

Fencing Facts

1.1 What sports and martial arts comprise fencing?

The Olympic sport of fencing is comprised of three weapons: foil, epee, and sabre. All are fenced on a long rectangular strip, and electronic scoring aids are used to assist in the detection of touches. The rules governing these three weapons are determined by the FIE (Federation Internationale d'Esgrime). Briefly, the FIE weapons are described as follows:

Foil: Descended from the 18th century small sword, the foil has a thin, flexible blade with a square cross-section and a small bell guard. Touches are scored with the point on the torso of the opponent, including the groin and back. Foil technique emphasizes strong defense and the attack to the body.

Epee: Similar to the duelling swords of the late 19th century, epees have stiff blades with a triangular cross section, and large bell guards. Touches are scored with the point, anywhere on the opponent's body. Unlike foil and sabre, there no rules of right-of-way to decide which attacks have precedence, and double hits are possible. Epee technique emphasises timing, point control, and a good counter-attack.

Sabre: Descended from duelling sabres of the late 19th century, which were in turn descended from naval and cavalry swords, sabres have a light, flat blade and a knuckle guard. Touches can be scored with either the point or the edge of the blade, anywhere above the opponent's waist. Sabre technique emphasises speed, feints, and strong offence.

The most popular of eastern fencing techniques is kendo, the Japanese "Way of the Sword". Kendo is fought with a bamboo shinai, intended to resemble a two-handed Japanese battle sword. Combatants wear armour, and strike to the top or sides of the head, the sides of the body, the throat, or the wrists. Accepted technique must be observed, and judges watch for accuracy, power, and spirit.

Other martial arts that include elements of swordsmanship are:

- Aikido—Japanese art that includes using and defending oneself against Japanese sword techniques.
- Arnis, Escrima, Kali—Phillipino stick and knife disciplines.
- Iaido—Japanese art of the sword draw (also Iaijutsu and batto-jutsu, more combat-oriented variants of the same).
- Jogo do Pau—Portuguese stick-fighting discipline.
- Jojutsu—Japanese stick-fighting discipline.
- Kalaripayitt—includes sword and weapons techniques from south India.
- Kenjutsu—unaltered Japanese martial art of the sword.
- Krabi Krabong—a Thai martial art that includes many sword forms.
- Kumdo—Korean variant of Kendo.
- Kung fu—Chinese martial art that includes many sword techniques.
- La Canne—French Boxing, with a single-handed stick, using rules similar to classical fencing.
- Le Baton—similar to La Canne, but with a longer, 2-handed stick.
- Maculele—Afro-Brazilian machete forms, related to Capoeira.
- Mensur—German fraternity "duelling", with schlagers.
- Modern Pentathlon—the "soldier's medley", a sport that recreates demands placed on a pre-20th century military messenger: running, swimming, shooting, equestrian jumping, and epee fencing.
- Pentjak Silat—Indonesian arts that include sword and stick forms.
- Single Stick—an ancestor of sabre fencing, fought with a basket-hilted wooden rod.
- SCA duello—rapier-like fencing in the round, with off-hand techniques. Info on the SCA can be found in the newsgroup rec.org.sca.
- SCA heavy lists—medieval-style heavy combat, with rattan weapons, armour, and shields.
- Shinkendo—real-sword-oriented variant of Kendo.
- Tai Chi—Chinese martial art that includes many sword techniques.

1.2 How did fencing originate?

Sword fighting as sport has existed since ancient Egypt, and has been practiced in many forms in various cultures since then. Although jousting and tournament combat was a popular sport in the European middle ages, modern FIE fencing owes more to unarmoured duelling forms that evolved from 16th century rapier combat.

Rapiers evolved from cut-and-thrust military swords, but were most popular amongst civilians who used it for self-defence and duelling. Rapiers were edged, but the primary means of attack was the thrust. Rapier fencing spread from Spain and Italy to northwest Europe, in spite of the objections of masters such as George Silver who preferred traditional cutting weapons such as the English broad sword.

The Spanish school, under masters such as Narvaez and Thibault, became a complicated and mystical affair whose geometrical theories required much practice to master. Italian masters like Agrippa and Capo Ferro developed a more pragmatic school in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, introducing innovations such as linear fencing and the lunge.

By the 18th century, the rapier had evolved to a simpler, shorter, and lighter design that was popularised in France as the small sword. Although the small sword often had an edge, it was only to discourage the opponent from grabbing the blade, and the weapon was used exclusively for thrusting. The light weight made a more complex and defensive style possible, and the French masters developed a school based on defence with the sword, subtlety of movement, and complex attacks. When buttoned with a leather safety tip that resembled a flower bud, the small sword was known as le fleuret, and was identical in use to the modern foil (still known as le fleuret in French). Indeed, the French small sword school forms the basis of most of modern fencing theory.

By the mid-19th century, duelling was in decline as a means of settling disputes, partially because victory could lead to a jail term for assault or manslaughter. Emphasis shifted to defeating the opponent without necessarily killing him, and less fatal duelling forms evolved using the duelling sword, or epee de terrain, an unedged variant of the small sword. Later duels often ended with crippling thrusts to the arm or leg, and fewer legal difficulties for the participants. This is the basis of modern epee fencing.

Cutting swords had been used in blood sports such as backsword prizefights at least as far back as the 17th century. Broadswords, sabres, and cutlasses were used extensively in military circles, especially by cavalry and naval personnel, and saw some duelling application in these circles as well. Training was performed with wooden weapons, and stick fighting remained popular until Italian masters formalized sabre fencing into a non-fatal sporting/training form with metal weapons in the late 19th century.

Early sport sabres were significantly heavier than the modern sport sabre and necessitated a strong style with the use of moulinets and other bold movements. As with thrusting swords, the sabre evolved to lighter, less fatal duelling forms such as the Italian sciabola di ferro and the German schlager. Hungarian masters developed a new school of sabre fencing that emphasized finger control over arm strength, and they dominated sabre fencing for most of the 20th century.

Duelling faded away after the First World War. A couple of noteworthy duels were fought over disputes that arose during Olympic games in the 1920s, and there have been rare reports of sword duels since then. In October 1997, the Mayor of Calabria, Italy, publicly challenged certain Mafiosos to a duel. German fraternity duelling (mensur) still occurs with some frequency.

The first modern Olympic games featured foil and sabre fencing for men only. Epee was introduced in 1900. Single stick was featured in the 1904 games. Epee was electrified in the 1936 games, foil in 1956, and sabre in 1988. Early Olympic games featured events for Masters, and until recently fencing was the only Olympic sport that has included professionals. Disruptions in prevailing styles have accompanied the introduction of electric judging, most recently transforming sabre fencing. Foil fencing experienced similar upheavals for a decade or two following the introduction of electric judging, which was further complicated by the new, aggressive, athletic style coming out of Eastern Europe at the time.

Women's foil was first contested in the 1924 Olympic games, and Women's epee was only contested for the first time in 1996, although it has been part of the World Championships since 1989. Women's sabre made its first appearance in the 1998 World Championships as a demonstration sport.

1.3 How is modern fencing different from the “real thing”?

If the “real thing” is a duel with sharps, then aside from the mortal danger and related psychological factors, the primary technical difference is that the duellist can win with only a single good touch, whereas the athlete has to hit his opponent as many as 15 times and so requires more technical and tactical depth. Many inferior duellists have won their combats through sheer dumb luck. This is far less likely in the sport. On the other hand, the sport fencer takes many defensive risks that would be unthinkable in a duel, since he has up to 15 “lives” to work with.

Some purists equate “real” fencing with classical fencing, i.e. the prevalent styles of the traditional French and Italian schools of fencing that predominated before electric fencing was popularised. By comparison, modern fencing is more mobile and athletic, while classical fencers were known for their more sophisticated phrasing and bladework.

Modern sabre fencing is performed with lightweight weapons and techniques that do not translate well to military sabres and broadswords. There is a certain amount of cross-over with lighter turn-of-the-century duelling sabres, however.

Lastly, it just seems apparent to some that sport fencing has evolved away from its bloody origins. Tactically and psychologically, it is true that the sport is a vastly different world from the duel. The sport fencer’s life is never in jeopardy, and with as many as 15 hits needed to secure victory, there often isn’t even much figurative danger. Since the quality of a hit is immaterial, fencers will naturally prefer an easy “wounding” hit over a difficult “fatal” one, and so glancing hits will often win out over strong thrusts. Technically, however, there have been few modern innovations, and the sport fencer still possesses all the technical skills necessary to fight a duel.

1.4 Which is the best weapon?

If the question means, “what kind of fencing is the most fun?” then the answer is: it depends what aspects of fencing you enjoy the most. If you are fascinated by technique, bladework, and tactics, you will probably get a lot of satisfaction from foil fencing. More visceral fencers who want to experience the adrenaline rush of a fast, aggressive sword fight will want to try some sabre. Most epee fencers consider themselves practical, no-nonsense sword fighters who rely on as few artificial rules as possible. Enthusiasts of more medieval combat styles, involving armour and heavy weapons, should consider kendo or the SCA heavy lists.

Perhaps the question means “what is the best weapon for a beginner to start with?” Foil is the most common starter weapon, and its skills translate most easily to the other weapons. Sabre is less ideal for students planning to try other weapons, due to the higher cost of electric sabre gear, and the reduced use of the point. Fencers who begin with epee may struggle with the concept of right-of-way if they attempt to learn a second weapon later. However, if the student is certain that they will stick with sabre or epee, then there is no harm to starting with those weapons immediately.

On the other hand, if the question means, “which weapon is the most deadly?” The answer will depend on a lot of factors, not the least of which are the skill of the combatants, the presence of armour, the military and cultural context, and the rules of the fight (i.e. is this a street fight, a gentlemen’s duel, or open field warfare?). Most swords are highly optimised for performance in a specific environment, and will not perform well outside it. Comparing two swords from completely different historical contexts is therefore extremely difficult, if not downright silly.

Then again, perhaps the question means, “Which style of fencing is the most realistic?” It must be said that questions of realism have little relevance to an activity that has almost no practical application in the modern world other than sport and fitness. Historically, however, epees have the closest resemblance (among FIE weapons) to real duelling swords, and the rules closely parallel those of actual duels (sometimes being fought to only a single point).

1.5 Is fencing going to be eliminated from the Olympics?

Olympic fencing appears to be safe for the present, and was recently expanded to include Women’s Epee. Since the IOC perpetually changes its roster of Olympic sports, nothing is certain in future games. Although fencing is one of only four sports to have been involved in every modern Olympic Games since their inception in 1896, it has been mentioned in the past as one of the disciplines that may be eliminated from future Games.

According to Gilbert Felli, Sports Director of the International Olympic Committee, the IOC plans to refine future games in various ways, including: limiting the number of athletes to 15000, increasing participation by women, eliminating “so-called artificial team events”, limiting sports of a similar type, modernizing the Olympic program, encouraging sports that provide a good television spectacle. Fencing recently underwent numerous revisions to its rules and structure to improve its value as a (televised?) spectator sport, perhaps in the hopes of improving its Olympic viability.

1.6 Does it hurt?

Not if done properly. Although executed with appreciable energy, a good, clean fencing attack hurts no more than a tap on the shoulder. The force of the blow is normally absorbed by the flex of the blade. Reckless and overly aggressive fencers can occasionally deliver painful blows, however. Fencing *is* a martial art, so you should expect minor bruises and welts every now and again. They are rarely intentional. The most painful blows tend to come from inexperienced fencers who have not yet acquired the feel of the weapon.

The primary source of injury in fencing is from strained muscles and joints. Proper warm-up and stretching before fencing will minimize these occurrences. There is a risk of being injured by broken weapons. The shards of a snapped blade can be very sharp and cause serious injury, especially if the fencer doesn't immediately realize his blade is broken, and continues fencing. Always wear proper protective gear to reduce this risk. FIE homologated jackets, pants, and masks are ideal, as they are made with puncture-resistant fabrics such as ballistic nylon. If you cannot afford good fencing wear, at least use a plastron (half-jacket worn beneath the regular fencing jacket), and avoid old and rusty masks. Always wear a glove that covers the cuff, to prevent blades from running up the sleeve. Fencing is often said to be safer than golf. Whether or not this is true, it is an extraordinarily safe sport considering its heritage and nature.

1.7 How long does it take to become good?

There is a saying that it takes two lifetimes to master fencing. By the time anyone has come close to "mastering" the sport, they are long past their athletic prime. Some may feel that this is a drawback to the sport, but most fencers see it as a great strength: fencing never becomes dull or routine; there are always new skills to master, and new grounds to conquer.

In times past, students often were not permitted to hold a weapon until they had completed a year or two of footwork training. Modern training programs rarely wait this long, and in many cases students will be fencing (albeit badly) almost immediately. Novice-level competition is feasible within 3-6 months. Competition at this point should be viewed as a learning aid, not as a dedicated effort to win.

Serious attempts at competing will be possible after 2-3 years, when the basic skills have been sufficiently mastered that the mind is free to consider strategy. A moderate level of skill (e.g. C classification) can take a few years of regular practice and competition. Penetration of the elite ranks (e.g. world cup, international 'A' level) demands three to five days per week of practice and competition, and usually at least 10 years of experience.

Progress can be faster or slower, depending on the fencer's aptitude, dedication, quality of instruction, and the age at which they begin. Rapid progress normally requires at least three practices per week, and regular competition against superior fencers. With the increasing emphasis on athleticism in the modern sport, fencers are getting younger, and the champions are getting to the podiums faster.

1.8 What qualities make a good fencer?

All of them. On the athletic side, speed and cardiovascular fitness rank foremost. Other traits that can be exploited are strength (for explosive speed, not heavy handedness), manual dexterity, and flexibility. Quick reaction time is extremely important. On the mental side, a fencer must be adaptable and observant, and have a good mind for strategy and tactics. Psychologically, he or she must be able to maintain focus, concentration, and emotional level-headedness under intense conditions of combat.

As far as body type goes, it is always possible to adapt your style to take advantage of your natural traits. Even so, height seems to be most useful in epee. Small or thin people are harder to hit in foil. A long reach helps in epee, and long legs are an asset in foil.

It should be noted that left-handers seem to enjoy a slight advantage, especially against less experienced fencers. This may account for the fact that lefties make up 15% of novice fencers, but close to half of FIE world champions.

1.9 How much does it cost to get involved in fencing?

A beginner's dry fencing kit (cotton jacket, glove, dry weapon, mask) will cost about US\$100-200. A full set of FIE-spec competition gear (FIE jacket, pants, mask, 2 weapons, wires, glove, shoes, plastron, electric jacket) will run at least US\$500-1000. FIE equipment is recommended both in terms of safety and quality, but clothing costs can be as much as halved by purchasing regular cotton or synthetic knits. Do not expect such equipment to be accepted at national or international levels of competition, however. Used equipment can also be bought from retiring or upgrading fencers. Many clubs will provide basic equipment to their beginning students. Club costs vary widely, depending on the quality of the space, the equipment provided to its members, and the amount of coaching included in the club fees. Advanced lessons are usually purchased separately.

1.11 What kind of cross-training will help my fencing?

The best training for fencing is fencing. Fencing development is asymmetrical and few other sports use the same muscle groups, so this is a difficult question whose answer depends largely on what aspect of your training you really want to focus on.

Cardiovascular fitness and leg strength always help, so anything that enhances these will be beneficial. Cycling, swimming, aerobics, and skating are good examples. Running, sprinting, soccer, basketball, and similar sports can also be helpful; although some athletes dislike the stresses they put on the knees. Racquet sports like tennis, badminton, squash, racquetball, and table tennis are also excellent, and will exercise your upper body in addition to your legs. Circuit or period training (short bursts of high-heart-rate exercise followed by brief recovery periods) has been put forward as particularly relevant to the demands of fencing. Many martial arts have physical and mental demands that are similar to fencing, and can improve both your fitness and your intellectual approach to the sport. Technique and tactics very rarely translate, however.

Weight training can help, if done properly, but the athlete must remember that flexibility, speed, and technique are more important than raw strength—although proper strength training (especially of the lower body and legs) can improve speed significantly. Otherwise, endurance training should have priority over bodybuilding. Some fencers maintain that juggling improves reactions, hand-eye coordination, and use of peripheral vision. Many coaches and fencers suggest occasional fencing or workouts with your opposite hand, both to improve skill and balance your muscular development.

1.12 How can I improve my technique without the help of a coach?

It is very easy to acquire bad habits and poor technique if you do not have the guidance of a knowledgeable fencing master, coach, or fellow fencer. If you are serious about improving your fencing, quality coaching is always your best investment. However, a disciplined fencer still has options if decent instruction is not available on a regular basis.

Firstly, a solid knowledge of fencing theory and regulations is a must. Freelance fencers should study the FIE Rules of Competition and a good fencing manual (see Section 3.3). They should test and apply this knowledge by refereeing whenever possible. An appreciation of good fencing style is also essential, so that they can readily identify weaknesses in their own and other fencers' techniques. Observation and comparison of skilled or accomplished fencers will develop this ability. Training videotapes and videotapes of high-level competitions (see Section 3.6) are also helpful in this regard.

Freelance fencers must be open-minded and critical of their own technique, so that they can recognize problems before they develop into habits. Discussion of their weaknesses with training opponents will help them clarify the areas that need work. If possible, they should videotape their bouts and review them to spot defects in their tactics and technique.

Fencers should seek out opponents who will strenuously test their weaknesses. More experienced fencers, left-handers, those whose tactics are particularly effective, and even those with annoying (i.e. difficult) styles should be courted on the practice strip. When fencing less skilled opponents, fencers should restrict their tactics to a small set that require practice, and resist the temptation to open up if they should start losing.

The opportunity to participate in footwork and line drills should never be passed up. When they can find agreeable partners, fencers can do more personalized drills to exercise their weak areas. (Of course it is courteous to indulge the needs of your partners when they in turn work on their own training.) Lastly, fencers should remain aware of their bout psychology and mental state when fencing, and try to cultivate the mindset that in their experience produces good fencing.

1.13 What is right-of-way?

Right-of-way (or priority) is the set of rules used to determine who is awarded the point when there is a double touch in foil or sabre (i.e. both fencers hit each other in the same fencing time). It is detailed in the FIE Rules of Competition, Articles t.56-t.60 (old 232-237) for foil, and t.75-t.80 (old 416-423) for sabre.

The core assumption behind right-of-way is that a fencing bout is always in one of three states:

1. nothing significant is happening
2. the fencers are conceiving and executing their actions simultaneously
3. one fencer is threatening, while the other is reacting to the threat

Since no points will be scored in the first situation, we can ignore it. In the second situation, the fencers' actions have equal significance, and it is impossible to award a touch. Both touches will be annulled and the bout will be resumed where it was stopped. The third situation is the important one. The first fencer to establish a threat has priority (right-of-way), even if the other

reacts by making a counter-threat. Any hit from the fencer with priority takes precedence over a hit from the other. The job of the referee is to decide which fencer did not have right-of-way, and annul his touch. If he cannot decide, the referee should abstain, annul BOTH hits, and resume the action where it left off.

A proper threat can be either an attack (see question 1.14), or a “point in line” (see question 1.16) that is established before the opponent attacks. Right-of-way is lost when the threat misses, falls short, is broken off, or is deflected away from the target by a parry or other engagement from the defender. The defender then has “right of attack” for a split second; if he returns the threat immediately, he takes over right-of-way and the tables have turned. If he hesitates, however, it becomes a toss-up; the first fencer to establish a threat will seize the right-of-way anew.

The right-of-way relationships between common fencing actions are as follows:

1. derobement has right-of-way over attacks on the blade
2. attacks on the blade have right-of-way over the point in line
3. point in line has right-of-way over the attack
4. the simple attack has right-of-way over the stop-hit
5. the stop-hit has right-of-way over the renewal of the attack
6. the stop-hit in time has right-of-way over the compound attack
7. the riposte has right-of-way over the renewal of the attack
8. the counter-riposte has right-of-way over the renewal of the riposte
9. the remise of the attack has right-of-way over the delayed riposte

1.14 What constitutes an attack?

According to Article t.7 (old 10) of the FIE rules of competition, “the attack is the initial offensive action made by extending the arm and continuously threatening the opponent’s target.”

A threatening weapon is normally interpreted to be one that will or could hit the opponent if no defensive action is taken. In other words, a weapon threatens if it is moving towards the target in a smooth, unbroken trajectory. This trajectory can be curved, especially if the attack is indirect, compound, or involves a cutting action. Hesitations and movements of the blade away from the target will usually be perceived as a break in the attack or a preparation of the attack. One common misconception is that a straight or straightening arm is required to assert the attack. However, a straight arm is not an attack, but a point-in-line.

The attack begins when the arm begins extending, not once it is fully extended. It is not even necessary that the arm become fully straight, although that is normal for attacks at medium and longer distances. Retraction of the arm, however, will usually be interpreted as a break in the attack.

Another common misconception is that an attack does not threaten unless the blade is aimed at the target. This is not generally true. The definition of an attack is the same for cuts and thrusts, so cuts and cut-like actions (including coupe’s and “flicks”) must threaten while the blade is still out of line. Generally, an attack threatens if it is moving towards the target as part of a smooth, unbroken movement, regardless of where the point is located when that movement begins.

Many fencers are under the mistaken impression that a bent arm or out-of-line point constitutes a preparation, and therefore that they can rightfully attack into it. If the bent arm is extending and the out-of-line point is moving towards the target, however, this assumption is usually false under modern fencing conventions. A successful attack on the preparation must clearly precede the opponent’s initiation of his final movement, or else arrive a fencing time ahead of his touch.

Sabre fencers must also consider Article t.75 (old 417) of the Rules of Competition, which states when the attack must land relative to the footfalls of a lunge, advance-lunge, (and fleche, historically). Attacks that arrive after the prescribed footfall are deemed continuations, and do not have right-of-way over the counter-attack. Sabre fencers must also remember that whip-over touches can be interpreted as remises, and not mal-pare’s.

1.15 What constitutes a parry?

According to Article t.7 (old 10) of the FIE Rules of Competition, “the parry is the defensive action made with the weapon to prevent the offensive action from arriving”.

A successful parry deflects the threatening blade away from the target. It is normally not sufficient to merely find or touch the opponent’s blade; the fencer must also exhibit control over it—although the benefit of the doubt usually goes to the fencer making the parry. If the attacker must replace the point into a threatening line before continuing, it is a remise (renewal of the attack) and does not have right-of-way over the riposte. However, if the parry does not deflect the blade, or deflects it onto another part of the target, then the attack retains the right-of-way (mal-pare’ by the defender). In practice, very little deflection is needed with a well-timed parry.

A well-executed parry should take the foible of the attacker’s blade with the forte and/or guard of the defender’s. This provides the greatest control over the opponent’s blade. In other cases the parry can still be seen as sufficient if the attacking blade is sufficiently deflected. In ambiguous cases, however, the benefit of the doubt is usually given to the fencer who used his forte/guard. For example, if a fencer attempts to parry using his foible on his opponent’s forte, it will often be interpreted in the reverse sense (e.g. counter-time parry by the attacker), since such an engagement does not normally result in much deflection of the attack. A foible-to-foible parry could potentially be seen as a beat attack by the opposing fencer depending on the specifics of the action.

At foil, the opponent’s blade should not only be deflected away from the target, but away from off-target areas as well. An attack that is deflected off the valid target but onto invalid target can still retain right-of-way.

At sabre, the opponent’s blade need only be deflected away from valid target, since off-target touches do not stop the phrase. Cuts are considered parried if their forward movement is checked by a block with the blade or guard. Contact with the blade or guard may be interpreted as a parry, even if a whip-over touch results. Avoiding whip-over touches altogether requires exceptionally clean and clear parries.

At epee, a good parry is simply any one that gains enough time for the riposte. Opposition parries and binds are commonly used, since they do not release the opponent’s blade to allow a remise.

1.16 What constitutes a point-in-line?

According to Article t.10 of the FIE Rules of Competition, the in-line position is that “in which [the fencer’s] sword arm is straight and the point of his weapon threatens his opponent’s valid target.” Properly done, the arm should be extended as straight as possible, and form a more or less continuous line with the blade, with the point aimed directly at the high lines of the target. Excessive angulation at the wrist or fingers negates the point-in-line. Superfluous movement of the point also risks negating the line, especially in sabre. Derobements/trompements, however, are permitted.

In foil and sabre, the point-in-line has priority over attacks that are made without first taking the blade. With these weapons (but not with epee) it is forbidden to assume the point-in-line position before the command to fence has been given. In sabre, a point-in-line that hits with the edge is passe’; if a touch is registered with the edge, it is properly analysed as a remise or counter-attack, except in the case of a derobement.

There are wildly differing opinions on the role of the feet in the point-in-line. Some claim that any movement forward or backward invalidates the point-in-line, while others claim that only forward movement obviates the line. These interpretations are incorrect. It was widely held to be an official ruling that steps or jumps forward or backward maintained the point-in-line, but lunges or fleches obviated it. This ruling, apparently based on a directive from the FIE, was official policy in the USFA for a while. However, the rulebook does not proscribe any footwork movements at all, and the current interpretation holds that footwork, even a lunge or fleche, has absolutely no effect on the priority of the point-in-line.

1.17 What is the scoop on “flicks” and “whips”?

Flicks are whip-like attacks that can score against very oblique and even concealed targets. Sometimes thought of as a recent corruption, flicks actually have a long history that stems from coupe’ (the cut-over) and epeeists efforts to throw their points around the bell. Properly executed and judged, they are effective and beautiful attacks; poorly executed and judged, they can be painful and annoying.

One common criticism of the flick is that it would cause minor injury with a real weapon. The obvious, if flippant, response to this is not to flick if you’re trying to kill someone with a real weapon. Another common criticism is that flicks are difficult to

defend against. One must simply remember to parry them as if they were cuts, not thrusts (using auxiliary parries like tierce, quinte, and elevated sixte). The flick is also highly sensitive to distance, and a well-timed break in the measure will cause it to land flat.

A third criticism is that flicks are usually given the priority, even though the attack often begins with the point aimed at the ceiling. However, the definition of an attack (see question 1.14) says nothing about where the point is aimed; only what it is threatening. It is normally true that an attack that scores must have threatened in at least its final tempo, no matter where it was pointed at the start of that tempo.

Sabre fencing has suffered from a related and more serious scourge, the whip-over. In this case, the foible bends around the opponent's blade or guard following a parry, to contact the target and register a touch. The scoring machines attempt to reduce these false touches by blocking hits within a certain time window following weapon contact, but this is of limited effectiveness and also has the unfortunate effect of blocking the occasional attack through the blade. Referees have tried to help out by analysing whip-over touches as remises, but they still score over composed or delayed ripostes. The FIE has been considering and trying various possible fixes, including varying the timeouts and mandating stiffer sabre blades.

Fencing Books

The following list of books on the sport of fencing is not complete. Books on historical methods, stage fighting, Japanese fencing, and other eastern martial arts are not listed here. Online bookstores and databases (e.g. www.amazon.com) are a good resource to search for more information. Hank Pardoel published his Bibliography of the Art and Sport of Fencing in 1996 through the Queen's University School of Physical Education. It contains a thorough index of thousands of fencing books, articles, microfilms, and other resources dating from the 1400s to the present.

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| Alaux, Modern Fencing (Charles Scribner, 1975) | Gaugler, History of Fencing (Laureate, 1997) |
| Anderson, All About Fencing (Arco, 1970) | Hutton, The Sword and the Centuries (Charles E. Tuttle, 1980) |
| Anderson, Tackle Fencing (Paul, ?) | Kogler, Planning to Win (CounterParry, ?) |
| Angelo, The School of Fencing (Land's End Press, 1971) | Lukovich, Electric Foil Fencing (Corvina Press, 1971) |
| Barbasetti, The Art of the Foil (EP Dutton, 1932) de | Lukovich, Fencing (Corvina Press, 1986) |
| Beaumont, All About Fencing (Coles, 1978) de Beaumont, | Manley, Complete Fencing (Doubleday, 1979) |
| Fencing: Ancient Art and Modern Sport (ES Barnes, 1978) | Morton, A-Z of Fencing (Queen Anne, 1988) |
| de Beaumont, Teach Yourself Fencing (McKay, 1968) de | Nadi, The Living Sword: A Fencer's Autobiography |
| Beaumont, Your Book of Fencing (Transatlantic, 1970) | (Laureate Press, 1995) |
| Beke & Polgar, The Methodology of Sabre Fencing | Nadi, On Fencing (G.P. Putnam, 1943) (Laureate Press, |
| (Corvina Press, 1963) | 1994) |
| Bower, Foil Fencing 7 th Ed. (Brown & Benchmark, 1993) | Nelson, Winning Fencing (Henry Regnery, 1975) |
| Campos, The Art of Fencing (Vantage Press, 1988) | Norcross, Fencing: the foil (Ward Lock, ?) |
| Castello, The Theory and Practice of Fencing (Charles | Palfy-Alpar, Sword and Masque (FA Davis, 1967) |
| Scribner, 1933) | Pitman, Fencing, Techniques of Foil, Epee, and Sabre |
| Castello, Fencing (Ronald Press, 1962) | (Crowood, 1988) |
| Castle, The Schools and Masters of Fence (Arms & Armour | Manley, Complete Fencing (Doubleday, 198?) |
| Press, 1969) | Selberg, Foil (Addison-Wesley, 1976) |
| Crosnier, Fencing with the Foil (Faber & Faber, 1951) | Selberg, Revised Foil (Spotted Dog Press, 1993) |
| Curry, Fencing (Foresman, 1969) | Shaff, Fencing for All (Scribner, 1981) |
| Curry, The Fencing Book (Human Kinetics, 1983) | De Silva, Fencing: The Skills of the Game (Crowood, 1992) |
| Deladrier, Modern Fencing (U.S. Naval Institute, 1948, | Simmonds and Morton, Start Fencing (Sportman's Press, |
| reprint 1954) | 1989) |
| Evangelista, The Art and Science of Fencing (Masters Press, | Simmonds and Morton, Fencing to Win (Sportman's Press, |
| 1996) | 1994) |
| Evangelista, Encyclopedia of the Sword (Greenwood, 1995) | Simonian, Basic Foil Fencing 2 nd Ed. (Kendall/Hunt, 1982) |
| FIE, Rules of Competition (AFA, CFF, USFA, etc., every | Skipp, Fencing (Know the Sport) (Stackpole, 1997) |
| year) | Szabo, Fencing and the Master (Corvina Kiado, 1982) |
| Garret, Foil Fencing (Penn State, 198?) | Bac Tau, Fencing (self published, 1994) |
| Garret et al, Foil, Sabre, and Epee Fencing (Penn State, | Vass, Epee Fencing (Corvina, 1976) |
| 1994) | Wyrick, Foil Fencing (W.B. Saunders, 1971) |
| Gaugler, Fencing Everyone (Hunter, 1987) | |

3.5 Fencing Films

The following films involve some amount of swordfighting or swashbuckling. They are rated on a four-star system, which is a general critics' opinion of the film as a whole (taken from commercial movie databases), not an indicator of the quality or quantity of the film's fencing. Major actors and occasionally the director (denoted by a '!') are named. Films with 2 stars or less have been omitted, as have recent films that have not yet been widely released or reviewed.

- The Adventures of Don Juan (1949, Errol Flynn, Raymond Burr, ***)
 The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938, Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, ****)
 Against All Flags (1952, Errol Flynn, Anthony Quinn, **1/2)
 Barry Lyndon (1975, Ryan O'Neal, Patrick Magee, !Stanley Kubrick, **1/2)
 Black Arrow (1985, Oliver Reed, **1/2)
 Black Pirate (1926, Douglas Fairbanks, **1/2)
 Black Swan (1942, Tyrone Power, Anthony Quinn, **1/2)
 Blind Fury (1990, Rutger Hauer, **1/2)
 Bob Roberts (1992, Tim Robbins, **1/2)
 Braveheart (1995, Mel Gibson, **1/2)
 By the Sword (1993, F. Murray Abraham, Eric Roberts, **1/2)
 Captain Blood (1935, Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, **1/2)
 The Challenge (1982, Toshiro Mifune, Scott Glenn, **1/2)
 The Charge of the Light Brigade (1936, Errol Flynn, David Niven, ****)
 Conan the Barbarian (1982, Arnold Schwarzenegger, James Earl Jones, **1/2)
 The Corsican Brothers (1941, Douglas Fairbanks Jr, **1/2)
 The Count of Monte Cristo (1934, Robert Donat, ***)
 The Count of Monte Cristo (1975, Richard Chamberlain, Tony Curtis, ***)
 The Court Jester (1956, Danny Kaye, Basil Rathbone, **1/2)
 Crossed Swords (1978, Raquel Welch, Charlton Heston, **1/2)
 Cyrano de Bergerac (1950, Jose Ferrer, **1/2)
 Cyrano de Bergerac (1990, Gerard Depardieu, ****)
 Dangerous Liaisons (1988, John Malkovich, Glenn Close, **1/2)
 Don Juan de Marco (1995, Johnny Depp, Marlon Brando, **1/2)
 The Duellists (1978, Harvey Keitel, Keith Carradine, !Ridley Scott, ***)
 El Cid (1961, Charlton Heston, Sophia Loren, ***)
 The Empire Strikes Back (1980, Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, ****)
 Excalibur (1981, Nicol Williamson, !John Boorman, **1/2)
 The Flame and the Arrow (1950, Burt Lancaster, Virginia Mayo, ***)
 Flesh and Blood (1985, Rutger Hauer, !Paul Verhoeven, **1/2)
 The Four Musketeers (1975, Richard Chamberlain, Michael York, ***)
 Frenchman's Creek (1944, Basil Rathbone, Joan Fontaine, ***)
 Glory (1989, Matthew Broderick, Denzel Washington, **1/2)
 Hamlet (1948, !Laurence Olivier, ****)
 Hamlet (1969, Anthony Hopkins, **1/2)
 Hamlet (1990, Mel Gibson, Glenn Close, !Franco Zeffirelli, ***)
 Henry V (1944, Laurence Olivier, ****)
 Henry V (1989, !Kenneth Branagh, **1/2)
 Highlander (1986, Christopher Lambert, Sean Connery, **1/2)
 Ivanhoe (1953, Robert Taylor, Elizabeth Taylor, **1/2)
 Ivanhoe (1982, James Mason, **1/2)
 Ladyhawke (1985, Rutger Hauer, Michelle Pfeiffer, **1/2)
 Long John Silver (1954, Robert Newton, Kit Taylor, ***)
 Macbeth (1948, Orson Welles, Roddy McDowall, ***)
 Macbeth (1971, Jon Finch, **1/2)
 The Magic Sword (1962, Basil Rathbone, **1/2)
 The Man in Grey (1946, James Mason, Stewart Granger, **1/2)
 The Mark of Zorro (1920, Douglas Fairbanks, ***)
 The Mark of Zorro (1940, Basil Rathbone, Tyrone Power, **1/2)
 Morgan the Pirate (1961, Steve Reeves, **1/2)
 Othello (1996, Lawrence Fishburne, Kenneth Branagh, **1/2)
 The Prince and the Pauper (1937, Errol Flynn, Claude Rains, ***)
 The Princess Bride (1987, Mandy Patinkin, Cary Elwes, !Rob Reiner, ***)
 The Prisoner of Zenda (1937, Douglas Fairbanks Jr, David Niven, ****)
 The Prisoner of Zenda (1952, Stewart Granger, James Mason, ***)
 The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex (1939, Errol Flynn, ***)
 Ran (1985, Tatsuya Nakadai, !Akira Kurosawa, ****)
 The Return of the Jedi (1983, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, **1/2)
 Robin and Marian (1976, Sean Connery, Audrey Hepburn, **1/2)
 Rob Roy (1995, Liam Neeson, Jessica Lange, ****)
 Romeo and Juliet (1935, Basil Rathbone, Leslie Howard, **1/2)
 Romeo and Juliet (1954, Laurence Harvey, ***)
 Romeo and Juliet (1968, Michael York, !Franco Zeffirelli, **1/2)
 Royal Flash (1975, Malcolm McDowell, ***)
 Sanjuro (1962, Toshiro Mifune, !Akira Kurosawa, ***)
 Scaramouche (1952, Stewart Granger, Janet Leigh, ***)
 The Scarlet Pimpernel (1935, Leslie Howard, Merle Oberon, **1/2)
 The Sea Hawk (1940, Errol Flynn, Claude Rains, ****)
 The Seven Samurai (1954, Toshiro Mifune, !Akira Kurosawa, ****)
 The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad (1958, Kerwin Matthews, ***)
 Shogun (1980, Toshiro Mifune, Richard Chamberlain, **1/2)
 Sinbad the Sailor (1949, Douglas Fairbanks Jr, Maureen O'Hara, ***)
 The Spanish Main (1945, Maureen O'Hara, Paul Heinreid, ***)
 Spartacus (1960, Kirk Douglas, !Stanley Kubrick, ****)
 Star Wars (1977, Harrison Ford, Alec Guinness, ****)
 Sweet Liberty (1986, Alan Alda, Michael Caine, **1/2)
 The Sword of Sherwood Forest (1961, Richard Greene, Peter Cushing, **1/2)
 The Three Musketeers (1935, Walter Abel, **1/2)
 The Three Musketeers (1948, Gene Kelley, Lana Turner, ***)
 The Three Musketeers (1974, Michael York, Raquel Welch, ***)
 The Three Musketeers (1993, Tim Curry, Charlie Sheen, **1/2)
 Throne of Blood (1957, Toshiro Mifune, !Akira Kurosawa, ****)
 Tom Jones (1963, Albert Finney, Suzannah York, ****)
 Under the Red Robe (1937, Raymond Massey, ***)
 The Vikings (1958, Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, **1/2)
 The Warriors (1955, Errol Flynn, **1/2)
 Willow (1988, Val Kilmer, !Ron Howard, ***)
 The Yakuza (1975, Robert Mitchum, Takakura Ken, ***)
 Yojimbo (1962, Toshiro Mifune, !Akira Kurosawa, ****)
 Young Sherlock Holmes (1985, Nicholas Rowe, **1/2)