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Rules Blog: USA Fencing adopting new t.124, "Unwillingness to Fight"

 [Devin Donnelly](#)  [February 4, 2019](#)

Please be advised that USA Fencing is adopting the structure of recent changes to rule t.124, "Unwillingness to Fight", as decided by the FIE during the December 2018 Congress. The effective date of the rule change is February 14, 2019. **The new t.124 will be in use at USA Fencing's Junior Olympic Championships in Denver.**

About the new rule text

Note that USA Fencing version of t.124 has been edited for use with USA Fencing competitions. This includes the following changes:

- In the case of a simultaneous P-Black Card (there is unwillingness to fight, scores are equal, and both fencers have each already received a P-Yellow Card and two P-Red Cards), the bout is decided in favor of the fencer with the higher initial seeding as determined at the start of the competition. This replaces the text of the FIE rule, which states that the bout is decided in favor of the fencer with a higher FIE ranking.
- The language around P-Cards has been modified to make it clearer that fencers progress through the stages of P-Card penalties independently of one another—that is, if a fencer has not yet received a P-Card (even if their opponent has), their first P-Card is a P-Yellow Card. This is in accordance with the [FAQ posted by the FIE](#) on January 29, 2019.

The full text of the rule is as follows:

There is unwillingness to fight when there is one minute of fencing without a hit or without a hit scored off the target. When there is unwillingness to fight, the Referee will immediately call "Halt!"

Individual events – Direct Elimination

When there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, the Referee sanctions one or both

fencers with a P-card as follows:

- a. If the fencers are equal: the Referee sanctions both fencers with a P-card.
- b. If the fencers are not equal: the Referee sanctions the fencer who has the lower score with a P-card.

P-card sanctions are as follows:

- a. For a fencer's first P-card sanction, the fencer receives a P-yellow card.
- b. For a fencer's second and third P-card sanction, the fencer receives a P-red card.
- c. For a fencer's fourth P-card sanction, the fencer receives a P-black card.

If the fencers are equal and receive P-black cards simultaneously, the fencer with the higher initial seeding wins the bout, as determined at the start of the competition.

Team events

When there is unwillingness to fight and a team has already received two P-red cards, that team receives a P-black card. In the case of a P-black card, the fencer currently on the strip is disqualified. However, the team may continue

to fence in the current and subsequent matches by substituting their reserve fencer, if one is available, and provided a replacement has not already been made previously for tactical or medical reasons. If a replacement is made after receipt of a P-black card, no further replacement may be made, even for medical reasons. The disqualified fencer may not take part in any further matches during the competition; however, the P-Black Card is not transferred to any subsequent matches in which the team participates, and the disqualified fencer remains eligible for any awards the team may earn.

If no replacement can be made following receipt of a P-black card (because there is no reserve fencer or because the reserve fencer has already been used previously), the team sanctioned by a P-black card loses the match.

If the teams are equal and receive P-black cards simultaneously, the team with the higher initial seeding wins the match, as determined at the start of the competition.

Both Individual and Team Events:

a. The P-yellow (warning) and P-red (penalty hit) cards received during any one bout

or match are valid only for that bout or match. These penalties are not transferable

to the following bout or match.

b. The P-black card means disqualification for repeated unwillingness to fight. The

fencer or team sanctioned keep their position in the ranking and the points obtained up to the moment of the disqualification.

c. The referee must record these P-yellow, P-red and P-black cards separately on the

score sheet. The sanctions awarded for unwillingness to fight are not

cumulative

with any other sanction awarded.

d. In both individual and team competitions, if, at the end of the regulation time,

there is equality of scores, articles t.40.3 and t.41.5 will apply.

Notes and differences from the previous t.124

I urge all referees, fencers, and coaches to read the [Official FIE FAQ](#) about t.124. Below, I have highlighted some of the important differences between the new t.124 and the older version:

- **Single criteria for “Unwillingness to fight”:** There is now only one criterion for applying t.124, and that is one minute of elapsed bout time without a hit scored (or a hit scored off-target in foil). It is the duty of the referee to track the time since the last hit and apply t.124 as necessary.
- **t.124 no longer advances the bout to the next period in individual DE matches, or the next relay in team matches.** After a referee has applied t.124 and issued the requisite P-Cards, the bout or relay continues as normal.
- **P-Cards are not cumulative with other penalties.** P-Card penalties exist independently of other penalties incurred during a bout. For example, a fencer with a P-Yellow Card and no other penalties who commits a Group 1 offense should be sanctioned with a Yellow Card.
- **P-Black Cards in team events:** A P-Black Card in a team event disqualifies *the fencer currently on the strip*. That fencer can be replaced by the reserve if the reserve is available (i.e. they have not already been substituted during that match), and the team can continue to fence. Any team

fencer sanctioned by a P-Black Card is disqualified for the remainder of the event and cannot participate in subsequent matches, however.

Handling intentional Unwillingness to Fight

Under the prior t.124, fencers occasionally engaged in intentional/tactical unwillingness to fight, for example retreating out of distance to their respective ends of the piste. The FIE has specifically addressed this situation in their FAQ; the following is a direct quote:

- “The referee should stop the match and penalize the fencers according to t.43.2 (interrupting the bout without valid reason). Fencing means fighting, not resting on the piste. Fencers must fence during the whole time and not decide for themselves when they want to go to the break.
- It is the duty of the referee to apply the rules strictly. Referees should NOT accept that fencers stop before the end of the official time and should therefore apply sanctions whenever required.”

About the rule adoption

USA Fencing, the Referees' Commission, and the Rules Committee are all aware of the potential difficulties and controversy around adapting to the new version of t.124; this is partly why we, as a body, have delayed implementation until now.

However, with the release of the FAQ and additional guidance from international referees, USA Fencing has decided to adopt the rule to bring us into line with the rest of the international community. Regardless of any one person's feelings about the merits of any new rule, it is important to have our fencers playing by the same rules as the rest of the world—particularly for our athletes competing internationally.

Best of luck out there,
Devin Donnelly
On behalf of the Referees' Commission and the Rules Committee

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