

Commentaries and Procedures for the Judging and Directing of Small-sword Formal Assaults

INTRODUCTION

Small-sword tournaments consist of two parts. The first part will be academic in nature to demonstrate the fencer's proficiency in the art of fencing. It is based on the academic assaults that took place in fencing schools or contests of skill where nothing leading to rough play was permitted. The second part will be combative in nature with full body target to demonstrate the practical application of the art. It is based on the duel in which thrusts to the face, disarms, and seizing the adversary's sword are all permitted.

ACADEMIC SMALL-SWORD

1.0 General Conditions of the Assault

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.

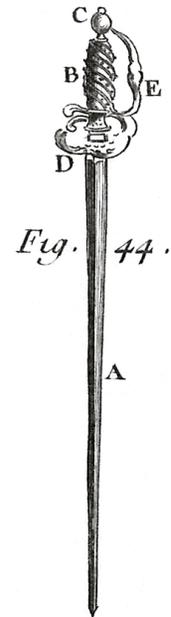
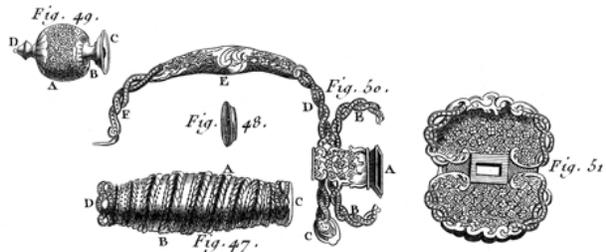
2.0 Weapons and Equipment Specifications and Requirements

All weapons and equipment must be inspected by officials prior to the beginning of the tournament. Each participant is required to bring 2 weapons to be inspected.

A. Weapons

- I. Permitted weapons: small-sword. No auxiliary weapons allowed.
- II. Hilt must be of the French, Spanish or Italian type and must be constructed in as historically accurate a manner as possible within the realm of safety. The hilt of weapons must be constructed without any type of eccentricity with regard to the quillions, knuckle bow, or ricasso, and without anachronism, such as offset guards. The guard of the weapon can be no wider than 4.5 inches and the quillions must not protrude more than 1 inch beyond the circumference of the guard. Blades must be standard *épée* or double-wide *épée*, between 29–35 inches. The point of the blade must be covered with a winding of waxed thread covered with adhesive tape and then covered with a leather patch or rubber coating. Rubber or plastic buttons, or their equivalent (such as rubber 'archery blunts'), are acceptable but must be secured to the blade with adhesive tape.

Components of a French small-sword hilt



French small-sword

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 of any type will be permitted. Extra protection for the throat, such as a *gorget* made of steel or leather (not less than 4 oz) is required, and must be sufficiently padded to provide impact protection. All masks must fit properly to ensure maximum protection.
- II. Standard three-weapon jackets or equivalent commercially available protection,

which in order to facilitate judging of touches may be of any solid color EXCEPT BLACK, are required for tournaments. Jackets must be made of strong material, preferably of heavily padded cotton duck or canvas. The jacket must overlap the waist of the pants/knickers completely by a minimum of 2 inches. Long pants or fencing knickers must be worn and must be of a strong, tight weave, non-stretch material.

- III. Heavy plastrons over the jacket are recommended. Breast protectors are required for women, and rigid groin cups are required for men.
- IV. Padded sabre gloves for both hands, or the equivalent, are required. The cuffs of the gloves must overlap the sleeves by at least 3 inches, and construction must be of sturdy leather or equivalent material.

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

3.0 Technique and Safety

A. Target Area

- I. A belt must be worn, the upper edge of which is waist level. The area for good touches is bounded by the top of the collar and the top of the belt on the front and back, and by the seams where the sleeves are attached to the jacket. Arms and anything below the top of the belt is off-target.
- II. All belts will be of the same width and will be provide by the AHF.
- III. An Instant apology is required from a fencer who hits his adversary on the mask. However, if, in the opinion of the judges, the hit was malicious, the offender will be ejected from the tournament.

B. Cuts

Cuts are not allowed.

C. Thrusts

- I. Thrusts must land distinctly on target, and the blade must bend sufficiently on impact to demonstrate penetrating power.
- II. Jabbing or punching actions are forbidden because they do not qualify as thrusts.

D. Use of the Unarmed Hand

The use of the unarmed hand is not permitted.

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 and 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.
- B. Ducking, slipping and all evasive displacements of the body, including those in which part of the body comes in contact with the ground, for the purpose of avoiding being hit are permitted, provided the action remains controlled. However, should the director feel that the action is uncontrolled or constitutes a fall, he shall halt the assault. A fencer may not substitute valid target by displacing the body in any manner that would replace a valid target with an invalid target on purpose to avoid being hit. For example: a fencer can not lower his body to replace the valid target with the head; if a fencer uses a valid technique such as a *passato sotto* but receives a hit on an invalid surface a point shall be scored against him.



Hatch indicates valid target areas

- C. Wrestling techniques are forbidden. This includes, but is not limited to, tripping and knocking down an adversary. The use of striking actions such as punches, chops and kicks are forbidden. Blows of any variety are forbidden. Grappling techniques are forbidden, including but not limited to joint locks, throws and tripping. Bodily contact of any kind is prohibited.

NOTE: Any violation of the wrestling and grappling prohibitions will result in ejection.

5.0 General Conduct

- A. The fencers may acknowledge receiving a touch by declaring "touch" in a loud voice.
- B. Speaking while under arms (except for acknowledging a touch against oneself) is not permitted 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 touch or that he disapproves of a decision.
- F. Emotional outbursts or displays of temper before, during or after an assault are forbidden. Participants must exhibit self-control and good manners.
- G. 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. 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 exchange that, in his opinion, is unruly, patently unfair and/or unsafe. Additionally, the director shall have the power to:
- Commence, halt, 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.
- B. The director will be assisted in his duties by 4 judges, the responsibility of whom it will be to watch for touches occurring during the assault, which they will signal against the fencer who was touched by raising the hand and declaring "touch" in a loud voice.
- C. Judges shall have 1 vote each and the director shall have 1½ votes. A minimum of 1½ votes is required to award a touch.

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

7.0 Procedure

- A. All assaults shall be for 3 points, with points scored against the fencer receiving the touch. In all assaults there shall be a time limit of 5 minutes. If the score is tied at the end of this time period, one additional touch will be fenced without time limit to determine a winner.
- B. To begin the assault the director shall bring both fencers 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 uniform, etc.) he shall bring them on guard with the command "Fencers take your 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 whether the touch was good or off target. The judges must respond with one of the following: "yes," "no," "abstain," "off target," "insufficient penetration," "*passé*" (passed), or "*plaque*" (flat).
- D. Touches without interval (continuance of the attack) count up to 2 touches. Only 2 successive touches are to count as good.
- E. A double touch (encounter) is not counted on either side unless one of the fencers, in the opinion of the director, resorts to it in order to bring the score equal, in which case the thrust of the other fencer is good. If, in the opinion of the director, one touch was clearly out of time, then the touch arriving on time is the only one valid.
- F. A touch off the target that arrives at the same time as a good touch by an adversary is not valid. The touch made on the valid surface is counted as valid. All touches made off target result in the director halting the assault.
- G. If a fencer disarms his adversary by beating or binding the weapon, a touch is good only if made instantaneously.
- H. The fencers may acknowledge any touches they have received. However the director has the final say in awarding the touch.

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 (meaning any part of the foot outside of the designated boundary lines) he will receive a warning. 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.

COMBATIVE SMALL-SWORD

1.0 General Conditions of the Assault

Fencers will fence in a ring on a *piste* 30 feet long by 6 feet wide. Stepping out of bounds (one foot constitutes out of bounds) will be penalized as detailed in section 8.0.

2.0 Weapons, Equipment Specifications and Requirements

- A. Same as in Academic section.
- B. All weapons and equipment will be inspected prior to the Academic portion of the tournament.

3.0 Technique and Safety

- A. Target Area
The target area shall include all parts of the body except the back of the head and the hands.
- B. Use of the Unarmed Hand
 - I. The unarmed hand may be used to parry.
 - II. Seizing of the blade is permitted. The fencer seizing the blade can do so only momentarily. Twisting or pulling the blade, however, is prohibited. This is not the same as disarming, in which the blade, hilt or arm is seized in a manner specific to the technique. The defending fencer, in order to avoid injury to the fencer who has seized the blade, must not twist or pull his weapon away when it is seized. Permissible actions in this case include letting go of the weapon (which is counted as a disarmament) or employing a counter seizure. If a counter seizure is employed, the director will call a halt to ensure safety and forestall grappling.
 - III. Disarming techniques by means of seizing the arm, forte of the blade or hilt of the adversary's weapon are permitted. This counts as 1 point scored against the fencer who was disarmed. A disarm concluding in a touch, executed as a continuous action, shall count as 3 points, regardless of target area. However, should a fencer drop his weapon as a result of the impact on a valid target surface, that shall not be considered as a disarm. In this case, a halt shall be called and the fencer shall be allowed to reclaim his weapon. The decision of whether a weapon was dropped because of a valid impact shall be solely at the discretion of the director, and this decision shall not be affected by the decision of the judges.

4.0 Infighting

Same as in the Academic section except for the following changes:

The use of the unarmed hand for checking and pushing is permitted. Pulling the adversary with the unarmed hand is allowed. Use of the weapon for checking or pushing is permitted. Actions and techniques that constitute a blow, a strike or impact are prohibited.

NOTE: Any violation of the wrestling and grappling prohibitions will result in ejection.
(see Academic section 4.0)

5.0 General Conduct

Same as in Academic section.

6.0 Officiating

Same as in Academic section.

7.0 Procedure

Same as in the Academic section except for the following changes:

- I. All assaults shall be for 3 points, with points scored against the fencer receiving the touch. Thrusts to the body and face shall count for 3 points; thrusts to the rest of the body for 1 point. In all assaults there shall be a time limit of 5 minutes. 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.
- II. 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 "Fencers take your guard." He shall then step back and give the command "fence." The fencers shall cease fencing upon the command "halt." The director may separate the fencers with a cane.
- III. 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 direction of the touch (who was touched) and where it arrived.
- IV. A double touch (encounter) is counted against both fencers. If the encounter brings the score tied 3 to 3, it is counted as a double defeat.

8.0 Violations of the rules

Same as in the Academic section except for the following changes:

If a fencer steps off any boundary of the ring with one foot (meaning the whole foot outside of the designated boundary lines) he will receive a warning. 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.

OVERALL WINNER OF SMALL-SWORD

In the event that there are two different winners in the Academic and Combative portions of the tournament, 1 assault will be fenced to determine an overall winner under the combative rules. The target area will change, increasing the difficulty to insure that the fencers demonstrate both an acute sense of academic and practical skill.

1.0 Target Area

The target area will be restricted to the torso and sword arm delineated by the top of the belt and the top of the collar of the jacket.

2.0 Officiating

The assault will be for 3 points. A touch to the torso counts as 1 point and a touch to the arm counts as ½ point. There is no time limit.

The AHF Rules Committee
Jeannette Acosta-Martinez, chair
Ramon Martinez, ex-officio
Keith S. Massey, Jana Umbs, Christopher Umbs
Editors: Ken Mondschein and Andy Baiman

Association for Historical Fencing, Inc. 2000
Revised March 2001
Revised January 2009

Rules adapted from the Rules of Toulouse 1696