

March 25, 2022

To the members of the Referees' Commission and USA Fencing referees:

My name is Bradley Baker, and I would appreciate your consideration for the position of Vice Chair of Rules and Examinations on the Referees' Commission. I believe that I am well suited to the position and would appreciate the opportunity to serve USA Fencing and our referees in this role over the next four years. I briefly review my qualifications for the position, plans as Vice Chair, initial implementation steps, and previous experience working with volunteers and committees.

Qualifications

I am an experienced national and international referee, having officiated at the national level since 2001, internationally since 2004, and earned FIE B licenses in all three weapons in 2007. I have refereed numerous local, regional, national, and international events, including bouts in the top four or top eight at the senior world cup level in all three weapons and have refereed at two Veteran World Championships. I have been the Editor for the USA Fencing Rules since 2017, am a former member of the Fencing Officials Commission (FOC), am currently a member of the Referees' Commission Rules Committee and am a Certified Referee Instructor.

I have a wide scope of institutional knowledge from diverse roles including as a competitive athlete, coach, referee, committee member, and as a member of the USA Fencing Board of Directors for 10 years. This has allowed me to establish relationships with other referees, coaches, fencers, and fencing families around the country such that I have a reputation for openness, understanding of diverse perspectives, and willingness to communicate.

By nature, I am an educator. I coached fencing initially as a part-time avocation before becoming a full-time coach, primarily at the collegiate level (University of Massachusetts & Temple University). Since then, I have successfully pursued a PhD and am currently an Assistant Professor in Sport Management. As such, I have training and experience in developing, implementing, and delivering training and educational materials, assessing knowledge, and helping others learn and grow.

Plans as Vice Chair

If selected as Vice Chair of Rules and Examinations, I anticipate continuing and building upon the successful projects initiated by current Vice Chair Devin Donnelly (e.g., RC Rules Blog, responding to rules questions from the membership), many of which I have been a part of as a member of the Rules Committee. The current Rules Committee comprises top-level referees and highly engaged athlete representatives. My first step would be to seek to retain existing members, who are all supremely qualified and do a remarkable job. I would also look to add one or two additional members, focusing on individuals who have a high level of national and international exposure and with an eye toward developing the next generation and succession planning.

My additional initial goals include renewing the online referee examination, reorganizing existing information and content related to rules interpretations, and providing greater access to existing rules collateral. In partnership with the Referee Development Committee and Vice Chair of Referee Development, I plan to renew the contents of the online referee examination. The exam and certification process and candidate preparation necessarily spans the domains of the Rules

Committee and the Referee Development Committee and requires close coordination. The existing examination would benefit from review and updating questions that are no longer applicable or that do not reflect recent changes in the rules or rule interpretations. At the same time, many of the questions are worded in ways that confuse test takers, increasing the level of stress in the process. As an interim step, identifying particularly problematic questions – using both feedback from candidates and data on which questions are most often answered incorrectly in live testing – and revising or replacing selected items should offer an immediate improvement to the test and the certification process. More extensive improvements and revamping the test structure is a larger scale project, described in the next paragraph. There exists considerable rules-related content developed by the Rules Committee and other initiatives by the Referees' Commission and, previously, by the Fencing Officials Commission. I hope to compile this content into a coherent and accessible repository that can serve as a resource to USA Fencing members and our referee cadre. As rules (and rule interpretations) change over time, older material requires careful review to ensure that it remains relevant and correct, yet much of this content is highly valuable and should be more accessible.

In the medium term, I have three goals as Vice Chair of Rules and Examinations. First, I would like to develop an annotated rules supplement modeled after examples from other sports. Many fencing rules require extensive fencing knowledge to interpret in the manner intended. Boundary conditions, edge cases, and fencing situations that require reconciling multiple applicable rules are common. An annotated rules supplement, appropriately maintained for currency, would be an invaluable resource for referees, fencers, and those who need to better understand how rules are applied. Ideally, such a supplement would include video examples to better illustrate situations that can be described only incompletely in text. Developing such a supplement would be an extensive undertaking that would require considerable contributions from a team of volunteers. Second, I would like to develop better study materials that go beyond a teach-to-the-test style question bank. This initiative would necessarily be in partnership with the Referee Development Committee and encompasses multi-modal training and educational materials designed for a range of audiences and referees at different levels. Finally, I intend to strengthen existing relationships with coaches and bring them directly into conversations regarding rules, rule interpretations, and proposed changes to the rules and training materials. Coaches offer a distinct perspective on how rules are applied and the potential impacts – both positive and negative – of proposed changes to the rules. Leveraging that expertise in understanding and communicating rules interpretations and proposed changes provides an essential viewpoint that can help inform discussions to the benefit of our referees and athletes.

Implementation

My initial steps toward these plans involve (a) working with existing Rules Committee members in an effort to seek their retention; (b) soliciting suggestions for additional members to add to the committee, actively recruiting and onboarding those selected to join, and mentoring their development; (c) reviewing the existing online rules examination and recent data from test takers to identify problematic items to prioritize in a renewal and updating process; (d) compiling and assessing existing rules content from the Rules Blog, email archives, back issues of American Fencing and the USA Fencing newsletter, and other sources to establish a single source repository of information that can subsequently be reviewed, updated, and republished; and (e) coordinating with National Office staff, who are often the first point of contact, to establish streamlined communications channels that can routinize processes and ease the burden imposed on staff from addressing rules-related questions from the membership.

Experience with Volunteers and Committees

The bulk of my experience with committees and related organizational structures has been as a working member. I have extensive experience in formal and informal groups across many levels both within and beyond fencing. In a leadership context, I have experience managing volunteers on short- and medium-term projects, such as organizing events. In my academic role, I routinely lead and manage research groups and have experience overseeing and managing teams involved in data collections. As a coach, particularly in my time as coach of collegiate clubs, I worked closely with student leaders to achieve organizational goals. This experience as a member of committees and in leading small groups of volunteers will be invaluable as Vice Chair of Rules and Examinations and overseeing the Referees' Commission Rules Committee.

I see the Referees' Commission as a key piece of USA Fencing, supporting our members in all of their activities and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue to serve through being selected as Vice Chair of Rules and Examinations. This position fits well with my background, experience, skills, and interests. I believe I can make a difference and contribute to the community and USA Fencing. I hope that this letter presents a clear picture of my qualifications and plans as Vice Chair. I remain more than happy to discuss any of these ideas or my vision for the position and thank you for your careful consideration of my candidacy.

Sincerely,



Bradley J. Baker