



## **Information and Background Guide**

A far cry from the choreographed bouts portrayed on film, the sport of fencing is dynamic, fast and athletic.

### **Weapons**

Foil, epee and saber are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. While it is not unusual for fencers to compete in all three events, an athlete typically chooses to hone their skills in one weapon.



### **Foil – The Sport of Kings**

The foil is a descendant of the light court sword formally used by nobility to train for duels. The foil has a flexible rectangular blade, approximately 35 inches in length and weighs 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 in the front and to the waist in the back. It does not include the arms, neck, head and legs. This concept of on-target and off-target evolved from the theory of 18<sup>th</sup>-century fencing masters who instructed their pupils to only attack the vital areas of the body – i.e. the torso. Of course, the head is also a vital area of the body, but attacks to the face were considered unsporting and therefore discouraged.

The foil fencer's uniform includes a metallic vest (called a lamé), which covers the valid target area so that a valid touch will register on the scoring machine. The flexible nature of the foil blade permits the modern elite foil fencer to attack an opponent from seemingly impossible angles.



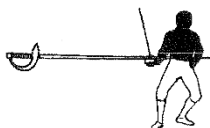
### **Epee – Freestyle Fencing**

The epee (pronounced "EPP-pay," meaning sword in French), 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, and the entire body, head-to-toe, is the valid target area, imitating an actual duel.

## Information Extracted From US Fencing Association's Parent/Spectator Guide

A full-body target naturally makes epee a competition of careful strategy and patience – wild, rash attacks are quickly punished with solid counter-attacks. Therefore, rather than attacking outright, epeeists often spend several minutes probing their opponent's defenses and maneuvering for distance before risking an attack. Others choose to stay on the defensive throughout the entire bout.

1996 was the first Olympics to feature team and individual Women's Epee events.



### **Saber – Hack and Slash**

The saber is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword, and is similar in length and weight to the foil. The major difference is the use of the blade. The saber is a cutting weapon as well as a thrusting weapon; therefore, saber fencers can score with the edge of their blade as well as their point. The target area is from the bend of the hips (both front and back), to the top of the head. This simulates the cavalry rider on a horse. The saber fencers' uniform includes a metallic jacket (lamé), which fully covers the target area to register a valid touch on the scoring machine. Because the head is valid target area, the fencer's mask is also electrically wired.

If epee is the weapon of patient, defensive strategy, then saber is its polar opposite. In saber, the rules of right-of-way strongly favor the fencer who attacks first, and a mere graze by the blade against the lamé registers a touch with the scoring machine. These circumstances naturally make saber a fast, aggressive game, with fencers rushing their opponent from the moment the referee gives the instruction to fence. Athens was the first Olympics to feature a Women's Saber event.

### **Object of the Bout**

The object of a fencing bout ("game") is to effectively score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or five points (in preliminary pool play) before your opponent, or have a higher score than your opponent when the time limit expires. Points are received by making a touch in the opponent's target area. Direct elimination bouts consist of three, three-minute periods with a one-minute break between each. The preliminary pool five-touch bouts are a maximum of three minutes.

### **Right-Of-Way**

The right-of-way rule was established to eliminate apparently simultaneous attacks between two fencers. This rule is only applied to foil and saber and the difference is important only when both the red and green



lights go on at the same time. When this happens, the winner of the point is the one who the referee determines held the right-of-way at the time the lights went on. The most basic, and important, precept of the right-of-way is that the fencer who started the attack first will receive the point if they hit the valid target area. Naturally, the fencer who is being attacked must defend himself or herself with a parry, or somehow cause their opponent to miss, in order to take over right-of-way and score a point. A fencer who hesitates for too long while advancing on their opponent gives up right-of-way to

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their opponent. The referee may determine that the two fencers truly attacked each other simultaneously. The simultaneous attack results in no points being awarded and the fencers are ordered back en garde by the referee to continue fencing.

In saber, the fencer who starts to attack first is given priority should his opponent counter-attack. However, saber referees are much less forgiving of hesitation by an attacker. It is common to see a saber fencer execute a stop cut against their opponent's forearm during such a moment of hesitation, winning right-of-way and the point.



Epee does not use the right-of-way in keeping with its dueling origin. He who first scores a touch earns the point, or if both fencers hit within 1/25<sup>th</sup> of a second both earn a point.

### **Following the Action**

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. Whenever a hit is made, the referee will stop the bout, describe the action, and decide whether to award a touch. Fencers seek to maintain a safe distance from each other – that is out of the range of the opponent’s attack. Then, 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 of their opponent.

When a fencer lands a hit, the referee stops the bout and – on foil and saber – determines who was the attacker, if their opponent successfully defended themselves, and which fencer should be awarded a touch, if any.

While it may be difficult to follow the referee’s calls (not helped by the fact that the officiating, in international competition, is performed in French!) the referee always clearly raises their hand on the side of the fencer for whom they have awarded a point. Watching these hand signals can make it easier for newcomers to follow the momentum of a fencing bout without understanding all of the intricacies of the rules.

## Fencing Facts

1. The United States Beijing Olympic Team brought home 6 medals in 2008. Our sport brought home the second highest number of medals which included the first three medals of the Beijing Olympic Games!
2. Fencing is one of only four sports to be included in every modern Olympic Games, since the first in 1896. Fencing was also a sport in the original Olympic Games in ancient Greece.
3. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Games, was a fencer.
4. The tip of the fencing weapon is the second fastest moving object in sport; the first is the marksman's bullet.
5. Fencing is conducted on a 14m x 2m "strip" or "piste" to replicate combat in confined quarters such as a castle hallway. The end of the fencing strip represents the line drawn in the earth by duelists' seconds: to retreat behind this line during the duel indicated cowardice and loss of honor.
6. The 750 gram weight test used in epee to ensure a touch is scored with sufficient force is based on the amount of tension required to break the skin (500 gram weight in foil). In a duel, honor was done when blood was first drawn – even if from a minor wound such as a blister.
7. The target area in saber, originally a cavalry weapon, is from the waist up because it is contrary to the rules of chivalry to injure an opponent's horse.
8. There was originally no time limit on a fencing bout, until a Masters Championship bout in New York in the 1930s lasted for seven hours. Thereafter, bouts were limited to 30 minutes. Today, the time-limit has been reduced to just 3 minutes for 5-touch bouts and 9 minutes for 15 touches.
9. Fencers wear white uniforms because before the advent of electronic scoring, touches were recorded on the white surface with a wad of ink-soaked cotton on the tips of the weapons.
10. Famous Fencers: Bruce Dickinson, the lead singer of Iron Maiden – foil. Neil Diamond, entertainer – saber. Prince Albert of Monaco – saber. Andrew Jackson fought a duel of honor with swords. General George Patton, competed in the 1912 Olympics and once owned a riding crop with a blade in the handle manufactured by Georgio Santelli, New York fencing instructor and equipment manufacturer. Most recently, movie star Jerry O'Connell – saber.
11. The New York Fencers Club, founded in 1883, is the oldest continuous running club devoted exclusively to fencing in the U.S.
12. The first electronic scoring machine for fencing was invented in 1936 by Alfred Skrobisch, an engineering student at Columbia and a future U.S. Olympian.
13. Women's Foil was added to the events at the Olympic Games in 1924. Women's Epee was added in 1996. The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece was the first time that Women's Saber was an official part of the Olympic Program.

## Glossary of Fencing Terms

**Advance**: Taking a step towards one's opponent.

**Attack**: Movement or series of movements by which a fencer tries to score a point. In foil and saber, the fencer who attacks first acquires the "right-of-way." In order to execute an attack properly (i.e. one that the referee will acknowledge), the fencer's hand must be clearly extending towards their opponent's valid target in a threatening manner.

**Beat**: Sharp tap on the opponent's blade to initiate an attack or provoke a reaction.

**Engagement**: Contact between the fencers' blades – often as the prelude to an attack.

**En Garde**: The stance, with a low center of gravity, that a fencer takes while fencing to allow for quick motion while advancing, retreating or attacking. This position must be taken before fencing commences.

**Feint**: A false attack intended to get a defensive reaction from the opposing fencer, thus creating the opportunity for a genuine attack ("feint-disengage attack")

**Fleche**: Explosive, running attack (Foil and Epee only)

**Flunge**: Action unique to saber – a combination of a lunge and a fleche. Evolved recently after the FIE modified saber rules in 1992 to prohibit running attacks.

**Parry**: Defensive action in which a fencer blocks his opponent's blade.

**Lunge**: Most common attacking technique, in which the fencer launches themselves at their opponent by pushing off from the back leg (which generally remains stationary).

**Piste (French) or Fencing Strip (English)**: The term for the fencing field of play. Fencers must stay within the boundaries of the strip.

**Point-in-Line**: Action in which the fencer, who is generally out of attacking range, points their weapon at their opponent with their arm fully extended. A fencer who establishes a point in line has right-of-way, and their opponent cannot attack until they remove the threat.

**Recover**: The return to the en garde position after lunging.

**Riposte**: Defender's offensive action immediately after parrying their opponent's attack.

**Second Intention**: A tactic in which a fencer executes a convincing, yet false, action in hopes of drawing a true, committed reaction from their opponent, which the attacker can then use to advantage to score.

**Stop Hit (foil and epee), Stop Cut (saber)**: A counter-action made at the moment of an opponent's hesitation, feint, or poorly executed attack. To be awarded the point in foil and saber, the fencer attempting to stop hit/stop cut must clearly catch their opponent's tempo. Hence, if their stop is not "in time," the referee may award the touch to their attacker. In epee, the stop must arrive 1/25<sup>th</sup> second before the opponent's attack to score a single touch.

## **Biography of Fencing Master Raymond Finkleman**



Raymond Finkleman, Fencing Master at the Chevy Chase Fencing Club and a native of Washington, DC, has been fencing continuously for over 49 years and was one of the first two US-trained and certified fencing masters. He started fencing while in high school and he was an active member of three different DC area fencing clubs. After graduating high school, he attended Vanderbilt University. Although fencing was not a NCAA sport at Vanderbilt, he was a member of their very active fencing club which competed against other colleges and universities throughout the US. Captain of the fencing club's team during his junior year, he was the coach of the team as a senior.

While in Nashville, he also started a program at nearby Peabody College (now incorporated into Vanderbilt University) and a private high school. After graduating with a degree in physics and astronomy, Maître Finkleman was one of the first two students (along with Maître James Murray) to enroll in the American Fencing Academy, the fencing master program started by Maîtres Raoul Sudre and Jean-Jacques Gillet patterned after the Institute National de Sport in France. Maître Finkleman received his Prevost certification in 1975 and his Fencing Master certification from the USFCA and the Académie d'Armes Internationale in 1976. His fencing master diploma was signed by Maîtres Stanley Sieja, John Geraci and Al Peredo.

Maître Finkleman started his professional coaching career at DC Fencers Club (DCFC) in Washington, DC and with the Montgomery County (Maryland) Department of Recreation. In the late 1970's, DCFC moved from the Chevy Chase Community Center in DC to a larger facility. Maître Finkleman kept the space at the Community Center and created the Chevy Chase Fencing Club.

Maître Finkleman's Montgomery County fencing program was a purely recreational program of foil group classes and club practice. Those fencers that showed interest and promise were encouraged to join his competitive program at the Chevy Chase Fencing Club. During his 31-year term as a contractor with the county, he introduced fencing to over 5,000 students. He left the county program in 2007 to devote more time to his competitive fencers at the Chevy Chase Fencing Club.

The Chevy Chase Fencing Club is taught in association with the DC Department of Parks and Recreation. The fencing program includes foil group classes for adults (age 13 and above); epee group classes for youth (ages 8 to 12); a youth club practice; and the Chevy Chase Fencing Club practice for adults and more experienced youth fencers. Maître Finkleman's Junior Epee Program has been very successful and has produced several top epee fencers. Classes are always in demand even without any advertising. From 2008-2009 to the present, Chevy Chase Fencing Club members have won 111 national medals at USFA NACs and Championships. More medals have been won at Super Youth Circuits and other regional and local events; great results for a club with less than 50 members.

Maître Finkleman has been awarded nine coach's medals by the US Fencing Association when his students have won gold medals at the National Championships. He doesn't work just with young fencers, but also has an active veteran fencing program. One of his veteran fencers, Dr. Bettie Graham, has competed in fourteen Veteran World Championships and is a 3-time National Champion (2013 (Veteran 70+ Women's Epee) and 2011 (Veteran-70 Women's Foil and Veteran-70 Women's Epee)). She won the bronze medal (Veteran 70+ Women's Epee) in the Veteran World Championships held in Croatia in September 2011 and has been a member of two gold medal Veteran World Championship teams (2013 and 2017). Another veteran fencer, Mark Henry, has competed as a member of the US World Team three times (2011, 2012, and 2014).

Maître Finkleman's former student, James Kaull, was an All-American fencer at Notre Dame University on a full fencing scholarship. While at Chevy Chase Fencing Club, Maître Finkleman accompanied James Kaull to Montreal where James was one of the youngest fencers (age 15) to ever win a Junior World Cup in 2007. James has been a member of the 2007 US Cadet World Championship Team in Belek, Turkey, and the 2009 US Junior World Championships Team in Belfast, Ireland. He won silver at the Goteborg Junior World Cup in the 2010-2011 season and was on the US team competing at the 2011 Junior World Championships in Jordan.

Maître Finkleman is also the coach of Katharine Holmes. Katharine has been a member of the US Cadet/Junior World Championship Team multiple times, competing in Belfast, Ireland (2009, silver in Cadet Championships), Baku, Azerbaijan (2010, silver in Junior Team, 5th in Cadet Championships) Mer Morte, Jordan (2011) and Moscow, Russia (bronze in Junior Team). Katharine also represented the United States at the Youth Olympics in Singapore in 2010 where she won an Olympic bronze medal. Katharine was an All-American fencer on the Princeton University Fencing Team and won the bronze medal at the 2012 NCAA Fencing Championships. She competed on the US Olympic Team at the 2016 Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Maître Finkleman has also coached several international fencers. Olimar Maisonet-Guzman, the top woman epeeist in Puerto Rico, has trained with him while in Washington, DC, as a Truman Scholar. She competed for Puerto Rico in the World Championships in Ankara, Turkey. One of the fencers that Maître Finkleman started at age 8, Nina Moiseiwitsch, has dual citizenship with US and Britain. Nina recently decided to represent Britain in competition and Maître Finkleman has accompanied her to the British Cadet/Junior Championships in Sheffield, England, (silver medal in the cadet event in 2010). Nina is currently ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in Britain and is on the British travel team competing in many international events including the European Championships. Ketil Hviding, from Norway, competed in the 2017 Veteran World Championships.

Maître Finkleman's students have competed in a total of 74 World Championship and Olympic events. His teaching has been recognized by an Award of Merit from the US Fencing Coaches Association.

Besides creating great fencers, Maître Finkleman has created great fencing coaches. At least six of his former students have gone on to coach fencing professionally including his wife, Jean. One, Isobel Combes, has become a certified fencing master in Britain and has two active clubs there. Another former student, Jill Feldman, coaches in the DC area and is currently an assistant coach at Chevy Chase Fencing Club. Jill has also chaired the bout committee at USFA NACs and Championships. Their fencing students are Maître Finkleman's "grand-students."

Teaching for the past 40 years, Maître Finkleman's love of the sport of fencing and the hard work and discipline that is required to do well in the sport is instilled in his students. It is this achievement of which he is most proud. Students have commented that Maître Finkleman not only provided them a skill that they can continue to enjoy throughout their lives, but that he has taught them how to work hard to achieve their goals, to accept defeat honorably, and to continue to pursue their dreams while respecting others. This is the true vocation of a maître d'armes.

# RESOURCES

Additional Information about Chevy Chase Fencing Club:

Website: <http://www.fencer.com>

Contact: Raymond Finkleman ([fencer@fencer.com](mailto:fencer@fencer.com))

Classes are offered for children (ages 8 to 12) and adults in association with the DC Department of Parks and Recreation at the Chevy Chase Community Center. Equipment is provided.

Location of Chevy Chase Fencing Club:

Chevy Chase Community Center  
5601 Connecticut Avenue, NW (Connecticut Avenue & McKinley Street)  
Washington, DC 20015

**United States Fencing Association** (<http://www.usfencing.org>): The United States Fencing Association (USFA) is the recognized National Governing Body for the sport of fencing in the United States. The USFA was founded in 1891 as the Amateur Fencers League of America (AFLA) by a group of New York fencers seeking independence from the Amateur Athletic Union. The AFLA changed its name to the United States Fencing Association in 1981. The USFA is affiliated with the *Fédération Internationale d'Escrime* (FIE), the international federation for fencing founded in Paris in 1913.