



**ABOUT COACH DANIEL BROWN**

Over the past decade, Coach Brown has successfully built teams at several middle and high schools, created competitive university programs and founded nationally competitive fencing clubs. Coach Brown holds coaching titles Prévôt d’Fleuret and Moniteur d’Armes, and he currently coaches at Foothills Fencing Academy in Greenville, SC.

# FENCING

**for curious parents, spectators  
and innocent bystanders**



# THE 3 WEAPONS

Épée, Foil and Saber are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. Each weapon has its own fencing style and specific rules, and is only fenced against itself. You can't, for example, use an épée to fence against someone with a foil. Fencers typically try all three weapons, but tend to prefer one.

## Épée

The épée (pronounced "EPP-pay"), is the descendant of the dueling sword. It is the heaviest of the three weapons, and has a larger guard (to protect the hand) and a stiff blade. Touches are scored only with the point of the blade, but the entire body is valid target area. In épée, the fencer who touches first scores, but both fencers score a touch if they hit at the exact same time.

## Foil

The foil is light, and has a small hand guard and a flexible rectangular blade. Points are scored with the tip of the blade, and must land within the torso of the body. Foil fencing uses the conventions of right-of-way to determine priority if both fencers hit at the same time.

## Saber

The saber is the modern version of the cavalry sword, and is similar in weight to the foil, but points can be scored using the edge of the blade in addition to the point. The target area is from the hips to the top of the head, simulating the cavalry rider on a horse. Saber fencing uses the conventions of right-of-way to determine priority if both fencers hit at the same time.



# ORGANIZATIONS

In the world of modern Olympic-style fencing, there are three major organizations you should be aware of. But such an ancient pursuit could never be limited to one style alone. There are innumerable groups that practice collegiate, classical, historical, and stage fencing. Some treat it as a sport, some as an art and some as a science.

## United States Fencing Association

The United States Fencing Association, or USAFA, sanctions official tournaments. These range from the small local events held at fencing clubs to major annual events like the Junior Olympics and Summer Nationals. Membership is required to compete.



## United States Fencing Coaches Association

The United States Fencing Coaches Association, or USFCA, offers standardized training and certification for coaches.



## Fédération Internationale d'Esime

The Fédération Internationale d'Esime, or FIE, is responsible for international tournaments like the events during the Summer Olympics. Equipment with an FIE stamp is certified for use in these international events, is typically more expensive, and is very safe as well as durable.



## Examples of Other Fencing Organizations

- The Society for Creative Anachronism, or SCA, researches and re-creates medieval and renaissance European life, including competitions in a modified style of rapier dueling with a dramatically different set of rules and equipment.
- The National Collegiate Athletic Association, or NCAA, regulates its own events, which have rules only slightly different from the USAFA.



# EQUIPMENT

**Competition Equipment** - In addition to the “dry” gear, competition equipment, or “electric” gear, is required to use the electronic scoring machines and for tournaments.

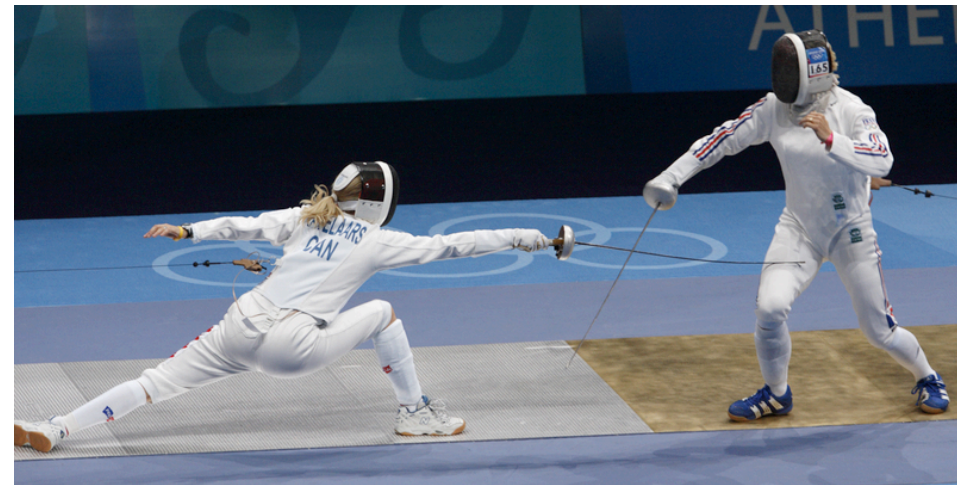
- Electric Weapon - Either a foil, épée or saber that includes wiring and a socket for the scoring machine connection.
- Body Cord - Connects the fencer’s electric equipment to the scoring machine.
- Lamé - Metallic vest in foil or jacket in saber that allows hits to register in the legal target. Not required in épée since the whole body is target.
- Scoring Machine - The electronic box that registers touches and alerts the referee. Some machines can also record score, time and other information. Setup includes floor cords and reels, all of which allow the machine to be connected to the fencers’ body cords. Provided by the tournament organizers.



# BASIC DEFINITIONS

**Competition** - Tournaments will typically include a variety of events with different weapons, ages and are sometimes divided by gender. However, mixed gender events are commonplace.

- Bout - A single match between two fencers.
- Touches - Another term for points in a bout.
- Referee - Also sometimes called a director, the referee runs the bouts, awards points and records results.
- Pool Round - The first round of a tournament has the competitors divided into small groups, or pools, in which everyone in that pool fences each other in a round robin format. Each bout is fenced until one fencer has 5 touches or 3 minutes have passed, whichever comes first.
- Direct Elimination Round - The second half of a tournament is an elimination round. Results from the pool round determine placement on the table. Bouts are fenced to 15 touches with up to 9 minutes of fencing time.
- Ratings - Fencers who place highly during tournaments earn ratings, from E up to A. The level of ratings that can be earned are determined by the number and level of competitors.



# BASIC DEFINITIONS

**Footwork** - A general term for proper movement techniques.

- Strip - The fencing area, typically a rectangle measuring 14 meters by 1.5 meters.
- On guard - The basic stance, balanced to allow equal readiness for offense, defense and mobility.
- Advance - The basic footwork used to move forward.
- Retreat - The basic footwork for moving backward.
- Lunge - A quick movement forward used for attacking an opponent, but which also allows a fencer to recover quickly.

**Bladework** - A general term for proper weapon techniques.

- Attack - The initial offensive action made while moving toward the opponent with the weapon ready, typically executed with a lunge.
- Parry - A defensive action using your weapon to block the opponent's blade from hitting you.
- Riposte - The defender's return attack after they parry.
- Disengage - Avoiding an opponent's parry while attacking.
- Right-of-way - The conventions in foil and saber fencing used to determine who scores if they both hit at the same time. When attacked, a fencer must parry or otherwise interrupt the attack.
- Counter Attack - An attempt to hit the opponent while being attacked, but without trying to defend first.



# EQUIPMENT

**In Practice** - Basic practice equipment or “dry” gear is the minimum required for non-tournament fencing.

- Practice Weapon - Either a foil, épée or saber. Foils and épées have a blunt plastic or rubber tip on the point.
- Mask - The heavy, strong steel mesh can resist even the hardest of hits. They also have a heavily padded bib that protects the throat.
- Glove - Protects the hand and includes a thick cuff to protect the wrist. It is worn only on the weapon hand.
- Jacket - Made of denim, kevlar or other approved protective cloth, the jacket protects the torso, including the groin.
- Chest Protector - This plastic guard is only required for ladies, although men's styles are available.
- Plastron - Also known as an underarm protector, it provides an additional layer of cloth in the most frequently hit target.

