



PARENT GUIDE TO FENCING

For parents and fencers

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Presented by

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This information can be located online at www.usfencing.org/

With local editorial in Italics

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INTRODUCTION

This guide was prepared by the Co-Chairs of USFA Parent Committee to provide clarity and current information. Our combined "fencing life" of over thirty years reflects an array of array of experiences in the sport. We started driving our children to lessons when they were young, accompanied them to local and national tournaments as they grew, and volunteered in a variety of areas within fencing.

This guide was created to help parents navigate the competitive aspects of fencing, whether local, regional or national and try to avoid pitfalls. The basics remain constant, but we will update this guide, as new information becomes available. The data in this handbook is advisory.

The Parent Committee is an information committee; it does not make policy. We are however, always interested in your comments and insights. We can direct your questions and concerns to the appropriate individual or committee.

The Parent Committee holds informational meetings during the season, primarily at Junior Olympics and Summer Nationals.

FENCING FOR PARENTS 101

A family membership in the USFA is strongly encouraged. Parents are children's best advocates. Membership in USFA allows you to have a voice on behalf of your child. In addition, you will receive the quarterly American Fencing Magazine and USFA national newsletters. Membership will place you on the mailing list for Division competition schedules.

The relationship between athlete and coach can become very strong, but the parent is the last word when it comes to parenting. The coach is the last word when it comes to fencing.

Teaching styles vary, as do personalities, so when searching for a private instructor, make sure you and your fencer are comfortable with the particular methodologies of the selected coach. Your fencer may be comfortable with lessons, but in the heat of competition a fragile relationship can fracture. Open communication is essential, but parents should always keep things on a professional basis.

Start your child in group lessons. Group lessons enable your child to learn the basics in a fun, non-pressure environment. Make sure fencing is something your child wishes to pursue on a long-term basis before seeking private instruction. Fencing should enhance your child's development; maintain an open attitude to all fencing opportunities in your area.

The cost of fencing can be very reasonable. Disabuse yourself of financial advantage; i.e., scholarships, endorsements, etc. This is a different kind of investment. The goal of fencing is intrinsic to fencing.

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

First and foremost, get your child to the club to train regularly.

School obligations come first, so utilize school holidays for maximizing training opportunities. Training two months a year at a camp will yield very limited results. A consistent training curriculum is strongly encouraged. [Author's note: Some young athletes may become so enamored of fencing that it eclipses all other activities including academics. While we appreciate the dedication and satisfaction the sport may bring the child, this can impinge on the child's future academic success]

Ensure that your child has a small snack before training and takes a water bottle to the club.

Be careful about weight training before it's appropriate age-wise. Consult with your child's doctor before starting any rigorous training program. Over training for short periods of time followed by long periods of less or no training is certain to result in injury.

Have realistic expectations of your child's ability. Don't rush into competition until his or her training is well under way; then start fencing locally. Until your child is consistently finishing well in local and regional competitions, he/she is not ready for national tournaments.

It's easy to get caught up in any success your child may have. Be careful not to impose your goals for success onto your child. Your child is the athlete, not you.

Your child's coach may require your child to keep a training notebook. While it is not your responsibility, you may want to gently encourage your child to record information so as not to become a source of aggravation; do not, however, be tempted to perform this task for your child. Keeping these records for oneself and thinking about what they mean is the point of the activity, not just filling up a notebook.

It is not necessary to purchase Federation Internationale d'Esime (FIE) equipment for your child. Some coaches will not even allow fencers to own a weapon until they have "earned" it. Do buy the best mask available. Masks are expensive, but safety is paramount.

A mask and glove are the best starter gear! Birthdays, holidays and special events are excellent times to add to your child's equipment.

A parent's primary purpose at a tournament is to support your child. That means you are your child's mode of transport, a "gofer" and "the mobile ATM machine." *And remember if you disappear, be close enough to return with the water!* (The fencer's primary function is to focus on his/her event, fence to the best of his/her ability and **HAVE FUN.**

REMEMBER THIS: Chauffeur, gofer, and credit card holder.

SELECTING A COACH

Selecting a coach may not be an easy process. If you are attached to a club or live in an area that has limited fencing opportunities, your selection may be a fait accompli. However, if you live in an area with a larger number of fencing options you should consider the various possibilities to determine the best coach for your child. This does not necessarily mean an Olympic level coach, but rather a coach who will work well with your child. A coach should instill good training habits, model fair play and expect good behavior on and off the strip. You and your child should feel comfortable speaking with the coach about problems, concerns and goals. Make sure your child feels truly comfortable with the style of coaching. Children react differently to different styles. What works for one child may not work for yours, or even a second child in your own family. Your child should NEVER be subjected to abuse (verbal, emotional, or physical) as a route to success on the strip.

A good coach is often an extension of the "parenting process" and may have a profound effect on your child. You must feel sufficiently comfortable with that person to allow him or her to have that effect.

In addition, do not feel pressured by a coach to put your child into high-level competition before he or she is ready. Coaches can sometimes become overzealous; athletes competing too early at high levels may experience burnout. Consider your personal finances as well. If it will be too much of a strain on your financial situation to attend a particular competition or send your child to a distant camp, say No. Don't make sacrifices before you need to.

INTRODUCTION TO COMPETITION

SET REALISTIC, ATTAINABLE GOALS

Your fencer should work with his/her coach to create a list of goals. These should include:

- Short term
- Goals for current competitive season
- Long term

Your fencer should not expect to have immediate success. The most robust advances are made in small, consistent increments. Small victories lead to large triumphs. Start your child's competitive experience locally. If it's drivable within 4 hours, it's local. After that, it's a personal choice.

Many clubs offer intramural events and various divisions offer novice tournaments for fencers with less than two year's competitive experience. Communicate with your child's coach about which local tournaments are most appropriate for the age-level and development of the child.

Children's temperaments vary. Some children may prefer to do only local competition, while others "hanker for the bright lights." Let your child dictate his/her comfort level.

Make sure you have your division's tournament schedule. This should be in your division's newsletter. You will be on the division mailing list if you are a USFA member. Read your newsletter for important information regarding division tournaments. Entry fees, pre-registration requirements, time of events, etc. should be readily available. You may also be able to find out this information on the web. The USFA website www.usfencing.org has pointers to division and section websites.

Travel costs for coaches are most often borne by the parents. (These costs are not included in your regular floor fees or lesson fees). Fees will vary from club to club, division to division and state to state. Some clubs will fundraise to help defray the cost of coach's travel for young fencers. Still others solicit members for frequent flier mile donations.

AVOID DISTRACTIONS

If possible, very young children should stay at home. A long day at a fencing venue can be boring to those not directly involved in the tournament. Activity not related to fencing can be distracting, draining, and/or disruptive to the athlete and dangerous to young children.

Also, encourage your child not to bring girlfriends or boyfriends to the practice club or competition venue. The fencer is there to focus on his training or competition and should have minimal distractions.

Leave your pets at home. A practice club or competition venue is no place for pets.

EQUIPMENT

Be aware your child does not have to own FIE equipment. FIE equipment is only required for international events. For local, and/or national tournaments you must have full regulation gear. For national tournaments, the fencer's name must be on your lamé, knickers and/or jacket. Wash equipment before taking to tournaments. Leaving a room deodorizer in the fencing bag or using Febreze does not equal a clean uniform.

Following is a list of minimum required equipment. Make sure your child has the necessary equipment. Check weapons to make sure they are working before you leave for the tournament. Don't go to any event with non-working weapons. While it may seem compulsive, your child should check them again upon arrival. Equipment can be affected by travel.

PUT IDENTIFICATION ON ALL YOUR EQUIPMENT!!!!

- MASK (sewn-in bib, must pass 12K punch test)
- UNDERARM PROTECTOR
- BREAST PROTECTOR (mandatory for women)
- JACKET (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm)
- LAMÉ
- KNICKERS (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm, must be overlapped by jacket by at least four inches)
- GLOVE (no holes except for body cord. Must cover approximately half your forearm)
- LONG SOCKS (white, must reach bottom of your knickers)
- FENCING SHOES or SNEAKERS
- MINIMUM** two working weapons (epees must pass weight and shim test)
- MINIMUM** two working body cords
- FENCING BAG (to carry your equipment in)
- WATER BOTTLE**
- TOWEL** and **PLASTIC BAG** to hold wet equipment
- TOOL KIT (screwdrivers for tip and pommel, spare screws, springs, Allen wrench, small white cloth to use as base, small magnet, flashlight)
- TEST BOX and weight and shims will help avoid penalties on strip for nonworking equipment

WASHING EQUIPMENT

- Wash as you would any other whites, EXCEPT do not use chlorine bleach
- Lamés, may be hung in the shower and spray rinsed and drip dry; some people use blow dryers
- Masks may be washed in dishwashers (make sure to wash by itself)
- Washable gloves and socks per normal wash

PARENTAL BEHAVIOR

Parents should be seen and not heard at tournaments. You should be accessible to your child with water, food and support, but not interfere with coaching or team activities.

Your child may or may not want you next to the fencing strip. Some youngsters find it reassuring; most find that they put added pressure upon themselves when performing in front of parents. Some fencers may change their minds about wanting parents around during the course of the tournament; they may or may not remember to be polite when requesting that you leave. Please don't take it personally - let them know you understand and then disappear. Parents are both lightning rods and safe havens in this situation. **Talk with your fencer about what he/she would like before you go to the tournament, but be prepared for changes of mind.**

Children may have strong emotional reactions to the stress of the competition, whether the bout is won or lost. Keep tissues handy. If your child won't take them from you, send someone you know and trust to comfort your child.

When you get to the division tournament you will need to have the **athlete's** USFA card with you to establish his or her current membership status.

At a local tournament, initial seeding, pools, direct elimination tableaus, and/or final results may be posted but will probably be verbally announced. The local Bout Committee (BC) will tell you which strip to go to. You must listen very carefully for all announcements.

Do not continually ask the BC or an organizer questions like how long before fencing begins, how long before the next round, whether your child gets points or a classification. During the tournament, they are too busy trying to make it run smoothly to respond to such questions. Continuous questioning will only delay events.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

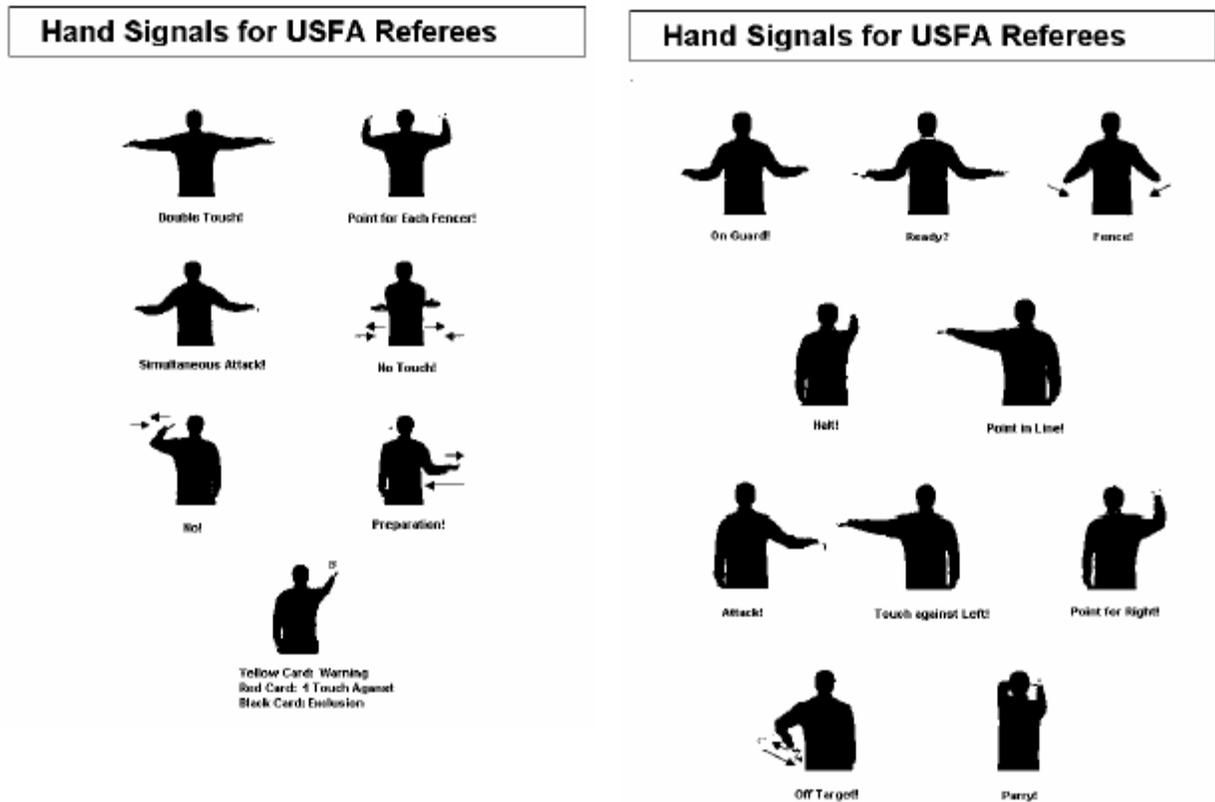
Below are a few suggestions to help make your time at a fencing venue more productive and interesting:

- ✓ Learn fencing terminology. You don't have to know the sport inside out to be able to understand certain words and their usage
- ✓ Study the referee hand signals and know when a touch is awarded to your child (see Figure 1)
- ✓ Volunteer at division tournaments to find out what is entailed in running successful competitions
- ✓ Learn how to keep time and score for pools as well as direct elimination's
- ✓ Learn basic armoring and gently remind your athlete to check his/her gear between rounds

BE PREPARED TO WAIT!

Fencing events generally take all day. Unless your child does not move up from the initial rounds (pools), you can expect to spend a great deal of time in the venue. Be patient. The BC is working to get your child's event moving as fast as they can. Bring something that will help you pass the time - a book, knitting, a personal computer, etc.

Figure 1. Referee Hand Signals



Encourage your child to rest, drink water, and perhaps eat something light while waiting between rounds.

The athlete's anxiety may be high; your job is to provide a calm environment. They will absorb any anxiety you exude.

Ranting about results, referees, venue, etc. diminishes the entire experience for everyone.

There are usually few seats available to spectators in venues. Bring your own folding chair or stool and use it. DO NOT take chairs meant for athletes. They need somewhere to sit between bouts to keep their legs "fresh". Placing a towel over their legs will help keep the muscles warm.

Bring a cooler of food and water if possible. Most local venues do not offer food service. There are products made for coolers that are in the form of a 'blanket'. This can

serve double duty: keeping the food and water cool and, as needed, for placing on an injury. Be supportive of your fencer no matter what the outcome of the tournament. Every tournament is a learning experience. Discuss with your fencer what they have learned and what they will work to improve upon.

The following suggestions have been garnered over years of experience and apply to all tournaments, local, regional, national and international.

THINGS YOU SHOULD AVOID AT TOURNAMENTS

1. **NEVER** leave anything valuable unattended. If your child has a locking fencing bag, make sure you have separate keys with you.
2. **NEVER** belittle other parents, competitors, and referees or disparage those running the event. Everyone is doing his or her best. Volunteerism drives the organization and events.
3. **NEVER** say anything disparaging to your youngster. It is amazing how easy it is to relieve one's own anxiety by telling a fencer he/she did something stupid. However, if your fencer has been less than brilliant in a bout, he/she is probably aware of it.
4. **NEVER** offer your youngster rewards for competing well. This only adds unneeded pressure in an already tough situation.
5. **DON'T** talk all the time. Fencers need time to prepare themselves mentally, without distractions. If you don't understand what is going on, ask someone who isn't fencing that day.
6. **DON'T** aggravate the officials or other coaches, fencers or spectators. If you think there is a problem, quietly find a coach.
7. **AVOID** doing or saying anything that will put pressure on your fencer to win. Remember, we are all in this for fun.

THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN AT A TOURNAMENT

1. Make sure your fencer drinks enough - refill his/her water bottle whenever necessary.
2. Repair equipment when necessary if you know how, or take it to someone who can (team manager, event armorer, etc).
3. If things are going badly, find your youngster's coach. (Keep in mind the coach is often trying to watch several students at once.) Many parents have expressed surprise that their children, who look to them for support in all other aspects of life, seem to want only their coach at time of fencing crisis.
4. When cheering for your fencer, use encouraging words, and only in between actions, not after the director says "fence." If you're not sure who scored the touch, keep quiet. Applaud at the end of each bout regardless of outcome for your child.
5. Bring food or know where you can get some for your fencer to eat between rounds.
6. Be Positive! Remember that no matter how your fencer is competing today, he/she is a terrific youngster.

Pay attention to when your division/section qualifiers will be held. The following national championship tournaments have qualifying paths – Junior Olympics, Division 1 and Summer Nationals. **ONLY** those fencers who have qualified **AND WHO HAVE SENT IN THEIR REGISTRATION MATERIALS** are permitted to fence in these events. Refer to the Athlete Handbook for qualifying paths. The handbook may be found on the US Fencing web site at www.usfencing.org.

Communicate with your child's coach and ascertain the exact dates of any appropriate qualifying events and file all entry forms well before the due date. The coach should not be responsible for turning in any entry forms, whether local or national.

In addition to club and division events, consider participating in the newly formed youth regional events and established section events. The Youth Regional Tournament Cup has been devised to help fencers gain more experience before moving on to higher level tournaments. The Youth Regional tournaments are expected to become a qualifying path in the future and these competitions are an excellent opportunity to compete against fencers from varying regions.

MOVING ON TO NORTH AMERICAN CIRCUITS (NACs)/NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS (At the end of this official USFA parent guide text, there is additional material that would be appropriate to this topic.)

Once your child is performing locally at a consistent level and improvements are solid, your athlete may be ready to consider competing at a national tournament.

Your child's first start at a national tournament should be in his/her age category. This might mean trying to qualify for the summer nationals. (*See qualifying paths in Athlete Handbook*) Don't push your child(ren) to compete in every age event for which he/she qualifies; the same guidelines should apply as for local events. You and the coach should discuss what events would fit best in the overall training scheme.

If you decide a NAC event will be the first national event, send the entry form in a timely manner. There are numerous ways to send in an entry. You may fax your entry form to Colorado (request fax back of receipt of your entry) or mail (enclose a self-addressed postcard). If you send via mail, we recommend sending it return receipt requested or using any service with a tracking number.

Tournament confirmation materials sent to you by USFA have important information such as date, time of your event and directions to the venue and host hotel. Make your hotel reservations as early as possible. Host hotels fill up quickly.

MAKE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS TO ARRIVE AT LEAST ONE FULL, EARLY DAY BEFORE (DEPENDING ON LOCATION) AND LEAVE THE DAY AFTER YOUR CHILD'S LAST EVENT. Taking the last flight the day before an event is ill advised (due to possible flight cancellations). **Never** make travel arrangements on the same day as an event. Events may run longer than expected and the added stress of catching a flight is likely to affect your child's performance. Leaving an event before the athlete has been

eliminated results in a black card. This means that your child's name will not appear on the results list that is posted on the web, having been replaced by the words black card.

Nota Bene: recent events makes traveling more arduous so have all photo identification easily accessible. Some airlines have implemented new restrictions on non-refundable fares. Check with your airline about this prior to traveling.

PREDEPARTURE CHECKLIST

- Have an equipment checklist. Do not wait until the night before you travel to make sure your child has everything he/she needs. Although there are usually vendors at large NAC/championship tournaments, don't wait until the last minute to purchase any necessary equipment
- Double check everything when you pack
 - ✓ *Entry confirmation and USFA card.* We can't stress this enough. Occasionally a mistake may be made, so always bring your confirmation materials
 - ✓ *Alarm clock.* Although many hotels now have alarm clocks in the rooms, you may not want to depend on that. You don't want to miss your child's event and wake-up calls can be unreliable. If your clock uses batteries, make sure they are fresh. Be sure you know how to set your clock
 - ✓ *Change of clothes.* Bring extra want t-shirts to fence in. Watch weather reports to find out expected temperatures. Bring a bathing suit. Most hotels have pools
 - ✓ *MONEY.* Bring enough for food, lodging, transportation, etc. There will probably be t-shirts, souvenirs and equipment for sale as well at large local and national tournaments
 - ✓ *Warm-up suit.* If your child has a club warm-up, bring that. If not, invest in a comfortable warm-up suit to keep warm between rounds
- If you are flying, allow plenty of time to get through airport controls, **WITH YOUR TICKET AND APPROPRIATE IDENTIFICATION.** If you are driving or taking any other mode of transport, allow time for the unexpected. An event will not be delayed because you are running late
- Label your child's fencing bag and other luggage with his or her name and address. Make sure you put the right destination tag on your bag at the airport
- Carry all equipment except weapons on the plane. Luggage may be lost. It is much easier to borrow weapons than have to completely outfit yourself.
- Weapons must be checked. If the airline asks about the specific contents of the bag, **DO NOT SAY "WEAPONS"**. Say, **"SPORTING EQUIPMENT"**.
- Have your child bring his or her water bottle on the plane. Fill it at the airport or at home, and plan to drink the whole thing on the plane
- If your child is traveling during the school year, he or she should bring schoolwork. Your child should find out what he or she will be missing and try

to get as much done in advance as you can. Get the school fax number as some teachers want assignments handed in the day they are due.

THE NIGHT BEFORE COMPETITION

Your child **SHOULD** be in the room by 10 pm. (younger fencers should be in earlier)

Check weapons again. This is the athlete's responsibility. Figure out what time you have to wake up in order to have breakfast and get to the site to warm up for your event. It is the fencer's responsibility to get to the site on time. Try to get to bed early enough to get (at least) eight hours of sleep or whatever is his or her normal number of hours of sleep.

TOURNAMENT DAY

Know what time your event starts and get up in time. Allow enough time for breakfast. Your child should eat something before competition.

Registration opens one hour before each event. You **MUST** wait until the specified times before checking in. Under no circumstances arrive later than the time stated for close of registration. **REGISTRATION WILL CLOSE on time** and your fencer will not be allowed to fence.

Check In. *The fencer must check in.* The fencer should have all confirmation materials and his or her USFA card. Parents may not check in their child for any event. They may accompany their child to registration/check in, but the fencer must be the one to give his/her name to verify entry in specific events. The fencer must check in for each event separately.

Weapons Check. If you arrive early enough the day before your child fences, he or she may get his or her equipment checked by the armorers in advance to save a step on event day. If equipment is not checked in advance, you must allow enough time for registration and weapons check. Equipment that will be checked is:

- Mask (12 kilo punch test ensures mask strength, rips and tears, rust are also checked)
- Body cords (check for resistance)
- Lamés (check for resistance)
- Saber overgloves (check for resistance)

While your child is getting weapons checked, you can take this time to reconnoiter the site and know where the trainer, bathrooms, and water fountains are located.

Your child should check the initial seeding by looking at classification/ year earned/national points. If your child notices that the seeding is incorrect, he must go immediately to the bout committee to inform them about the problem. Once pools are posted, it is too late to change seeding.

Check pools as soon as they are posted. Be aware that pool numbers and strip assignments are not necessarily the same. You and your child should listen carefully to all announcements. If you are unsure that you heard something that pertains to your child's event, send your athlete to the bout committee to ask. Failure to show up to the strip results in a black card – automatic exclusion from the event.

Upon completion of the pool, the fencer must sign the pool sheet affirming accuracy. They must double-check their own results.

In addition to a training program, your child should be learning, at the very least, rudimentary strip rules. Your child should know proper sportsmanlike conduct and specific fencing etiquette. This includes appropriate comportment in the venue. Your child should also be learning how to keep score during the pools and direct elimination and should always check the scores after every bout, pools and direct elimination.

BE PATIENT – BE PATIENT – BE PATIENT – BE PATIENT

All pools must be fenced and entered into the computer for second round seeding. Check the round result seeding. If the fencer thinks a mistake has been made, he or she should proceed immediately to the bout committee to discuss the situation with a member of the Bout Committee.

Direct Elimination. The format for direct elimination depends on what event your child is fencing. Direct elimination formats differ, and you should consult your confirmation materials to ascertain what format your child is fencing.

Listen for announcements. Strip assignments may be posted on the tableau. If so, your child should immediately report to that strip. If they are not posted on the tableau, listen closely for announcements. Fencer names and strip assignment will usually be announced periodically, as strips become available.

Upon finishing the DE bout, win or lose, the fencer must sign the score sheet. The winner takes the score sheet to the appropriate BC person, double-checking that his name has a V for victory. It is easy in the heat of the moment to reverse the winners and loser's names. Double-checking at this juncture can avoid heartache. Once the data has been entered, it is too late to make a change if the information on the score sheet that the fencer signed is incorrect.

This process continues through to the Gold Medal.

If your child loses a DE bout and there is repêchage, do not leave the venue until your child has lost two times. It's best to ask the BC if the fencer has been eliminated.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINALISTS

If your child has made the final 8, he or she should be prepared to wear warm-ups or whites for the medal presentation. Finalists will be asked to supply a brief, **legible** biography on a form supplied by the BC that includes coach's name and number years

fencing, club and up to three most distinguished accomplishments to date. These can include local or national fencing results. During the presentation of the finalists sportsmanship is on display. The fencer must shake hands with all competitors and medal presenters

If your child has misplaced anything, equipment, water bottle, personal clothing, check with the local lost and found before leaving the venue.

As noted earlier, competitions are hosted by volunteers in association with the USFA. Before departing, it is courteous to thank the BC and local organizers for their time and effort.

DOPING CONTROL

Doping control occurs at national tournaments. There is a very strict procedure for procuring a urine sample which both protects your child and the integrity of the testing. The athlete is escorted to a private room where water and juices are available. The athlete is accompanied at all times by a United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) escort until the athlete is able to void. If doping control is being done at a tournament, a USADA escort will tell athletes if he/she has been selected for testing. However, athletes should always double check at the BC that they are not being tested before leaving the venue.

New and even experienced athletes can unwittingly take medications and vitamin supplements that are considered to be banned substances. Your child should **NEVER** take any medication or nutritional supplements before checking with the USADA. This includes over-the-counter medications, herbal remedies and supplements that may be purchased at GNC-like stores. Even something like a poppy seed bagel may give a false positive and cause unnecessary grief. Medications as seemingly innocuous as Sudafed or Nyquil are banned substances. Figure 2 is a brief list of prohibited substances taken from the USADA handbook. This is not a complete list. For more detailed information, call the USADA hot line (800.233.0393).

Figure 2. USADA Partial List of Prohibited Substances

Different every year – please check on www.usfencing.org for current list.

BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES FOR UNACCOMPANIED FENCERS

If your child goes to an event unaccompanied by a parent, he/she must carry emergency contact list, medical insurance card, and enough money to pay for expenses (allow sufficient funds for the unexpected). The chaperone (if applicable) should have a copy of the above information. *And at local/regional events, make sure your fencer has necessary waivers signed by legal guardians – NOT coaches. This includes USFA membership applications as well.*

CHECK WITH THE HOTEL PRIOR TO SENDING YOUR UNACCOMPANIED CHILD. MANY HOTELS DO NOT ALLOW CHILDREN TO CHECK IN WITHOUT A PARENT OR CHAPERONE PRESENT. CLARIFY THE USE OF THE CREDIT CARD WITH THE

HOTEL WELL IN ADVANCE (FAXING A PHOTOCOPY OF BOTH SIDES OF THE CREDIT CARD with an accompanying note as to what charges are allowed MAY BE REQUIRED).

Your child **SHOULD** be in the room by 10 pm. (younger fencers should be earlier). There should be **no guests in the room at any time without a coach or chaperone**. This includes teammates.

Fencers should be guided by their coach. Parents may make stricter rules, but not looser ones than the coach. These guidelines are to help your fencing performance at this event. They're designed to protect your child, roommates, and the peace of mind of the coach.

The following expectations should be made clear to all unaccompanied fencers:

DO NOT leave the venue without telling a coach or chaperone where you are going. This includes before and after pools, DE's and after you are done with your event (hopefully late in the day).

DO NOT run in hotel hallways, play in elevators, or make loud and disturbing noises. Just because you may not be fencing, other people are, and they deserve the same consideration you would expect. (This behavior is not acceptable even if a parent accompanies you.)

The athlete traveling alone must let a coach or chaperones know what his daily plans are. The responsible party reserves the right to veto unacceptable plans. Never leave the venue or hotel without letting an adult know your whereabouts.

Your child has worked hard for this event, he or she must continue to take responsibility for ensuring best possible fencing results.

Athletes and their families are expected to treat teammates, fellow fencers, officials and other guests at the hotel and venue with respect and consideration.

The entire cadre is expected to obey all local laws. "Please" and "Thank you", accompanied by "Sir" or "Ma'am" goes a long way in this sport.

DON'T FOCUS ON A CLASSIFICATION

Inexperienced fencers often fall prey to chasing after a classification rather than concentrating on improving their fencing skills. Classifications should not be looked upon as an item of prestige since their only function is to help with seeding. Having a classification based on one stellar day does not mean you have mastered all the fundamentals.

A "C" can be a curse for those who need the time to hone the skills needed to compete successfully at the national level. Obtaining a "C" classification too early precludes the

fencer from competing in “D” and under developmental tournaments where essential skills can be learned.

While a higher classification gives you a better seed in the pool round your seeding in the direct elimination tableau is dependent only on performance in the pool rounds.

Improve your skills, practice, bout regularly, and compete locally. For the patient fencer who works hard to improve, a classification comes when least expected, but well deserved.

MAXIMIZING THE EXPERIENCE

At fencing tournaments, take the time to meet new people, visit different cities and see what they have to offer. Many lasting friendships have been formed between fierce competitors. Enjoy the full experience of competition by taking advantage of all opportunities for growth.

GRIEVANCES

If your athlete feels that there is a serious problem developing seek resolution as soon as possible. This may be accomplished through your division. The division officers meet regularly and can help solve your dilemma. If it needs to go to a higher authority they will refer you the correct entity. The USFA hierarchy: division, section, national, with the majority of decisions on local tournaments made at the division level. One rarely need approach the national office for mediation of a problem. Contacting the national office should be reserved for questions of membership in the organization or entry to national competition.

CAMPS

There are many fine camps all over the country. You do not have to go far afield to find something that will fit your child. Camps may add a positive experience to your child’s fencing career. All have something to offer - convenience, cost, coaching staff. Some high school fencers use camps as an opportunity to visit college campuses and learn more about the college coaching staff. Discuss with your coach which camp might be right for your child. You can find out more about camps in the American Fencing Magazine.

LAST MINUTE ESSENTIALS

- Medical Insurance card and emergency contacts (especially if child traveling without parent)
- Small bills, checkbook and/or credit card
- Books or other hobby/activity to pass the time while you are waiting.
- Miscellaneous items: Tums, Maalox, tissues, Chapstick, aspirin, emery board, small plastic bags, tissues, etc.

- Band-Aids
- Ice packs
- Feminine hygiene products
- Hair ties
- Mineral ice
- Any other items you feel essential to your child's well being
- Camera with high speed film
- Batteries
- Power cord
- Sharpie/ permanent marker
- Cell phone if available

INFORMATION SOURCES AND OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES

The following list may be useful as information resources. In addition, here is just few travel web sites that might be beneficial for travel arrangements. All airlines have their own web site as do most hotels and car rentals.

INFORMATION RESOURCES TRAVEL WEB SITES

www.usfencing.org	www.expedia.com
USFA rulebook	www.USOC.org
Athlete handbook	www.cheaptickets.com
www.travelocity.com	www.orbitz.com
www.hotwire.com	

GLOSSARY

BC - Bout Committee
 DE - Direct Elimination
 FIE - Federation Internationale d'Escrime (International Fencing Federation)
 FOC – Fencing Officials Commission (referees)
 IF - International Federation
 JOs -Junior Olympics (February, President's Weekend)
 LOC - Local Organizing Committee
 NAC - North American Cup
 NGB - National Governing Body (of USOC, i.e., United States Fencing Association)
 USFA - United States Fencing Association
 USOC - United States Olympic Committee

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What to Expect at an NAC or National Championship Tournament

(information taken from various web sources)

The North American Cup (NAC) events are a series of national competitions organized by the United States Fencing Association (USFA). These are much larger than the typical local or regional tournament, sometimes with 40 fencing strips and thousands of competitors.

Not every fencer can win the gold medal or go to the Olympics. National competitions are an arena for helping fencers reach for the limits of their ability, not just to win medals. National competitions provide a chance to compete against the best in the country, which often bring out the best in a fencer, regardless of where they finish. Competing becomes an important component of their training.

There are seven different age groups for competition. The rules regarding qualification in certain categories are too involved to list here, but the Club and the USFA can help you. Age is determined as of January 1st of the competitive season (August 1st through July 31st).

Veteran (over 40)

Open (over 13)

Junior (under 20 over 13)

Cadet (under 17 over 13)

Youth-14 (under 15 over 11)

Youth-12 (under 13 over 9)

Youth-10 (under 11 over 7)

There are also 3 developmental levels in the "open" events. Division III is for fencers classified "D" and under - a very low level national event. Division II is a little higher difficulty level with a "C" and under requirement. Division 1 is a "C" and over.

Once you arrive at the tournament, the fencer must check in. Not a parent, not a sibling, but the fencer, preferably an hour before the close of registration. The fencer should have ready at check-in his/her confirmation letter which he/she will receive from USFA and their USFA membership card.

Read the Confirmation Letter carefully. The confirmation letter is a separate letter pertaining to the event(s) your child has entered. If you have a receipt of entry, bring this also. If there is a problem with your registration you will have the proper documentation necessary to fix the problem immediately.

Once the fencer has checked in, he/she may not leave the venue.

If the fencer is not at the strip at the start of his/her event, they will be scratched!!!
This means they will not be allowed to fence in that event. What this would mean to you, the parent, you have just spent money for nothing.

After they have registered for their events, **all competitors must get their equipment checked at the armorer table.** Often it is a wise idea to come to the venue the day before and have the equipment checked when there no pressure. This also gives time for locating or purchasing replacement for any failed equipment.

Equipment Required for Competitive Events

Underline indicates suggested but not required

MASK (sewn-in bib, must pass 12K punch test)

UNDERARM PROTECTOR

BREAST PROTECTOR (for girls)

JACKET (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm)

LAME (if foil or sabre)

KNICKERS (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm, must be overlapped by jacket by at least 4 inches)

GLOVE (no holes, except for body cord. Must cover approximately half your forearm)

LONG SOCKS (white, must reach bottom of your knickers)

OVERGLOVES (for sabre fencers)

MINIMUM two working weapons (epees must pass weight and shim test)

MINIMUM two working body cords (and head cords for sabre fencers)

FENCING BAG (to carry equipment)

WATER BOTTLE

TOOL KIT (screwdriver for tip and pommel, spare screws, springs, allen wrench)

AT NAC AND CHAMPIONSHIPS EVENTS, fencers must have their name printed on the back of lames, jackets in the case of epee fencers or the back (non-weapon side) leg of your knickers; Some NAC events have vendors that provide this service but not all. (And there is usually a HUGE line at the beginning of the tournament) The events that usually have vendors that do this are Junior Olympics, Summer Nationals and some opens or youth events. This may vary depending on the size and location of the NAC. Sword Masters will do this locally.

What to Expect from an Equipment Check

Mask will be checked for holes, breaks in the mesh, tears in the bib, and bib must be sewn in and conform to regulation size, punch test, and sabre masks will be continuity (conductivity) checked. If your mask fails, they MAY destroy it right before your eyes!

Two **body cords** will be tested to make sure they do not exceed 1 ohm. Body cords should be unraveled before presentation to armorer for inspection (check throughout competition to ensure your armory inspection tag stays attached to your body cord. If your inspection tag becomes detached you will have to have it reinspected at armory.

Lames will be checked for continuity (conductivity), tears and bad fasteners.

Sabre fencers over-gloves and head cords will also be checked for continuity (conductivity.)

You need only get your equipment checked once at a tournament (unless tags become detached from body cords). Equipment is tested for safety and to make sure it is in proper working order. Your equipment will be stamped with a special stamp. Equipment purchased from vendors must also be checked by the armorers. You may be able to get your equipment checked before the day you fence. Check your confirmation materials for times.

The director will check all equipment that was subject to inspection by the armorers for the specific tournament's identifying mark at the beginning of each pool or direct elimination bout. Failure to present equipment on strip with proper inspection marks will result in penalties.

Registration has Closed - Now What Happens?

When it says "close of registration at 9 AM", why aren't the kids fencing at 9:02 AM?

A competition must be run to assure fairness and accuracy at every step. When registration is closed a beehive of activity is moving at the bout committee (BC). They must announce the names of those who did not check-in should the athlete be present. You may have heard the announcement, "Fencer XYZ please come to the BC table immediately or you will be scratched". On rare occasion a frantic parent runs up and says they didn't know they had to check in. (The Error: READ THE CONFIRMATION MATERIAL).

Then the initial seeding (minus the withdrawals) gets re-calculated and posted. Fencers have five minutes to check that it is accurate (YOU AND YOUR ATHLETE SHOULD DOUBLE CHECK IMMEDIATELY). If no problem is found then pools are created. This process takes several variables into consideration: seeding, club, and division affiliation. Every effort is made to minimize conflicts and at least two people check the accuracy of the pools before they are posted. (DOUBLE CHECK THE POOL SHEET IMMEDIATELY). Errors can be rectified most easily BEFORE the competition begins. **BE PATIENT:** you and your child want fencing to begin but **ONLY** if there are no problems which may cause fencing to be halted later due to a protest.

Now that the pool sheets are posted and reviewed by the fencers the BC is still humming with strip and director assignments. The problems that occur at this stage may include: a machine/reel/strip is "down", a director has a "club/division conflict" and must be changed, all the fencers don't report to the strip. That is why strips are changed or a fencer's name is announced. (**BEWARE THE DREAD BLACK CARD: SHOW UP AT A STRIP PROMPTLY.** Please note that the **POOL NUMBER** and the **STRIP ASSIGNMENT** are frequently different. **AND DON'T STRAY BETWEEN BOUTS...AND BE SURE TO CAREFULLY CHECK YOUR POOL SHEET BEFORE YOU SIGN**) BC will **NOT** change scores once the sheets are signed and turned in even if all the fencers

agree and the referee agrees. You sign the sheet only if you are positive it is correct. We suggest parents or fencers keep their own score sheet that will look similar to the one they sign for easy referral before signing. Once all the pools are in, the data is entered. There may be considerable differences in how quickly one pool gets finished before another depending on size of pool, quickness of the director, mechanical problems of one sort or another. **BE PATIENT.**

The results are entered into the computer and the seeding into direct eliminations (DE) is posted. **CAREFULLY CHECK** the posted pool results that they are accurate to your recollection of your indicators (victories, touches scored versus touches received). If there is a problem the athlete must present himself **IMMEDIATELY** to the BC where the appropriate pool sheet will be inspected. Again, if the sheet is signed and the scores were incorrect - it will not be changed. **ONLY** if the error was made copying the information to the computer will a correction be made.

After a few minutes have elapsed to allow fencers to have inspected the pool results, a DE table is generated and posted. The strip numbers may be posted or announced. (**BE ALERT TO ANY ANNOUNCEMENT**). Directors are assigned, called to the BC and sent out to strips where the fencer should present himself. Upon completion of the bout the victor takes the signed score sheet to the BC, **POLITELY WAITS TO HAND THE SLIP TO THE BC AND ANNOUNCES HIS NAME AND SCORE.** This is another time when the fencer needs to make sure the "V" for victory has been recorded by the correct name. **MANY** times, in the rush of things, the referee accidentally puts the "V" in the wrong box and **BOTH** fencers sign off on it. When you take this slip - read it as you go, if you forgot to do that before, and before you get to the bout committee make sure the "V" is in your box!!! This allows an extra check on accuracy. The athlete who tosses the slip at the BC runs the risk of a misplaced slip or inaccurately entered victor. (It is very hectic at the BC and while the athlete knows his own name the BC may not). This system of having the victor announce his name and score repeats itself all the way through until the gold medal is won. Also the athlete may be asked to take the next bout slip back to his strip. It is **VERY** important that this slip goes back immediately to the referee in the area in which you were fencing. Failure to take this slip back immediately may cause a delay in the events or a mistake in the on-strip tableau.

Other Things to Keep in Mind

1. Don't take flash pictures in the venue – use non-flash settings.
2. Make sure your fencer drinks enough water - refill his/her water bottle whenever necessary. They should be drinking 6-8 oz. after each bout. In my experience, this is the primary function of parents!
3. Use encouraging words and **only between actions**, not after the director says "fence". It's probably a good idea to find out if your talking will distract your fencer or not. Sometimes it does when it is a parent voice, but is fine with other voices. Don't take this personally if your fencer doesn't want you talking.
4. If you are not sure who scored the touch, keep quiet or say something generic.
5. Reconnoiter the site and know where to find the bathrooms, water fountains, armory and trainer. (A trainer is a medic who has Band-Aids and ice, free!)

6. *Be Positive!! While it is great to show support for your fencers, NEVER CHEER AGAINST ANYONE - especially if teammates are fencing each other. Applaud even if your fencer did not win. It was a great bout by two great kids.*
7. *Let your fencers have quiet time to prepare themselves without distractions. If you don't understand what is going on, ask someone who isn't fencing that day.*
8. *Don't ask fencers or scorekeepers what the score is or was. If you didn't hear the last score, just wait. After the bout, do not ask either fencer the score as this is difficult for the loser. The general idea – don't ask anything (as a spectator) of anyone wearing a fencing uniform! They're job is to fence.*
9. *Let the coach be the coach. They give advice and point out problems. The coach is better experienced to handle problems that may arise on the strip. Your role is more important!!! You are there to give unconditional love and support.*
10. *Remember to remove all your equipment from the strip once you have finished fencing. This includes any confiscated weapons. Referees will usually lay confiscated weapons up on the table with the scoring box, or on the floor underneath it. Ask them if you may remove it.*
11. *Do not leave any valuables lying around. Make sure all money is kept in a safe secure place and not in the fencing bag.*
12. *Remember, any spectator is subject to the same black cards that fencers are. Parents and friends need to be respectful of the referees and other fencers and their families. Arguing with a referee is just a losing cause and disrupting order on strip may cause you to be ejected from the event.*

Related Costs

For tournaments far from home, airfare will clearly be a considerable cost. (We try to organize traveling and lodging costs for events. Please call us if your fencer want to go to a particular tournament but doesn't have a ride.) In addition, fencers will need to have money for food, possible ground transportation (under 21 can't rent cars!) and spending money.

The coaches will be working with fencers throughout the tournament, and while doing so, often lose income from private lessons and other fee-paying services. It is considerate to compensate your coach while they are away from their livelihood.

The cost of coaches' accommodations, airfare and ground transportation should be divided equally between fencers who are being coached.

Travel Tips for National Tournaments

- **SEND IN YOUR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP ENTRY FORM IMMEDIATELY AFTER QUALIFYING OR, IF AN AUTOMATIC QUALIFIER, IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIPT.** Your division should have entry forms at the qualifying tournament, or if not, an entry form will be in the next USFA e-newsletter. If you qualify for more than one event and plan to fence all qualified events, submit one form with all events listed in which you are eligible to compete. Also, send a self-addressed stamped postcard with your entry form with your child's name and

events entered. USFA will send this back to you with an official stamp. This is a backup confirmation in case you don't get an official one from USFA. If you fax, put a cover sheet with your fax number, name, and what events you registered for on it. This will be faxed back to you stamped received for your records.

- **RESERVE YOUR HOTEL ROOMS EARLY.** As soon as the venue and hotel become known, make your reservations. You can always cancel or make changes, but once the block of rooms is gone, it is very difficult to stay at the host hotel. If your child is traveling alone, check the hotel policy regarding minors checking in with no adult. Try to ensure they stay at the host hotel as travel to and from airport and venue will be much easier for him/her as most transportation is arranged around these venues. The USFA now offers this service located at: <http://www.thsweb.com>.....
- **AIRFARES**
Continuously monitor airfares; many offer brief sales to certain destinations. For JOs, airfares often go down directly after New Year. However, this is a guideline only. Use your own judgment when purchasing airfares. As soon as a fare appears that is within your budget, BOOK IT! Call the Olympic Desk for travel help if necessary. The telephone number is on the back of your child's USFA membership card.
- **ALWAYS TRAVEL THE DAY BEFORE AND THE DAY AFTER ALL YOUR EVENTS.** Do not try and arrive the day you fence or leave the last day you fence. It is very difficult to anticipate the end time of a tournament so plan your departure for the day after your last event. Don't add stress to the fencer by worrying throughout an event if you will catch your plane.
- **JOIN AIRLINE AND HOTEL FREQUENT FLYER/STAY PLANS.** If you are not already a member of frequent flyer and hotel stay programs, JOIN. These miles and points add up and can eventually get you a free ticket and/or hotel stay. It's worth the investment and most are free to join. The kiosk check in is just too convenient!
- **CARRY ON ALL EQUIPMENT THAT YOU WEAR.** Always take your most expensive and difficult to replace items in your carry on. You can't bring your weapons on, but your lames, shoes, masks, uniforms, certainly would be easy to carry on, along with a change of clothes. TOO MANY TIMES we have seen kids go to all the expense of getting to a tournament only to have the airlines lose their bag and they can't get equipment together in time. It is pretty easy to borrow a couple of weapons, or even buy them! But replacing an entire set of equipment is very overwhelming; and while you may accomplish it, will certainly rec havoc with your mental preparation.

University Scholarships

Thinking about scholarships? Here are just a few of the universities that offer fencing scholarships or fencing opens doors for acceptance:

*Air Force Academy
Columbia
Drew
Duke
Harvard
New York University
M.I.T.
North Carolina
Notre Dame
Penn State
Princeton
Rutgers
Saint Johns (Redmen)
Stanford
University of Pennsylvania
Vassar
Yale*

And we have contacts at many of them! Whether or not the school you wish to enter has fencing scholarships (such as Air Force!), fencing on a resume for college will be an eye-catcher and may give you an advantage to gain entrance over others.

Coming in the future expanded information about college fencing including:

"I wanna fence NCAA, but I don't know how!"

The Italicized information was provided by Terry Harkey, both from personal experience and insight from many other parents in the trenches. If you have helpful suggestions please submit them so they may be included in any revisions. We parents must stick together and learn from each other. You may contact Terry at:

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