

Spectator Guide

Getting to Know the Olympic and Paralympic sport of fencing



Welcome! We're glad you're visiting this USA Fencing tournament. Fencing is most often compared to physical chess, and we've put together this guide to help you understand some of the pieces and moves. If you have questions, just ask a fencer! We're a friendly, welcoming community. And when you're ready to give fencing a try yourself, find a club near you at member.usafencing.org/clubs.

The Objective of Fencing

The goal of a fencing bout (that's what an individual "game" is called) is to score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or five points (in preliminary pool play) before your opponent can do the same or time expires. Each time a fencer scores a touch, they receive a point.

Points are earned by making a touch in the opponent's target area. Direct elimination matches in epee and foil consist of three 3-minute periods with a 1-minute break between each. In saber, the first period lasts for eight touches, and the second period ends when the first fencer scores 15 points.

Fencing Fast Facts

- Fencing is one of just five sports contested at every Olympics since 1896. (The others are athletics, cycling, swimming and gymnastics.)
- The metal fencing strip, or piste, is about 46 feet long. That's about a foot shorter than the distance from the baseline to the half-court line on a basketball court.
- Action begins when the referee says "En garde! Prêts? Allez!" — or "On guard! Ready? Fence!"

The Fencing Weapons

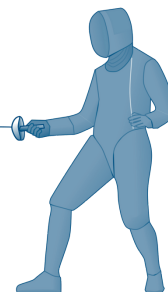


Epee



The epee (pronounced "EPP-pay"), 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.

A full-body target makes epee a competition of careful strategy and patience — wild, rash attacks are quickly punished with solid counter-attacks. Be smart and be strong!

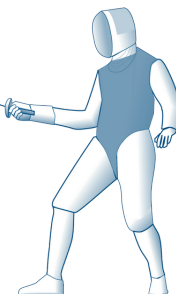


Foil



The foil is a descendant of the light court sword 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 and does not include the arms, neck, head and legs.

The flexible nature of the foil blade permits the modern elite foil fencer to attack an opponent from seemingly impossible angles. Watch out for back flicks!

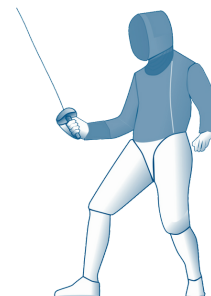


Saber



The saber is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword, and it's similar in length and weight to the foil. The major difference is the use of the blade. Saberists 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.

Saber is a fast, aggressive game, with fencers rushing their opponent from the moment the referee gives the instruction to fence. Don't blink!



Following the Action



Fencers seek to maintain a safe distance from each other — that is, they try to stay 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 hit is made, the referee stops the bout, describes the action, and decides whether to award a touch.

The referee always clearly raises their hand on the side of the fencer for whom they have awarded a point. Watching these signals can make it easier for newcomers to follow the momentum of a fencing bout without understanding every rule.



USA Fencing

The national governing body for the Olympic and Paralympic sport of fencing in the United States



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