Wiring epees – Legal and Illegal Methods of Connecting the Wires

Of all the weapons, epee can be one of the most the most challenging to apply the rules correctly. The vast majority of the rules in epee are in place because at one time or another, a fencer tried to gain an unfair advantage. But because the rulebook is a technical document that does not provide examples other than legal language, it can sometimes be challenging to understand the practical implications. Recently, there have been many questions about how one can connect the wires of an epee to the prongs inside the guard, and it's not just a matter of attaching them any way that you please. Hopefully this article can clarify legal and illegal methods of attaching the wires. This article will focus on the wires inside the bell guard.

When attaching the wires to the sockets inside the bell guard, two main rules must be considered. First, the fencer should not be able to break or make contacts between the two wires – either accidentally or intentionally. Second, the wires must be arranged so that the referee can completely inspect them to ensure that the fencer cannot create a contact.

Let's look at the pictures below. Picture A demonstrates wires that are completely conforming to the rules. Each wire is inside its own insulation (m.5.2.d, m.31). The insulation goes all the way up to the socket (m.5.2.e). There is no non-insulated wire projecting beyond the connections (m.5.2.f). There is padding sufficiently wide enough to protect the wires from the fencer's fingers (m.5.2.a). The referee can inspect the entirety of the wires down to the bell guard (t.44.2). They cannot accidentally break the wires (m.5.2.b). To whoever wired this blade, Great Job!

Picture A – Correct attachment of epee wires

Pictures B, C, and D all show problems with attachment of the wires though, and pictures E and F show problems with the padding.

In Picture B, the referee can inspect the entire length of the wire, but since the wires wrap around the posts to the side of the socket where the fencer's fingers are, it becomes illegal. When the wires wrap around the sockets, it becomes illegal.

Picture B – Wires incorrectly wrap around posts

In Picture C, the wires are on the correct side of the socket, and cannot be accidentally disconnected, but because they pass through the "tunnel" created by the socket and the metal plate, the referee cannot verify if there is a hidden switch. Using a "tunnel" like this is illegal.

Picture C – Inability to inspect the length of the wires

Picture D shows a socket with both the problems.

Picture D – Multiple problems with the attachment

The final pictures show problems with the padding. Pictures E and F below show examples of padding that does not sufficiently protect the wires from the fencer's fingers. In picture E, the padding is not wide enough and there is a gap where the fencer's fingers have access to the wires. In picture F, there is a notch in the padding where the wires are not protected. Neither of these are legal. Picture G demonstrates padding that is wide enough and completely protects the wires from the fencer's fingers.

Picture E – Padding that is not wide enough

Picture F – Padding that is not complete

Picture G – Padding that completely covers the wires

Eminent United States armorer and member of the SEMI Commission of the FIE Dan DeChaine has this to say:

“The two photos which show the wires attaching at the backs of the sockets [pictures A and C] demonstrate the proper method of attachment of the wires. However the two pictures [pictures C and D], which show the wires passing through the tunnel in the guard connector pose a problem. The rules indicate that the referee must be able to examine the wires from the point where they enter the guard, and for their entire length up to the point where wires attach to the socket. When a wire passes through a tunnel, it cannot be examined for the complete length of the wire (or certainly that portion of the wire which resides inside the tunnel). Further, the rules stipulate that the wires be so attached that connection of the wire to the socket cannot “accidentally” be broken. Therefore, both photos which show wires that wrap around the socket and attach at the front of the socket would be a violation of this mandate.

What this leaves us with is the sad fact that by strictly observing the rules, we must say that only the first photo demonstrates a completely legal method of wiring.”

At national tournaments in the US, the application of this rule has been inconsistently applied historically. Starting at the beginning of next season on August 1, 2013, referees will be instructed to ensure that epees meet all of these standards. Like other non-conforming equipment, the penalty is a group 1 offense. We hope this helps clears up any confusion about epee wiring!

Many thanks for the above photos go to Irene Seelye, fencer and armorer at heart, photographer by hobby.