



6655 Dublin Center Drive  
Dublin, Ohio 43017  
614-716-8531  
[www.614fencing.com](http://www.614fencing.com)

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO FENCING



### **Welcome to Columbus Fencing & Fitness!**

**We are excited to teach you about the sport of fencing  
and all the ways it can benefit your child.**

**That's why we wrote this booklet.**

**Read on and enjoy the adventure!**



## **The Basics** **(& some fun facts)**

Fencing is known as “**physical chess**” because it is both physically AND mentally challenging, requiring stamina, skill, strategy, sharp reflexes, self-discipline and superb mental focus.

Much like cross country, gymnastics, swimming, and track, **fencers compete as individuals** but also enjoy the benefits of being part of a team.

Fencing has **specific rules of etiquette** that teach fencers to respect their opponents, their coaches, and themselves.

Fencing teaches a child how to accept and **learn from success and failure.**

Fencing provides a **safe and healthy outlet** for aggression in a controlled environment.

Fencing is **among the safest sports available.** While there is the occasional bruise, pulled muscle, and sprain, serious injuries such as broken bones and concussions are uncommon.

Fencing **fuels a child’s imagination** and can build self-esteem.

# The Weapons

There are three different fencing weapons in modern fencing.



## Foil

- The lightest weapon, weighing in at less than one pound.
- The most flexible of the three weapons.
- A descendant of the court sword formally used by nobility to train for duels.
- Targets an opponent's mid-section only, from shoulders to groin in front and from shoulders to waist in back.

## Épée

(pronounced EPP-pay)

- Heavier than the foil, weighing almost 1.7 pounds.
- Has a thicker, less flexible blade than the foil.
- A descendant of the dueling sword.
- Targets an opponent's entire body, including the head and feet.

## Saber

- Similar in weight to the foil.
- Has the least flexible blade.
- A modern version of the traditional cavalry sword.
- Targets an opponent's body above the waist, including the head.
- A faster and more aggressive form of fencing than foil or epee.

*Fun fact: The reason saber touches can only be scored above the waist is because in the days of cavalry fighting, it was considered poor form to injure a soldier's horse.*

# Outfitting Your Fencer

All fencers, regardless of weapon, are required to wear:

- ❖ Jacket.
- ❖ Knickers (pants).
- ❖ Mask.
- ❖ Underarm protectors (also called plastrons), worn under the jacket.
- ❖ Chest protector (required for females).
- ❖ Glove.
- ❖ Long socks that reach the bottom of the knickers.
- ❖ Fencing shoes or running/tennis shoes.

In addition, those competing in foil or saber must wear an extra garment, called a lamé (pronounced la-MAY) for electronic scoring.

The foil lamé consists of a conductive vest covering the torso and groin.

The saber lamé consists of a conducting jacket covering the torso and arms. In addition, saber fencers wear a conductive mask.

*Fun fact: Fencers wear white uniforms because before electronic scoring, ink-soaked pads were attached to the tips of fencing weapons so touches could be scored visually on the uniform.*



# Finding the Right Tournament

## Local & Regional Competitions

Most local and regional tournaments can be found on [www.askfred.net](http://www.askfred.net). We strongly recommend that you set up an account on askfred.net for easy online registration. Not only is askFRED free, it also keeps records of your results! When you set up an account, please add Columbus Fencing and Fitness as your club. AskFRED has two separate listings for our club. Please choose the one that reflects the Columbus Division rather than the National Division (COLM vs NAT). Tournament organizers try to organize pool bouts so that club members don't initially compete against each other.

Columbus Fencing and Fitness hosts a variety of tournaments throughout the year, including the Ray and Melanie Bautista Memorial fencing tournament held each May, which draws top fencing talent from throughout Ohio and the Midwest.

## National Competitions

Large U.S. national tournaments, such as the North American Cup, the Junior Olympics, and the U.S. Summer Nationals, are listed on [www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org). These tournaments require advance online registration. Some national events are limited to fencers who have qualified by competing in certain regional or local tournaments.



## International Competitions

European and other international tournaments are listed on [www.FIE.com](http://www.FIE.com). Most international tournaments require a fencer to qualify at a national level.

## Understanding Rankings

All new fencers start with an “Unclassified” or “U” classifications.

Fencers increase their classification from U to E, D, C, B, or A (the highest classification) by placing in certain USFA-sanctioned tournaments.

The numbers following a classification letter indicate the year in which the classification was earned. For example, a D13 classification would indicate the fencer's D was earned in 2013.

## Preparing for Tournaments

Once your child reaches a skill level where tournament competition is the next logical step, there are four key areas critical to maximizing your child's opportunity for success.

### 1. Communication with coaches:

Although coaches may suggest upcoming tournaments, it is ultimately the parent and child that must decide together which tournament to enter. Once you are registered for the tournament, be sure to let your coach know the time and date. One week before the competition, discuss with your coach whether any training modification is needed in anticipation of the event.



**2. Sleeping habits:** Sleep is very important. A good night's sleep is essential for a good performance, so don't let your child stay up late the night before a tournament. Sleep deprivation is cumulative, so your child should get at least 8 hours of sleep in the days preceding the tournament.

**3. What your child eats and drinks:** The night before a tournament, a meal with carbohydrates and lean protein, such as pasta with chicken, will prepare your child's body. The morning of a tournament, breakfast should include another protein (eggs are good) for an additional boost. Avoid fatty foods (such as donuts) which can slow your child down. Hydration is also vital to an athlete's success, so be sure your child drinks plenty of water the night before the tournament, and during the tournament as well.

**4. Your child's emotional state (and yours):** It's normal to experience a wide range of emotions before, during and after competition. How a competitive fencer learns to concentrate and execute skills on the strip -- despite the anxiety, doubts, and/or excitement -- is a complex task and unique to each fencer. But parents and fencers alike need to remember competition is not about winning. It's about showing up, trying your best at all times, and focusing on that next touch.

## Important!

When traveling to tournaments, make sure weapons are working properly before departure and after arrival. Weapons can be damaged during transit.

Expect tournaments to take all day. They often do. Patience and bringing quiet activities to help occupy yourself and your fencer – a book, an iPad, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, knitting, drawing supplies, the newspaper – will make the time between bouts go faster.

## What to Bring to Tournaments

Take the time to double- and triple-check your equipment and make sure the tournament bag is fully packed before leaving home. There's nothing more unnerving to a fencer and irritating to parents than having to scramble to find, borrow or buy (if possible) the plastron still hanging in the laundry room. While you may have your own additions, this makes a good checklist for the essentials:

- USFA Membership Card or other proof of USFA Membership (iPhone app)
- Shoes
- Socks
- Fencing Pants - Knickers
- Fencing Jacket
- Plastron (Underarm Protector)
- Chest Protector (Women)
- Cup (men)
- Glove
- Lamé (for foil and saber)
- Mask
- At least 2 working weapons
- At least 2 working body cords (and mask cords if saber)
- Entrance fee (unless pre-paid)
- Extra T-shirt
- Towel
- Change of clothes for post-fencing
- Large, refillable water bottle labeled with fencer's name
- Food for between rounds (bananas, power bars & more bananas)
- Money for meals before and after competition (and a tournament t-shirt!)
- Journal or notebook & pen/pencil
- Book or activity for between rounds (fencer)
- Book or activity for the day (parent)
- Portable or folding camp chair
- Extra layer of clothes if the venue is air conditioned (parent)
- Camera/Video recorder to capture any milestones or memories



## What to Expect

Most fencing tournaments organize fencers into “pools” of 5 to 7 fencers for the preliminary round of fencing. Pool assignments are usually posted at the facility. In the preliminary round, the first fencer to score five touches wins the bout.

After the pools are completed, the results are tabulated and the fencers are ranked. This ranking is then used to create a direct elimination table where the fencers will compete again, this time to

15 touches (10 touches for Y10 youth and veteran events) or nine minutes – whichever occurs first.

Note: In some very large tournaments, the direct elimination table may only include the top 80% or 90% of the pool results.

In direct elimination, if the fencer wins, he or she moves on to fence again; if they lose, they are out of the tournament.

A referee observes each bout and uses hand signals to indicate points scored. The referee also indicates which fencer has the right-of-way as points are scored.

All scoring is recorded electronically and the scoring machine will light up on the side of the fencer who scores each point.

The referee may assess penalties during a bout. A yellow card is a warning and prevents the fencer from scoring a touch. A red card results in the opponent being awarded a point. A black card results in the fencer being excluded from the remainder of the competition.

When the tournament is over, the final results are posted and an award ceremony is held.

*Fun fact: Only one object in sports moves faster than the tip of a fencing weapon: a sharpshooter's bullet.*

## Other Tips for Success

Be realistic about your child's abilities. Fencing skills take time to develop. Regular practice will help your child improve more quickly, but don't push your child to enter competitions until a coach says he or she is ready to do so.

When your child is ready for competition, start small and local. This gives your child the opportunity to familiarize himself with how tournaments are run.

Keep your child's focus – and your own – on having fun and celebrating new skills. It's not all about winning. Even small improvements can be big victories!

Coaches won't tell you how to parent. Likewise, parents shouldn't coach their child. Your job is to be supportive and encouraging at all times. We'll handle the rest.



# Speaking the Language

Like any sport, fencing comes with its own vocabulary. Here are some terms you should know:

**Advance** - Stepping towards the opponent with the front foot, followed by the back foot.

**Attack** - Aggressive movements made in an attempt to score a point. To properly execute an attack, the fencer's hand must be clearly extended towards their opponent.

**Beat** - A sharp tap on an opponent's blade to initiate an attack or provoke a reaction.



**Body cords** - An insulated wire connecting the fencer to the electronic scoring system. Foil and saber body cords have two prongs on the weapon side with a third wire connecting to the lamé; epee body cords have two sets of three prongs each, with one set connecting to the weapon and the other connecting to the scoring system.

**Bout** - What an individual “game” is called in fencing.

**Corps-a-corps** - When a fencer's body accidentally or purposefully touches the body of his or her opponent. All weapon action is immediately halted.

**Disengage** - Evasive action taken to avoid letting the opponent take the fencer's blade.

**Engage** - Contact between the fencers' blades, often as the prelude to an attack.

**En Garde** - The “ready” position fencers take before the action begins.

**Feint** - A false attack intended to get a defensive reaction from the opponent, creating the opportunity for a genuine attack.

**FIE** - Federation Internationale d'Escrime, more commonly known as the International Fencing Federation.

**Fleche** - An explosive, running attack used in foil and epee.

**Flunge** - A combination of a fleche and a lunge, used only in saber.

**Guard; Bell Guard** - The part of the weapon that protects the hand.

**Lunge** - Pushing off of the back leg to launch an attack on the opponent.

**Parry; Counter-Parry** - Blocking an opponents' blade.

**Point-in-Line** -Pointing a weapon, with arm fully extended, at the opponent while still out of attacking range.

**Recover** - Returning to the en garde position after lunging.

**Remise** - Attacking again immediately after an opponent's parry.

**Right-of-Way** - In foil and saber, the fencer who attacks or establishes a point-in-line has right of way. There is no ROW in epee.



**Riposte** - Taking offensive action immediately after parrying an opponent's attack.

**Strip** - The 46-foot long grounded metal platform upon which competitors duel. Also referred to as a piste, which is French for track.

**Thrust with Opposition** - A fencer simultaneously deflecting an opponent's point by using his or her guard while making an attack of his or her own.

**Touch or Touche** - When "legal" contact is made with an opponent; each touch equals one point

**USFA** - United States Fencing Association, also known as USA Fencing.

## Still have questions?

These are fencing websites we have found to be particularly helpful:

[www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org) (U.S. governing body of fencing)

<http://www.fie.org/en/> (International fencing news, rules and information)

<http://www.614fencing.com/> (Local events, news blog, YouTube videos, etc.)

[www.askfred.net](http://www.askfred.net). (Most local and regional tournaments listings)

In addition, please know that the Columbus Fencing and Fitness coaching staff is always willing to answer questions and offer advice. Contact us at 614-FENCING (336-2464) or visit [www.614fencing.com](http://www.614fencing.com).

*We look forward to seeing your child with a weapon in their hand!*