

Commentaries and Procedures for the Judging and Directing of Dueling Sabre Formal Assaults

1.0 General Conditions of the Assault

- A. All assaults shall be fenced on a *piste* 30 feet long by 6 feet wide. Stepping out of bounds will be penalized as detailed in section 8.0.
- B. Each fencer must adhere to Classical dueling saber technique in style and form.

2.0 Weapons, Equipment Specifications and Requirements

A. Weapons

- I. All weapons and equipment must be inspected prior to the beginning of the tournament. Each participant is required to bring 2 weapons to be inspected.
- II. Hilt: The guards must be made of steel, and may be of a Radaelli, Pecoraro or a solid shell type. They must be constructed in as historically accurate a manner as possible within the realm of safety. No guards shall have openings large enough to allow a blade to enter. Blades must be of the S2000 type.



- III. The use of a martingale is optional.
- IV. Fencers must have two weapons in good condition when arriving on the piste.

B. Clothing and Protective Equipment

- I. Three-weapon fencing masks (12 kg Punch test) with thick, sewn-in bibs are required for tournaments. No customized masks or attachments to the masks will be permitted. All masks must fit properly to ensure maximum protection.
- II. Three-weapon jackets are required for tournaments. These must be made of strong material, preferably of heavily padded cotton duck or canvas. The jacket must overlap the complete circumference of the waist of the pants/knickers by a minimum of 2 inches. In order to facilitate judging of touches, jackets must be white or of a natural canvas color. Long pants or fencing knickers must be worn and must be made of at least 12-ounce duck or the equivalent and can be of any light (muted) or dark solid color. Socks must match the color of the knickers and may not display corporate branding or logos. Shoes must be predominantly white, black or gray.
- III. An underarm plastron is required under the jacket. Breast protectors are required for women, and rigid groin cups are required for men. Heavy plastrons over the jacket are recommended, as is some form of padded protection to protect the upper thigh.
- IV. A padded sabre glove for the armed hand, or the equivalent, is required. The cuff of the glove must overlap the sleeve by at least 3 inches and must be made of sturdy leather or equivalent material.
- V. A *manchette* or elbow guard constructed of heavy canvas or leather is required.

- VI. Excessively baggy clothing is forbidden. Spandex or nylon clothing, warm-up pants and sweat pants are NOT permitted.

NOTE: No bare flesh may be exposed with exception of the unarmed hand and back of the head.

3.0 Technique and Safety

A. Target Area

The target area shall include the body above the line of the hips, including the arms, the head and the front leg beginning 2 inches above the knee. The back of the head, however, is not a valid target.

B. Cuts

Cuts must be made with the true or false edge. Cuts made with the flat are not valid but will cause a halt in the action. All cuts must be comprised of a percussive action in conjunction with a pull or push of the blade.

C. Thrusts

- I. Thrusts must land clearly and distinctly on target. The blade must bend sufficiently on impact to demonstrate penetrating power. All thrusts must be delivered with the hand in pronation (hand in first or second position).
- II. Jabbing or punching actions are forbidden because these do not qualify as thrusts. However, actions such as the *appuntata* or replacement of the point are permitted, as they are valid technique.

D. Use of the Unarmed Hand

The use of the unarmed hand is NOT permitted. The unarmed hand must remain on the hip or behind the back, with the exception of the *passata sotto*, in which the unarmed hand makes contact with the ground.



Hatch indicates valid target areas

4.0 Infighting

- A. Infighting is permitted. However, discretion and self-control must be exercised. If the director feels that the action has become irregular or unsafe, he will immediately stop the action. Similarly, if the action becomes obscured so that the director and judges cannot interpret the phrase, the action must be stopped. The action will also be halted upon any clashing of the guards. The adversary who systematically and deliberately causes infighting by force of the action will be dealt with as described in section 8.0.
- B. Passing the adversary (changing positions on the *piste*) in the course of an assault is permitted if it is done as a consequence of a *phrase d'armes* and does not stop the action.
- C. The "fleche", or any type of running attack, is prohibited. However attacks by means of a passing step are permitted because they are not executed as running attacks.
- D. *Corps-a-corps* encounters must be stopped by the director. *Corps-a-corps* is defined as bodily contact and is not permitted in dueling sabre. The adversary who systematically and deliberately causes a *corps-a-corps* by force of the action will be dealt with as violation of the rules as described in section 8.0.
- E. A hit outside the prescribed target area may be counted provided if, in the opinion of the director, it would have been good if the adversary had not taken an irregular position or made an illegal movement. Should the director feel that an action is uncontrolled or constitutes a fall, he shall halt the assault.

5.0 General Conduct

- A. Every hit should be immediately acknowledged, whether good or bad, by the fencer

receiving the hit by making a foot call (an *appel*) and declaring "touch" in a loud voice.

- B. Speaking while under arms (except for acknowledging a touch against oneself) is not allowed except with the permission of the director, gained by making a foot call (an *appel*) and being recognized by the director.
- C. When the Director halts the action, both fencers must immediately assume first position (*aplomb*).
- D. It is forbidden to hold the weapon with both hands or to change from one hand to the other during an assault.
- E. A fencer should not gesture in any form to the audience or judges that he has made a valid thrust or cut or that he disapproves of a decision.
- F. Neither fencer is allowed to leave the point/edge of his weapon fixed on his adversary once the halt is called.
- G. The fencer is not allowed to turn his back toward the adversary after delivering a cut or thrust.
- H. Emotional outbursts or displays of temper before, during, or after an assault are forbidden. Participants must exhibit self-control and good manners.
- I. All violations of the general conduct rules will be dealt with as a violation of the rules as described in section 8.0.



First position (aplomb)

6.0 Officiating

A. Formal Assault

- I. Every formal assault will be presided over by a Director of Combat. The director's function is to ensure that the combat proceeds smoothly and fairly. He must see that the fencing is conducted in accordance to the rules and must halt any swordplay that, in his opinion, is unruly, patently unfair, and/or unsafe. Additionally, the director shall have the power to:
 - Commence, halt, or end an assault, and declare a winner.
 - Penalize violations of the rules and conventions of fencing, including those written and unwritten rules relating to good conduct.
 - Award touches with the concurrence of the judges and in accordance with the applicable voting procedure.
 - Exercise complete control over the fencers, spectators, judges, minor officials, and such other personnel that may be in the area of the piste. This control extends to whatever means may be necessary to maintain order, including ejecting a fencer or spectator, dismissing a judge, etc.
- II. The Director will be assisted in his duties by 4 judges, the responsibility of whom it shall be to watch for touches occurring during the assault, which they shall signal against the fencer who was touched by raising a hand and declaring "touch" in a loud voice.
- III. Judges shall have 1 vote each and the director shall have 1 votes. A minimum of 1 votes are required to award or deny a touch.

B. Scoring for Excellence of Technique and Form

- I. Scoring for technique and form shall be determined by a separate panel of 3 judges. Each judge in the panel will award to each contestant in each assault a point value from 0 through 5 (0 being worst, 5 being best). When a separate panel can not be assembled, then the award shall be determined by a consensus

of the officiating director(s) and/or judges.

- II. The technical points are utilized to distinguish between those who are adhering to sound martial principles and those who are merely interested in scoring points.

NOTE: The Director of Combat is the sole interpreter of the rules.

7.0 Procedure

- A. All assaults shall be for 3 points, or for a limit of 5 minutes, whichever comes first. Points are scored against the fencer receiving the touch. If the score is tied at the end of this time period, 1 additional touch will be fenced without time limit to determine a winner. The fencer with fewest touches called against them shall be declared the winner.
- B. To begin the assault, the director shall bring both contestants to the center of the piste. Once the director has assured that everything is in order (such as that the fencers are using inspected weapons, wearing the approved clothing, etc.), he shall have them salute and bring them on guard, with the command "on guard." He shall then step back and give the command "fence." The fencers shall cease fencing upon the command "halt."
- C. Upon seeing a touch or the signal for a touch from a judge, the director shall stop the assault and poll the judges as to the validity of the touch. The judges must respond with one of the following: "yes," "no," "abstain," "off target," "insufficient penetration," "passé" (passed), "plaque" (flat), "mal parée" (insufficient parry) or "over steel."
- D. For a parry to be considered sufficient, the attacking blade must be clearly removed from its threatening position with the result that the defender is not touched. Mere contact against the attacking blade is not considered a sufficient parry. If an attack arrives due to an insufficient parry (*mal parée*), the attack is counted as valid. If the attack lands due to the attacking blade whipping around a properly executed parry (over steel), the touch is not valid.
- E. A hit off-target suffices to stop the phrase of arms and annuls any succeeding riposte or counter-riposte.
- F. If a fencer disarms his adversary by beating or transporting the weapon, a hit is good only if made instantaneously as a consequence of that action.
- G. When a touch is made in the course of a passing action, the touch made immediately on the pass is valid. A touch made after passing the adversary is valid so long as it is the result of a continuous phrase. A touch made by a fencer who has been attacked, and has executed a parry and riposte even on turning around, is valid.
- H. Priority
Priority is determined by the attack. The attack in duelling sabre is the initial offensive action executed by EXTENDING THE SWORD ARM, which must precede any forward movement of the body and continuously threaten the adversary's valid target.

—Adopted from: *The Art Of The Sabre and The Epee* by Luigi Barbasetti, 1936
Fundamental Principles For The Determination Of Priority In The Double Touch

In order to eliminate controversy in the double touch, we are enumerating herewith the basic principles governing it. These rules are not purely theoretical, but of actual application in tournaments.

The double touch may be simultaneous or almost simultaneous and may be brought about:

- 1. By the attacking party*
- 2. By the defending party*
- 3. By both parties*

- 1. Double touch brought about by the attacking party. This takes place:*
 - (a) When the attacking party tries to perform an action against the adversary's weapon, and continues his attack after missing the adversary's blade.*
 - (b) When the same party in response to a disengagement into tempo, a cut to the arm or stop-thrust, performs an ineffective parry and continues his attack without any other concern. He cannot invoke his rights as attacking party, having lost them by his effort to parry. This behavior betrays a very serious lack of judgment and in a duel would be disadvantageous or even dangerous.*
 - (c) When the attacking party continues the attack after his adversary has responded to his feint by a beat or any other contact of blades. It is a recognized principle that the object of any feint is to deceive a parry; if this parry has not been eluded by the attacking party, he loses the rights conferred by the offensive, which is considered as ended. The fencer who parries has the right to the riposte.*
 - (d) When attacking party continues after being touched in the arm and there is a lengthy period of time between the stop-hit and the attack.*
- 2. Double touch brought about by the defending party. This occurs:*
 - (a) When the defending party is touched by a simple attack which he has not parried, being content with stopping his adversary with the point or by a cut to the arm.*
 - (b) When expecting a complex offensive the defending party executes a stop-thrust and the adversary develops a simple attack.*
 - (c) When a long period elapses between the parry and the riposte, permitting the attacking party to apply a remise. The fencer who parries must not lose an instant in performing the riposte.*
- 3. Double touch brought about by both fencers. This occurs:*
 - (a) When one of the fencers applies numerous feints and his adversary decides to stop him and performs his tempo action against the final blow. The attacking party cannot force his adversary to parry, and on the other hand the defending party cannot claim validity for his blow against the last feint because he had the opportunity to execute the tempo action at the beginning of the attack in order to avoid the double touch.*
 - (b) While the two parties attack simultaneously after reciprocally waiting in vain for the adverse offensive. The attacking party must force his adversary to defend himself or, as in the preceding case, both adversaries are guilty of the same fault.*

8.0 Violations of the Rules

Violations of these rules will be dealt with in the following manner, unless otherwise noted elsewhere in the rules:

- 1st Offense: Warning
 - 2nd Offense: Point against
 - 3rd Offense: Loss of the assault
 - 4th Offense: Disqualification
- A. If a fencer steps off any boundary of the *piste* with one foot he will receive a warning. (Meaning any part of the foot outside of the designated boundary lines.) A second occurrence will result in a point being called against that fencer. Once any point has been awarded, all previous out-of-bounds warnings are annulled for both fencers.
- B. Dishonorable conduct, such as attempting to circumvent the rules, will result in a warning for the first offense and ejection for any subsequent offense.
- C. Vindictive acts of any kind will result in disqualification and ejection from the event. The AHF Board of Governors may also ban the offender from all events for a period of any length, up to and including a lifetime ban from Association events.

“This method of judging is based upon the idea that the contest is intended as an exhibition of skill as well as the securing of touches.”

—*Amateur Fencer’s League of America Fencing Rules*, 1891.

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