst into an elimination table of 16, 32, 64 or 128 fencers. This may be fenced in a single or double elimination tableau. In a single elimination, a fencer losing against an opponent is eliminated from the tournament. In double elimination, a fencer is eliminated after two losses. The finals of an event are fenced as a single elimination table of eight fencers.

**Team Competitions:** At a team event, two, three, or four man teams plus one permitted alternate are fielded

by clubs, schools, or countries and are seeded based on the strength of the fencers comprising the teams. The preliminary round(s) are fenced under the pool format and the later rounds are usually fenced with a single elimination format.

In a team match, each of the fencers on the team fences each of the fencers on the other team. Scoring is "relay" style. In Relay, the first three minute bout is fenced until one fencer has 5 touches. The second bout is fenced until one fencer has ten touches, and so on, until a final score of 45 is reached. It is possible for one fencer to score more than 5 touches in a single bout. Should the score be tied at the end of the final bout, priority is determined by the referee, and an additional minute is fenced.

## The Rules

The rules are divided into four basic categories:

### 1. The strip rules dealing with the position of the fencers.

All fencing action takes place on the fencing strip, as described earlier. The director will stop the bout each time a fencer crosses the lateral boundaries of the strip with one or both feet, or passes an opponent while remaining on the strip.

When a fencer leaves the strip with one or both feet, that fencer is penalized one meter of distance, the opponent advancing one-meter from the point he or she occupied at the moment the infraction occurred. If this distance penalty caused the fencer to retread beyond the end line of the strip, he or she is counted as touched.

### 2. The rules of right-of-way, which determine priority in foil and sabre if both fencers make a touch during the same action.

-The rules of right-of-way in judging the priority of hits made in foil and sabre fencing are based on the generalized theory that an individual being threatened with a real sword will first defend himself before initiating his own offensive action. The following order of priority:

-A point in line is a fully extended arm - pointing toward the valid target of the opponent and must be in place prior to initiation of an opponent's attack and has the highest priority. The valid target in foil is both the front and back of the torso and in sabre, the body above the hips. An advance or retreat by an individual who has established a point in line has no effect on the priority.

-An attack is an offensive action made with the arm extending and the point threatening the valid target of the opponent. The attack continues to have priority until it misses the opponent, the opponent parries, or the weapon arm is retracted.

-A parry is the defensive action made by deflecting the blade of the attacker away from the target. After successfully parrying the attack, the defender has the right of way to attempt a touch in turn.

-A riposte is an action technically executed in the same manner as an attack, but which must be preceded by a parry.

-A defender may also respond to an attack by making a counter attack. Although a counter attack is technically executed in the same way as an attack, the counter attacker does not initiate the action but is merely responding to the attacker. The counter attack does not have priority over the attack. Therefore, if both fencers arrive on the target, only the action of the attacker will be considered. If, however, the attacker fails to hit either valid or invalid target, the action of the counter attacker will be counted, and, if it arrives on the valid target, he will be awarded the touch.

-In sabre fencing, off-target hits are not registered on the machine and therefore do not stop the bout.

-In epee, there is no right-of way or limited target area. The point simply awarded to the first fencer that hits the opponent, anywhere on the body. If both fencers hit simultaneously, a point is awarded to both fencers.

-In all three weapons, the bout is over when one fencer reaches 5 or 15 touches, or time expires.

3. The penalty rules list the infractions for which touches may be added to the score of the opponent or annulled from the fencer who scored while committing an infraction. More severe sanctions may be awarded for serious offenses.

4. The organizational rules, regulate the manner of conducting a competition.

### The Officials

Two types of officials are present at competitions: the Referees and the Bout Committee. The Referee describes the actions made by the fencers and awards the touches based on the rules of priority and registration of touches on the scoring machine. The Bout Committee is responsible for seeding the participants, establishing the format of the competition and resolving rules disputes.

### Penalties

Penalties are divided into four categories.

#### Category One

All Category One penalties are interdependent. Upon the first occurrence of an offense during a bout, the fencer is warned and receives a yellow card. Committing any additional offense during the bout will result in the offender receiving a red card and the opponent receiving a penalty touch.

#### Category Two

All Category Two penalties are also interdependent. A fencer is given a red card upon first and any subsequent infraction during a bout.

Both Category One and Two infractions result in the annulment of a touch made by the offending fencer while committing the offense.

#### Category Three

Category Three penalties may be assessed for infractions against safety or the order of the competition. Such infractions can result in penalty touches (red card) or expulsion (black card) from the competition.

#### Category Four

The Category Four penalties involve unsportsmanlike conduct, using fraudulently modified equipment, collusion or brutality. The infractions result in automatic expulsion (black card) from the competition.

A complete listing of infraction and penalties is found in the USFA Rulebook.

### How to Follow the Action

For those new to fencing, it is difficult to follow the lightning speed of the fencers' actions. To become more comfortable in watching a fencing bout, focus on one fencer. The fencer being attacked defends himself by use of a parry, a motion used to deflect the opponent's blade, after which the defender can make a riposte, an answering attack. Thus, the two adversaries keep changing between offense and defense. Whenever a hit is made, the referee will stop the bout, describe the actions, and decide whether or not to award a touch.

Fencers seek to maintain a safe distance from each other, that is, out of range of the other's attack. One will try to break this distance to gain the advantage for an attack. At times, a fencer will make a false attack to gauge the types of reactions by the opponent in the real attack.

As you become accustomed to the speed of the game, the tactics and strategies become more apparent, and you will gain a better understanding of the finesse and fascination of fencing!

### Be Prepared to Wait!

Fencing events generally take all day. Unless your child does not move up from the initial rounds (pools), you can expect to spend a great deal of time in the venue. Be patient. The Bout Committee (BC) is working to get your child's event moving as fast as they can. Bring something that will help you pass the time - a book, knitting, a personal computer, etc. Of course, comfortable shoes are a must since you will be "on alert" during the entire competition (or at least until you learn more about the tempo of the competitive day at which point you will read, knit, or doze).

Encourage your child to rest, drink water, and perhaps eat something light while waiting between rounds. Bring a cooler of food and water if possible. Most local venues do not offer food service. There are products made for coolers that are in the form of a 'blanket'. This can serve double duty: keeping the food and water cool and, as needed, for placing on an injury.

There are usually few seats available to spectators in venues. Bring your own folding chair or stool and use it. DO NOT take chairs meant for athletes. They need somewhere to sit between bouts to keep their legs "fresh". Placing a towel over their legs will help keep the muscles warm.

The athlete's anxiety may be high; your job is to provide a calm environment. They will absorb any anxiety you exude. Be supportive of your fencer no matter what the outcome of the tournament. Every tournament is a learning experience. Discuss with your fencer what they have learned and what they will work to improve upon.

### What to Bring to a Tournament

Fencing equipment listed below. Other items to consider: Medical Insurance Card and emergency contacts (especially if child is traveling without parent); small bills, checkbook and/or credit card/ATM debit card; books or other hobby/activity to pass the time while you are waiting; Band-Aids; feminine hygiene products; mineral ice; batteries; sharpie/permanent marker; ice packs; water bottle; hair ties; camera with high-speed film; power cord; cell phone; and any other items you feel essential to your child's well being.

### Regional Youth Circuit, Super Youth Circuit

The Regional Youth Circuit (RYC) gives fencers the opportunity to gain more experience before moving on to higher-level tournaments. The RYC & Super youth Circuit Events are an excellent opportunity to compete against fencers from varying regions. The RYC are a qualifying path to participate in the North Cup Tournament and Summer Nationals. The Super Youth Circuit events are an opportunity for youth fencers to earn points and be placed on the National Rolling Point Standings (NRPS). Points can also be earned at a North American Cup event, Junior Olympics, and Summer Nationals. For more information on the Regional Youth Program please visit <http://www.USFARYC.org/>.

## National Tournaments

Once your child is performing locally at a consistent level and improvements are solid, your athlete may be ready to consider competing at a national tournament. The USFA runs several national tournaments: North American Cup (NAC), Junior Olympics, and Summer Nationals. National tournaments have entry rules/qualification paths that must be met before entering the tournament. These entry rules/qualification paths are

listed in chapter one and chapter two of the Athlete Handbook.

Your child's first start at a national tournament should be in his/her age category. This might mean trying to qualify for the summer nationals. (See qualifying paths in Athlete Handbook). Don't push your child(ren) to compete in every age event for which he/she qualifies; the same guidelines should apply as for local events. You and the coach should discuss what events would fit best in the overall training scheme.

Send the entry forms for National tournaments in a timely manner. Late entries require a triple late fee (3x's the total amount due.) There are numerous ways to send in an entry. You may fax your entry form to the National Office (request fax back of receipt of your entry) or mail (enclose a self-addressed postcard). If you send via mail, we recommend using any service with a tracking number. Note, that sending anything return receipt requested tends to take longer to get to the recipient. Priority mail allows one to track the status of the packet and know when it arrives at the USFA office.

Tournament confirmation materials sent to you by USFA have important information such as date, time of your event and directions to the venue and host hotel. Host hotels fill up quickly so make your hotel reservations as early as possible AFTER you have sent in your entry form.

Hotel and transportation information can usually be found on the US fencing website. Plan to arrive at least one full day prior to the start of your child's event and leave the day after your child's last event. Taking the last flight of the day before an event is ill advised (due to possible flight cancellations). Never make travel arrangements on the same day as an event. Events may run longer than expected and the added stress of catching a flight is likely to affect your child's performance. Leaving an event before the athlete has been eliminated results in a black card. This means that your child's name will not appear on the results list that is posted on the web, having been replaced by the words FENCER EXCLUDED.

Nota Bene: recent events makes traveling more arduous so have all photo identification easily accessible. Some airlines have implemented new restrictions on non-refundable fares. Check with your airline about this prior to traveling.

### International Tournaments

Once your child has earned national points and reaches a certain level in the national points standings, he/she may be eligible for international competition. Generally the top eight athletes in the junior or senior points standings are able to compete in World Cups. World Cups are tournaments for top-level junior and senior fencers from around the world to meet and compete.

In many cases an athlete's first exposure to international competition is at a Cadet Designated Competition. Each weapon will typically have 1-3 Cadet international competitions per season. Typically the top 12 fencers on the Cadet point standings are eligible.

Athletes may not enter themselves in World Cups. All entries must come from the fencing federation of each country. In addition, athletes must apply for an FIE license which is obtainable from the USFA. Application to be considered for a world cup must be submitted to USFA. The athlete is responsible for expenses to and from World Cups. The Junior and Senior world cup schedule for each season is posted on the USFA web site as well as on the FIE web site ([www.fie.ch](http://www.fie.ch)) by mid summer preceding the start of the new season.

It can also be found in the Athlete Handbook with the criteria for participating in World Cups. The Athlete Handbook is an excellent guide for rules and regulations regarding international fencing.

### Making a World Team

There are various world teams that athletes may strive to earn a spot, Olympics, Senior World Championships, Junior World Championships, Cadet World Championships, Pan American Games, Junior and Cadet Pan American Championships, and occasionally World University Games. Selection criteria for these competitions can be found in the Athlete Handbook.

### Equipment Fencers Need

Selection of fencing equipment is a key issue among coaches, parents and fencers. When purchasing and fitting fencing equipment, the fencer should be adequately protected and the uniform should allow freedom of movement to properly perform the necessary skills.

A full set of fencing equipment can be purchased for a relatively reasonable cost. You need not buy the most expensive equipment for your child to be protected and enjoy the sport. You may inquire at your local fencing club to see if used equipment is available. Properly maintained equipment can normally be resold. Some clubs may provide basic equipment for their novice classes.

Your child does NOT need to own FIE equipment. FIE equipment is only required for international events.

Following is a list of minimum required equipment. Make sure your child has the necessary equipment. Check weapons to make sure they are working before you leave for the tournament. Don't go to any event with non-working weapons. While it may seem compulsive, your child should check them again upon arrival; equipment can be affected by travel.

- Mask (sewn-in bib, must pass 12K punch test)
- Underarm protector
- Breast Protector (mandatory for women)
- Jacket (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm)
- Lame
- Knickers (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm, must be overlapped by jacket by at least four inches)
- Glove (no holes except for body cord. Must cover approximately half the forearm)
- Long socks (white, must reach bottom of your knickers- soccer socks work well)
- Fencing shoes or sneakers
- Minimum two working weapons (epees must pass weight and shim test)
- Y10 fencers must use weapons with blades that are no longer than 32.5 inches. This includes both genders, and all three weapons.
- Minimum two working body cords
- Fencing Bag (to carry your equipment in)
- Water Bottle
- Towel and plastic bag to hold wet equipment
- Tool Kit (screwdrivers for tip and pommel, spare screws, springs, Allen wrenches, small white cloth to use as base, small magnet, flashlight) -Test Box and weight and shims will help avoid penalties on the strip for nonworking equipment

Put identification on all your equipment!!!!

### Washing Equipment

Wash as you would any other whites - do not use chlorine bleach. Lames may be hung in the shower and spray rinsed and drip dry; some people use blow dryers. Masks may be washed in dishwashers (make sure to wash by itself). Washable gloves and socks per normal wash.

