

## **A Beginner's Guide to Competitive Fencing:**

Participating in a Fencing Competition is a challenging and rewarding experience. In addition to evaluating your current level of Fencing, Competition provides the opportunity to expand your Fencing experience through bouts against and watching Opponents of various skill levels who utilize many different styles. Regardless of the sport however, learning how to function effectively (Physically, Technically, Mentally, Etc.) within the framework of any formal Competition is a skill, in-and-of itself.

### **How Competitions are Organized and Designated:**

Competitive Fencing in the U.S. is governed by the organization "[USA Fencing](#)" [[usafencing.org](#)], which functions in coordination with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). Fencers competing in any "USA Fencing" sanctioned Competition event, must be members of "USA Fencing". "USA Fencing" directly operates National events, and regulates sanctioned Local events. A large number of events are held in the Bay Area and Southern California each year. "[The Bay Cup](#)" [[thebaycup.net](#)] operates Local events in the Bay Area. Local events are managed on the website "[AskFRED](#)" ([Fencing Results and Events Database](#)) - [[askfred.net](#)]. "AskFRED" allows one to Search for Competitions, Preregister for them and to review Results - usually providing a recordation of each point scored. Prepayment online may be required. [Registration for Regional & National events will need to be conducted via "[USA Fencing](#)".].

Fencing Competitions for each weapon are usually designated by Age and Gender. "Youth" Events: Y10; Y12; Y14 (e.g. "Y12" is limited to those age 12 and under); "Cadet" (16 and under); "Junior" (19 and under); "Senior" (Technically: 13 to 39); "Veteran" (40 and above in the U.S.). An "Open" is for those age 13 and above. A "Mixed" event includes both Genders.

Competitions can also be further designated by Skill Level (Classifications). Fencers can earn "Classifications" (or "Ratings") based upon their results in a given Competition - when specified conditions exist: The Total Number of Competitors / the Number of Fencers with Certain Classifications (Strength of the Competition) and Where the Fencers eventually place in that specific Competition. Classifications are Alphabetical, "A" being the highest, down to "E", and "U" being Unclassified. [A "U" event would be intended for Fencers who are currently Unclassified. An event that is "D & Lower" is just that. An "Open" is usually open to all Classifications].

## **Becoming a Competitive Fencer:**

A potential Competitive Fencer must sufficiently improve their Technical Fencing Skills, and then begin to develop Bouting Tactics and Strategies. Additionally, the Fencer must fully understand the Format and Procedures of Competitions. A Fencer prepares for Competition through Physical Conditioning and by Developing their Technical & Tactical Skills. A Fencer can become a Successful Competitor, when they are Prepared for all of the demands required of them during a Competition, and when they Fence with Confidence. "Training to Minimal Standards - Produces Minimal Results".

## **The RULES:**

The Competitive Fencer must have an understanding of Fencing's official Rules - which are often Revised and Added-to. The current "USA Fencing Rule Book" can be accessed on their site under the "Athletes" Tab, in "Rules and Compliance". While the Rules address every specific detail of the sport, each Competitive Fencer is ultimately responsible for being in compliance with all of them.

### Understand the Rules and Requirements relevant to your Specific Weapon:

[Uniform/Clothing; Weapons; Field of Play; Fencing Procedures; Disciplinary Rules; Penalties: (See the color-coded "Offenses and Penalties" Chart for a summation of Yellow/Red/Black Card offenses); See also "Unwillingness To Fight" (Section T.124).

\*\*\*Failing to know the Rules not only could result in Disqualification from a Competition, but also places one at a Competitive Disadvantage against an Opponent who does know the Rules and can use them to their advantage.

## **Equipment: [Required vs. Advisable]**

**[Required]:** Every time a Fencer steps onto the Strip, they must have All of their required Uniform Items - Conforming with the Rules and in "good condition". They also must have a MINIMUM of 2 Working Weapons and 2 Working Bodycords available to them at the Strip. As set-forth in the Rules, Weapons are inspected before every bout. Any violation will result in the Referee issuing a "Yellow Card" warning to the Fencer and Confiscation of the equipment. If the Fencer is not able to correct this, they could be Disqualified from the Competition. Even if they can correct the violation, they will still be fencing that bout under the condition that Any additional Yellow Card violation will result in a point being awarded to their Opponent (Via a Red Card).

**[Advisable]:** After all of the time and effort in training, travel/event fees -- Why take a chance of Disqualification or why Fence under the Distraction of not knowing if you have enough equipment? An often used phrase in the Tactical world regarding equipment malfunctions is, "2 is 1, and 1 is None" (Always operating under the presumption that you will lose use of your most critical equipment when you need it most. Thus, the absolute need for having back-up equipment). If you take 3 Weapons to a Competition and one breaks or fails inspection - you now only have the ABSOLUTE MINIMUM number Required - For each bout - For the remainder of the Competition.

Fencers should take a Minimum of 4 Weapons and 3 bodycords to Competitions. Optimally, 2 or 3 of these weapons should be "Competition-Only" (Only used for Competitions - Identical to your Practice weapons). The longer equipment is used, the closer it is to breaking. At least one of the bodycords should also be designated for Competition-Only as well. Fencers will also need to have a Screwdriver (1.5 to 1.8MM) to tighten Tip Screws (Also taking Spare Screws) and Pistol Grips will need a 6MM Allen Key for tightening. [I have seen Fencers break blades or discover malfunctioning weapons while warming-up at Competitions. During competitions, I have also seen 2 Fencers break shoelaces and another break his jacket zipper pull-tab - Be Prepared].

Also, consider using a bag with a shoulder strap to carry your weapons and bodycords during the competition. It makes it much easier, as you will also be carrying your mask, your hydration bottle and possibly a towel. And, other Fencers will not mistakenly walk-off with one of your weapons. A small First Aid kit is a good idea as well (At least a ziplock bag with alcohol prep pads and some band-aids. Small cuts received to the off-hand and white uniforms are not a good combination).

### **PREPARATION / PLANNING: ["Hey Where's My \_\_\_\_\_!!?"]**

Much of what happens to us in life is outside of our control. In order to maximize our chance for success, we must manage what little control that we do have through Preparation and Planning. In the days prior to leaving for a Competition, confirm the status of your weapons, gather and pack All of your required equipment and supplies and make your travel plans carefully.

Weapon Maintenance: Check the Tightness of the Grips and that the Angle of the Grip is the same on all of your weapons. Check Tip Screws, Barrels and Conduct Weight and Shim Tests. (All of your weapons should be individually marked inside the guards to enable identification as to: Competition v. Practice / Your Name, Etc.).

Hydration/Nutrition: Whether Water or Sports Drinks or both, take more than you think that you will need. If Sports Drinks, use the Clear/White ones: A Bright-colored spill on a white uniform looks Ridiculous. Bananas and other Fruit or Fruit Cups (with/without sugar added) are good. Plan your Pre and During Consumption carefully. Experiment with new foods BEFORE using them during a Competition.

### **COMPETITION DAY: [Get there Early and Prepare Yourself]**

Always plan to be walking into the event venue at least 60 minutes prior to the indicated End of Registration/Start Time. Anticipate traffic delays and parking issues. Once there, you will need to Check-In (With your "USA Fencing" Membership Card). Some events require an inspection of Masks, Uniforms, Gloves, Weapons and Bodycords - another line to wait in. Then, warm-up, stretch, get dressed and perhaps Fence a bit if you wish. The organizers will eventually post the Preliminary Seeding Roster, which lists all of the Competitors by their Classifications. This simply provides confirmation that you are in the Competition, and lists your potential Opponents.

### **THE COMPETITION EVENT: [Be Calm - Be Focused - Be Smart]**

#### **Pools: [You Fence Everyone in your Pool once - To 5 Points or 3 minutes]**

The Organizers will then post the Pool Assignments. All of the Competitors are distributed into Pools (Usually into Groups of 5 to 7) with the Classifications of the Fencers being distributed as equally as possible. The Referees will then start to call roll for their Pools and each Fencer needs to report to their assigned Strip for a uniform inspection. The Referee will then announce the 2 Competitors of the first bout (by Name or Number), and the 2 in the bout to follow. The First Fencer called, goes to the side of the Strip to the Right of the Referee (Unless one of the Fencers is Left handed. In a bout with one Left handed Fencer, the Left-hander goes to the Left of the Referee).

Before each bout begins, the Referee conducts an inspection of each Fencer's weapon: Tip & Screws; Weight & Shim Tests; Both ends of the bodycord properly secured. Once the first bout is over, the next 2 Fencers need to be getting ready (on the correct sides of the Strip). You should not only seek to maximize your Number of Wins, but also limit the number of Points Scored Against You as much as possible. After the last bout in the Pool, each Fencer must Review the Score Sheet (Verify your number of Wins, Losses and Points Scored: Count the "V"s for your Wins and the recorded number of points that you scored during your Losses) and then Sign by your Name.

### **The Break: [Recover - Review - Reset]**

Once your Pool is complete, you will have some time to rest, rehydrate and refuel. Review your Fencing in the Pool and make adjustment where necessary. When the results of all the Pools are submitted and calculated, the Organizers usually will post a Pool Results / Direct Elimination (DE) Seeding Roster. It lists every Fencer from Best to Worst: Based upon Wins, Points Scored and Points Scored Against (Ties for those with same number of Wins/Losses are resolved by "Indicators" - The ratio of Points Scored vs. Scored Against). The DE Seeding is based upon the Results from the Pools - Fencer's Classifications have No bearing. The Results from Pools are what they are. Now you just need to move Forward - Fencing one Point at a time - one Opponent at a time.

### **Direct Eliminations (DEs): [15 Points or 9 minutes - Win or you are Eliminated]**

Eventually, the Organizers will post the first rounds of the DE Bracket and the Referees will start calling Fencers to the Strips. The configuration of the Bracket is set based upon the number of Competitors. The Higher Seeded Fencers either get a Bye in the first round, and/or are matched-up against the Lower Seeded Fencers. So, the better you do in Pools, the better/easier path that you May initially have in DEs.

DE bouts are to 15 points, or to whomever is ahead after 3, 3-minute time periods - With 1 minute breaks in-between (Some "Youth" events may have a different configuration). When possible, try to watch and learn from the bout that will determine who your Opponent will be. Now, really is the time to be Smart. A Win is a Win. You just need to be Ahead when time expires. Get a Lead and Keep it. Use the Double-Touch (In Épée). Conserve energy if you can. After each DE round, the number of Competitors is cut by half. Eventually, there are 4 remaining Fencers who Fence in the 2 Semi-Final bouts. The 2 Defeated Fencers are eliminated, and are considered to have placed "Tied for Third" (On occasion, they may Fence for 3rd & 4th Place). The Winners of these 2 bouts go to the Final to determine Second and First place.

**While Competitions involve many elements, Do Not be intimidated by them. After your first or second event, you will know what to expect and you will begin to benefit from them in many ways.**

**Shawn [Updated: 2021]**