Referee Handbook

United States Fencing Association
Fencing Officials Commission
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Introduction

In any sport, the level of competitive performance and the level of officiating are inextricably linked; competitors are inspired to perform well when they are confident of proper judgments and discouraged when that confidence is lacking. This relationship between performance and officiating is particularly strong in fencing, because referees, very close to the action, must make immediate judgments on rapid, complex actions and apply a set of highly technical rules. Thus, it is vital for the sport that the effort expended to develop competent referees parallels that to develop competitors.

With this goal in mind, this handbook has been prepared by the United States Fencing Association's Fencing Officials Commission (FOC) to explain its policies as to how one earns a referee's rating, to give some direction as to how one develops as a referee, and to discuss some common refereeing methods that have been tested and proven effective in competition. Future additions to the refereeing methods section are planned. Suggestions are, of course, most welcome. We would sincerely appreciate recommendations for the inclusion of any relevant material.

It is hoped that this handbook will assist in having the rules uniformly applied. The Commission expects both experienced and developing referees to follow these guidelines and encourages coaches and instructors to include them in their teaching programs.

How to Become a Fencing Referee

The Fencing Officials Commission wants every person who is qualified to become a rated referee. One of the main purposes of the Fencing Officials Commission is the encouragement and assistance of interested people in becoming good referees. Here are some general guidelines in this regard:

- Becoming a good referee depends, in large part, upon establishing confidence in one's self and in others that your judgments will be sound. This takes time, effort and exposure. This requires the referee to be available to accept opportunities to direct at higher level competitions.

- A referee must do more than know the rules. The rules *must be applied*! And—they must be applied under the pressures generated in competitions.

- The referee not only must apply the rules competently, but do so in a manner that is positive rather than negative.

- Referees must train and practice their skills as surely as the competitors they judge must train and practice. Just as a competitor's skills deteriorate without practice, so do a referee's. A top referee officiates often.

- One must *study* (not just read) the rules! The referee must realize that application of the rules is primary, but command of the rules is the best way both to gain confidence and to convince others of one's competence.

- Attend *approved* referees' seminars—these will give a better idea of what is expected of a fencing referee. In addition, literature, videotapes, et cetera provided by the FOC should be studied for clues to proper application of the rules.

- One must remember that our sport is constantly changing. The fact that a referee directed in the finals of the Nationals two years ago does not necessarily mean his or her level of competence is the same today. A good referee stays current!

- Attend as many competitions as possible. Be sure to arrive before the first round. That is when you will most likely be assigned. Don't become one of the complainers who are often heard to say: "They never use me as a referee! For the past five years, I've arrived just before the finals of the Nationals and offered to referee, but the FOC

Representative never assigns me!" It is important to understand that the person in charge of assigning referees must have confidence in your abilities *at the moment of need*—it simply is not fair to the fencers to assign you even though you might have directed well at another time.

- Develop habits to aid you in remembering what you should do. (Example: Every time you do your inspection of a fencer's equipment at the start of a pool or direct elimination bout, you should do it in exactly the same order. You will be far less likely to overlook a missing inspection mark, or an irregularity in the weapon.) Keep score, time bouts, check scoresheets, watch other referees. We learn by doing and by example, and a competition is the place to learn.

Many clubs organize tournaments for the dual purpose of training novice fencers for competition and for providing practice opportunities for referees. If your club does not, you should organize such an event. Offer to referee whenever you see two people fencing for touches. Top coaches are in agreement that understanding refereeing can only help the competitor. Compare your judgments with those of experienced referees at every tournament. You may not always agree, so ask questions and discuss things.

Most referees' first experience with tournament officiating will come unexpectedly; when there is no one else readily available, you will be asked to referee. If you have prepared as outlined above, you will survive this experience, and you will learn from it. Be warned, however, that your first opportunity will probably involve inexperienced fencers, and their actions are often extremely difficult to analyze. There is no help for this; persevere and learn from each exposure.

Referee Code of Ethics

The Fencing Officials Commission has established the following code as a guide for all referees:

The concepts of honor and right have permeated the practice of arms for centuries.

From the medieval Code Duello—which held that only the just cause would triumph—to the codification of rules covering the emergence of competitive fencing in the nineteenth century, it is clear that both concepts are inextricably linked with the sport.

Combined, they constitute fencing's essential spirit, an ineffable sense that justice will be done for the combatants.

This is the spirit that fencing referees must clearly recognize, embrace, represent and communicate.

It is not unlike the standard Hippocrates crafted for physicians: The physician must not only be prepared to do what is right himself, but also to make the patient, the attendants, and externals cooperate.

This code of ethics seeks to establish for fencing officials—in particular the Referee—a guide to the exercise of honor and right. It considers four areas: ***Integrity***, ***Competence***, ***Responsibility*** and ***Dignity***.

INTEGRITY

- The Rules of Fencing assign sweeping powers to the Referee and important ones to ancillary officials. It would be impossible to fulfill the letter of these laws in the absence of the sense of incorruptibility that the idea of integrity implies.

- Rule t.34 states: "By accepting a position as referee or judge, the person so designated pledges his honor to respect the rules and to cause them to be respected, and to carry out his duties with the strictest impartiality and absolute concentration."

- For this reason alone referees must maintain and promote complete neutrality.

- Referees should accept assignments only when no conflict of interest exists.

- Even in those instances that may suggest a conflict of interest, the Referee must make it known immediately to the assignors, e.g., pupil or former pupil, same club, et cetera.

- Referees are representative of the body conducting the competition and, therefore, must not consider themselves associated with any country, club or individual during the competition.

- Referees are present at the competition solely to officiate; it is inappropriate to coach or assist athletes during the competition.

- Referees are to respect other referees to the utmost. It is improper to publicly indicate disapproval of the actions of other referees.

COMPETENCE

- Referees must know the rules.

- Referees must apply the rules.

- Referees must stay current on interpretations of the rules.

- Referees must attend scheduled seminars on the rules.

- Referees must offer their judgment to appropriate Officials Commissions concerning rules that do not accomplish their intended goal.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Referees must be available for assignment from the time they are required to report until released by the assignors.

- Referees must do nothing that would interfere with their mental and physical abilities to perform.

- Referees must check with the assignors for reporting times and be present a minimum of one-half hour prior to the starting time of the round.

- Referees must be within earshot of all announcements affecting referees unless properly excused from the competition area.

- Referees are to be completely familiar with the duties assigned by Article t.35 of the Fencing Rules and carry them out scrupulously.

- Referees must insure that score sheets are accurate and that they are turned in to the Bout Committee immediately upon completion of a bout or match.

DIGNITY

- Referees must be properly attired at all times.
- Referees should refrain from joining in horseplay or other exhibitionism that sometimes arises during breaks.
- Referees should exercise authority but avoid inciting contestants to misbehave.
- Referees should strive to conduct themselves in such a way that they earn a high regard from others.
- Referees should volunteer for withdrawal if unable to continue to perform.

This Code is intended to provide the general principles by which Fencing Referees shall guide themselves and by which they will be measured by the Fencing Officials Commission.

Referee Ratings

The following system has been established by the FOC and approved by the USFA Board of Directors for the rating of USFA referees:

The current USFA ratings scheme is based on a 10 level scale, with 1 being the highest:

A level 10 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of an Unclassified competition.

A level 9 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of an E rated competition.

A level 8 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of a D rated competition.

A level 7 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of a C rated competition.

A level 6 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of a B rated competition.

A level 5 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the first round of an Open North American Cup competition. A level 5 rating must be earned before subsequent ratings can be earned.

A level 4 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the Direct Elimination round of 128 of an Open North American Cup competition.

A level 3 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the Direct Elimination round of 32 of an Open North American Cup competition.

A level 2 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the Direct Elimination round of 8 of an Open North American Cup competition.

A level 1 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at any level of an Open North American Cup competition.

The first step in becoming a referee is to obtain a copy of the *Study Guide for National Referee Examination*. This may be obtained from the USFA National Office, One Olympic Plaza, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80909, for a four-dollar ($4.00) postage and handling fee or by downloading it from the FOC web page on the Internet (http://www.fencingofficials.org). You will not be given an "answer key" to the *Study Guide* as that would defeat the purpose of the guide, which is for you to ***study*** the rules. The *Study Guide* questions are organized in the order of the rules in the *Rules Book*. You are expected to find the answers to each question in the *Rules Book*.

Then, all referee candidates must take the Referee Seminar. No one is to be allowed to take either a written or practical exam without first having attended the seminar.

All referees must pass the written exam with a score of 90% or greater. Lower ratings mean less skill and experience, not less knowledge.

Your actual written test will be culled from the very same questions in the *Study Guide for National Referee Examination*. You must earn at least a 90% on both the General Section and the particular weapon section(s) in which you wish to be tested in all of the written tests.

Finally, all referees must pass a practical exam. The practical exam is composed of fencing at a given level, either in live competition or in "practice" competition. The level of ability evident in the bouts determines the rating that a referee candidate may be awarded. The best referee in the world can't earn a 5 with bouts that are of a 7 level.

The FOC web site has a current list of FOC Certified Instructors. These individuals are the only ones authorized to conduct Referee Seminars. Referee candidates should contact one of these individuals (obviously, geographic considerations should be made) to arrange seminars in their area. In addition, there is a current list of FOC Certified Examiners. (If there are one or two answers to questions in the *Study Guide* that you cannot find, an examiner will assist you in finding the applicable rule.) Contact any one of them to administer first the written test and, after successfully passing it, a practical examination. Since the level of competition is a factor in determining a referee's rating, be aware that examinations in the first round of some Divisional Opens or during a training session at a club might result in higher ratings than ones from examinations in the finals of some Sectional Championships. The level of the fencing while you are being examined is the *only* governing factor. The FOC will continue to arrange testing at Sectional

Championships and Referee Seminars upon prior arrangement and at the Summer National Championships.

Once an individual has any rating, the FOC requests that the referee use the rating. A referee who does not successfully referee at their rated level for a period of two years will have her or his rating lowered automatically one level. If the referee does not successfully referee for an additional two years following such a decrease in rating, the rating will automatically be further reduced. If a referee is inactive for five successive years, the National Rating will be withdrawn. All Nationally Rated Referees who do not preside at USFA National Competitions (North American Cups, National Junior Olympics, or National Championships) are required to notify the FOC of their activity in order to maintain their rating. A current list of Nationally Rated Referees is published by the FOC on the FOC web site (updated at least annually) and will indicate the most recent year of activity at the rated level.

Fencing needs good referees! Fencing needs referees who are active!

The Class 10 rating is awarded upon passing the written exam, both General and Weapon sections. Class 9–5 ratings are awarded by CRI, CRE, and members of the FOC. The Class 4 rating may be awarded by the FOC's Domestic Rating Committee. The Classes 3–1 ratings are awarded only by a vote of the entire FOC. Referees who feel that they have improved up to a higher level or referees who feel that their rating is incorrectly low may apply for examination (only a practical is needed for 4–1) by writing to the Fencing Officials Commission.

Immediately after any practical examination has been given, the candidate will be advised by the examiner(s) as to the evaluation(s). The results of the practical examination for Classes 3–1 will be reported to the FOC and will be voted upon at the annual FOC meeting. Members of the FOC who are familiar with the candidate's officiating level will vote on the person's rating, while those who are not currently familiar will abstain.

Referees' Attire

Referees represent authority in any sport. It is very beneficial to have these figures of authority appropriately attired while officiating. In order to establish a degree of "uniformity," we require that all referees at National Competitions wear a uniform.

The uniform for men is a navy blue blazer, gray trousers, shirt and tie. The uniform for women is a navy blue blazer, gray skirt or slacks, and a blouse. This uniform is to be clean and pressed as a sign of respect to the fencers and to the referee who is wearing it. A blazer issued to referees at the Olympics, World University Games, et cetera is also acceptable. It is requested that all referees wear appropriate shoes and leave athletic shoes to the athletes.

Seminars

The Fencing Officials Commission is very much aware of the need for local or regional Referee Seminars. The Commission has certified a number of Referee Instructors to be sure that someone will be available to each and every Division to run Referee Seminars. All Divisions that wish to have a Referee Seminar can either write to the FOC or contact one of the Referee Instructors directly. A fee of no more than $75 per attendee will be charged.

All Sections have been mandated by the USFA Board of Directors to have a representative of the Fencing Officials Commission at the Sectional Championships for examining referees. Section Chairs should write to the FOC as soon as the dates of the Championships are set to make the necessary arrangements. Expenses (honorarium, room, board, and transportation) for this are to be borne by the Section.

Clinics are essential to develop standardized officiating practices. Standardized officiating practices are essential to the development of our sport in the United States. It is vital that *only* certified Referee Instructors conduct Referee Seminars. All too often (despite the best of intentions), wrong and outdated information is passed on to the unsuspecting by so-called "knowledgeable referees." Please—contact the FOC if there is any doubt about an examiner's qualifications.

All referees are required to attend a Rules Interpretation Seminar yearly. Failure to do so will result in the referee being placed on an "Inactive" list, and will be ineligible to referee until such a seminar has been attended. Failure to attend a Rules Interpretation Seminar for two consecutive years will result in the referee's rating being removed. At this point, all examinations would have to be re-taken.

Rules Interpretation Seminars are given 15 minutes before the close of registration of the first event each day of each NAC. Rules Interpretation Seminars will also be given at each Sectional Championships, and by arrangement with a Certified Referee Examiner/Instructor. The regular Referee Seminar is an acceptable substitute for the Rules Interpretation Seminar.

FIE Referees' Licenses

All USFA rated referees with a Class 2 or 1 rating are encouraged to apply to the FOC for the higher international licenses. Qualification to take the FIE test will be based on having a 2 or 1 rating, being active at a National level, and demonstration of superb skill in working under pressure. In addition, the FIE has established a maximum age of fifty-five for one to have an FIE license.

The Fencing Officials Commission is the sole authority for the submission of candidates to the FIE for examination or removal as an International Referee. A Nationally rated 2 or 1 referee who would like to be rated by the FIE should send the request, in writing, to the USFA Fencing Officials Commission. The FOC will notify the candidate if the request is approved and, if it is, when and where the candidate may take the examination. At that time, the candidate should download and complete the ***Referee Examination Application***  from the FOC website. This should be sent, along with a passport-sized photo and the application fee of $45 to Corinne Greenman at the USFA National Office. If the FOC is considering removal of a USFA referee from the FIE list due to any reason, the FOC will notify that referee, in writing, that removal is being contemplated prior to any action being taken.

General Responsibilities of the Referee

A referee's specific duties are listed in the *Rules Book*, but there are several general responsibilities that are only implied. The first of these is that while rendering technical decisions, referees must maintain their dignity and command respect. In addition, the referee must:

- Help maintain the level of fencing quality and promote its correctness.
- Concentrate on the task (and refrain from officiating when tired or out of form).
- Maintain control of the fencing in a firm, courteous manner.

All fencing referees *must* understand these responsibilities fully and conduct themselves in a manner that brings credit to the sport. If you are assigned to referee a bout in which you feel (or a competitor or coach may feel) that you have a conflict of interest, inform the assignor of referees. Don't hope everything will "work out" and that there won't be any close calls; let the assignor make this call.

As a referee, you are a referee all day long and even between tournaments. You can issue warnings and penalties during a bout. You cannot tell a fencer "what you think of her/him" after the bout, after the tournament, or even over coffee the following week. To do so destroys your credibility and objectivity.

Do not "incite" a fencer. When a fencer has just lost a bout, do not speak to the fencer except to request the signing of the score sheet. Any attempt at instruction or justification of your actions may understandably cause a not too polite reaction from the fencer.

Referees at competitions are to behave courteously toward all other officials. A referee who is a spectator at a bout should never make any word or gesture that would indicate disagreement with the presiding referee. It is absolutely inappropriate for one referee to interfere in any way with another's refereeing.

Application of the Rules

Knowledge of the rules of fencing is a prerequisite to competent officiating, but the referee's job is to apply the rules, and this requires far more than knowledge. Of primary importance is that the referee understand conceptually what is to be done. This understanding can be gained by considering three classes of rules: analysis, administration, and penalties.

Fencing Phrase Analysis

The most important officiating task in foil and saber is correct interpretation of right-of-way. The rules state in Article t.42: “As soon as the bout has stopped, the Referee reconstructs briefly the movements which composed the last fencing phrase.” This disarmingly simple statement requires some discussion for thorough understanding.

First, referees must recognize that they are directed to analyze *fencing actions*—not describe activity. This is a critical distinction. There is much activity in fencing (lunge, feint, advance, et cetera.) But only a few of these result in *fencing actions* (attack, repost, et cetera.) Since only *actions* have priority in fencing, the referee must consider only *actions* to arrive at decisions.

Second, the referee must understand the identification system for these *actions* in order to clearly communicate to the fencers the referee’s concept of the phrase. The system is fairly simple, because these *actions* are few in number and each has a specific name. In order of priority, they are:

1. Point in Line
2. Attack
3. Prise de Fer
4. Riposte
5. Counterattack
6. Remise/Redoublement/Reprise

These actions, coupled with modifying words, are all that a referee needs to analyze most fencing phrases. For example, the words “from the right” (or “left”) identify which fencer is being considered; “in the final phrase” limits the actions analyzed; and “in the preparation” recognizes activities that precede the actions to be analyzed.

Once the referee has grasped the concept of actions versus activity and has learned the identification system, the referee can quickly arrive at decisions by applying the rules of right-of-way in foil and saber.

The Point in Line

The point in line exists as the highest level of priority. If it is established correctly, the opponent must avoid it, remove it, or have the fencer with the point in line to no longer have the point in line.

A point in line exists when a fencer has the following conditions met prior to an opponent's attack:

- weapon arm fully extended
- a straight line from the point of the weapon to the shoulder
- point aimed at valid target
- no movement of the blade except to derobe the opponent's attempt to find the blade
- is standing still, moving forward, or moving back

The Attack

What makes an action an attack is something that has been discussed for centuries. There are, it sometimes seems, two schools regarding this question. One states that the arm must be fully extend*ed* in order to be attacking; the other school is just as adamant in stating that whomever starts moving forward with even the intent to hit is the attacker. The truth is actually somewhere in the middle.

Look at the *Rules Book*. Article t.7 is supposed to define the attack.

> "The attack is the initial offensive action made by extending the arm and continuously threatening the opponent's target, preceding the launching of the lunge or fleche."

Does this tell the whole story? Hardly. To find out what an attack is, there are two important things one needs to understand.

One is that you'll not find the answer by only looking in the *Rules Book*. (Remember that the *RulesBook* doesn't even state which arm has to be extending to make an attack.) The *Rules Book* does not have a glossary so there are no definitions as to what an "offensive action" is or what "threatening" means. The definition as to what is an attack is derived from both the *Rules Book* and from convention—what is called an attack by the world's best referees.

The other is that it isn't what *one* person does that makes an action an attack. The attack is defined by what *both* fencers do in relationship to each other. Here is an example. In a foil bout between Mary and Sue, Mary lunges while extending her arm. Her arm is fully extended just before her forward foot hits the ground. What fencing action has Mary done? Here are three possibilities:

1. If Sue was immobile, in lunge distance, and in the On Guard position, Mary made an ATTACK.

2. If, just before Mary started, Sue lunged while extending her arm, Mary made a COUNTERATTACK.

3. If Sue was immobile, beyond lunge distance, and in the On Guard position, Mary established a POINT IN LINE.

In this example, the same "movement" by Mary resulted in three different "actions."

One will overhear something such as the following at competitions all over the world after a top-level referee correctly says “Halt. Attack from the left. Point for the left.” when the fencer on the left went after his opponent with his guard next to his hip and then finally started extending just before the opponent—who had been desperately trying to make a parry—ultimately extended his arm:

We’ve got to let everyone know what’s going on. “They” are calling any aggressive movement an attack.

It is important to realize that the referee is supposed to analyze “actions.” In this example—even though there was much “movement”—the end result was an attack.

What makes one’s action an attack is one’s movement in relationship to what the opponent is doing. Knowing this, take another look at Article t.7 paying particular attention to some key words.

> “The attack is the INITIAL OFFENSIVE action made by EXTENDING the arm and CONTINUOUSLY THREATENING the valid surface of the opponent’s target.”
>
> **INITIAL**—you must start your action *before* your opponent. This does not at all mean who started moving first.
>
> **OFFENSIVE**—you must be going toward your opponent. Attempting a parry is not offensive.
>
> **EXTENDING**—for those of you who know grammar, this is a gerund; it connotes action. The arm *never* has to become extend *ed* to have a correctly executed attack. To have an extending arm, your hand must be going away from your body.
>
> **CONTINUOUSLY**—non-stop. You must keep attacking. If you “break” your attack—stop moving forward or hold back your arm—you are no longer attacking and, if your opponent starts an attack of her own, your continuation may become a counterattack. Your attack ends when it misses, is parried, or falls short. In Saber, the attack also ends when the front foot lands in the lunge.
>
> **THREATENING**—you must present a danger to your opponent. This word really has two parts to its definition. One is the relationship of distance between the fencers in determining whether one is threatening. If your opponent is within advance lunge distance, you can be threatening; you can start an attack. If your opponent is beyond advance lunge distance, you cannot be threatening; you

cannot start an attack—even if your opponent were to remain completely immobile, your attack would not start until you were at advance lunge distance. The other part that is important in defining this word is that your point (for foil) or your blade (for saber) is going toward your opponent's valid target. It is a very common misconception that, for example, a foil attack requires the point to be "aimed" at the valid target before an attack starts.

If one were to only use the *Rules Book* to decide what constituted an attack one could easily argue in favor of foil fencer John in this completely absurd example: John extends his arm aiming the point directly at the middle of Bob's chest. John then lunges without moving his arm. After John lunges, Bob sticks out his arm. John's point arrives on Bob's arm; Bob's point arrives on target. Is it a point for Bob because John couldn't have been attacking? Since John hit Bob on the arm, John clearly wasn't "continuously threatening the opponent's (Bob's) target". Here, of course, the referee would say that John's attack was off target and Bob's action was a counterattack; no touch is awarded.

What actually happens so often in competition is the combination of the technical and tactical execution of an action. Example: If a fencer starts a correctly executed attack and her opponent starts retreating while trying to make a parry, the aggressor may very well pull her arm back so that the defensive fencer has no blade to parry. If the parries continue, the aggressor will wait until she is close enough and then restart her attack. If the parrier were to start her own attack while the former aggressor had her arm back, then this attack would have right of way; it would be an attack into a preparation.

There are two other comments that one frequently hears about a referee's decision:

- "That was too close to call! You shouldn't make a call like that on the final touch."
- "That was really simultaneous. Neither fencer really started before the other."

The first comment is one that is just wrong; it is based on a totally false premise. There is no such thing as an action that "just isn't good enough for the final touch." The referee is required to make the last call of a bout just as he or she is required to make the first call. If an action was done correctly enough to get the first touch, it was also done correctly enough for the final touch. A fencer should not be required to make a "one light" touch to win a bout.

The “simultaneous” call is made far too often. Is it possible that both fencers started at exactly the same time? Theoretically, yes; hardly ever unless, as most often happens in saber, both fencers have made the really, tactical decision to attack simultaneously. Some of the best officials will sometimes analyze an action as simultaneous to indicate that they just could not tell who started or that both fencers did not execute their actions correctly. Many less qualified officials will use “simultaneous” as a means of avoiding actually making a call.

It is the referee’s job to determine who is the attacker. The referee must simply translate into words the perception of what actions the fencers made. (A good referee describes “actions”—not “movements.”) An attack is an attack because a fencer, in relationship to another fencer, executed the action correctly.

The Beat Versus the Parry

In foil and saber, it is very important for the referee to differentiate between the beat and the parry. Whenever there is a meeting of the blades, the referee must decide which fencer is then able to have the right of way.

It is equally true in foil as it is in saber that the parts of the two blades that meet are critical in deciding whether the meeting is a beat or a parry. If one fencer's weak [foible] part of the blade meets the strong [forte] part of the opponent's blade (not a mere grazing of the blades), it is a parry by the opponent. If it is the strong that meets the weak, it is a beat.

This determination is not as easy as it may sound. The referee requires extensive experience to make this judgment. This is especially true as all meetings of blades are not always a weak on strong. The referee should generally give priority to the offensive fencer, the fencer who initiates the contact, where it cannot be distinguished if the action is a beat or a parry.

Words and Gestures

The fencers and the audience have to know what the referee is calling. The use of the correct words and the required gestures that the referee uses will allow for an easy understanding of the referee's analysis of actions.

The words that are to be used in analyzing actions, along with brief descriptions such as "from the right," are:

- Preparation
- Point in Line
- Attack
- Beat
- Parry
- Riposte
- Counterattack
- Remise
- Redoublement
- Reprise

On guard!

Ready?

Play!

Halt!

Attack! / Counter-attack!

Simultaneous!

Point in line

Hit against!

Not valid!

Hit scored for!

Administrative Duties of the Referee

The referee must not overlook administrative and organizational duties because they are important to establish control. Timing or scoring errors can negate the best refereeing. Protests can delay a match and cause criticism of the referee.

The following practices are strongly recommended:

- If you are so lucky as to have them, respect the scorer and timer. These officials are the referee's allies and will return concern for their welfare with proper attention to their duties. Before the pool or match, the referee must determine the experience of each and instruct them in order to be confident in their work. Make sure that the timer knows to very loudly say "Halt!" when time expires. It is also very important that at the moment this "Halt" is required, the timer should have the scoring apparatus in her or his peripheral vision so that the timer will be able to inform the referee if a light that may be on the apparatus was on before or after the expiration of time. Also be sure that the timer knows to only inform you as to how much time is remaining and only if *you* ask. (This insures that both fencers have the same information regarding time.) Ask the scorekeeper to announce the score clearly after every touch. Also ask the scorekeeper for pool scoresheets to write in the final number of touches a defeat (instead of a "D") and a "V" with the number of touches scored for a victory on the score sheet after each bout. Note that there is a possibility of less than five touches being scored and a fencer having a victory in a pool bout. Below are some examples of correctly filled out score sheets.

Sample Pool Score Sheet

Sample DE Score Sheet Senior

Sample DE Score Sheet Youth

Sample DE Score Sheet Veterans

Sample Score Sheet Team

- Call the roll and check equipment in a businesslike manner. The equipment check should serve notice that the referee knows the rules and is prepared to apply them.

- Confiscate any equipment that does not work. If it is non-regulation at the time of inspection, confiscate it and issue the appropriate card. If equipment breaks during the bout, also confiscate it. Confiscating equipment is not only required by the rules; it is for the fencers' protection—they cannot get a card for presenting a known non-functioning piece of equipment to the referee at a subsequent time in the bout.

- Be sure the scorekeeper writes down on the score sheet any YELLOW, RED, or BLACK cards that are given.

- After each bout, review the score sheet for correctness. Early checks will avoid disputes later on and also catch errors before they become critical for promotion to the next round.

- Be sure to check the accuracy of any score sheet, total all indicators, have all fencers initial all scoresheets – pool and direct elimination – and you then sign the score sheet.

- Thank all other officials at your strip after each round. They have contributed and should receive recognition.

- Be sure all score sheets are promptly returned to the Bout Committee.

Penalties

Proper application of the penalty rules is second only to correct analysis of the fencing phrase. Proper handling of penalty situations is a critical test of the referee's judgment. The referees' responsibilities are as follows:

- As appropriate, issue YELLOW, RED, and BLACK immediately when faults occur. Do not wait until another occurrence. Delay conditions fencers to improper fencing, favors the offender, places the offender's opponent at a disadvantage, and may result in accidents or injuries. Hold the single card up toward the offending fencer for a few seconds so that both fencers and the audience know that a card has been issued.

- Apply penalties uniformly with both experienced and inexperienced fencers. Resist the tendency to give the experienced fencer more leeway or to overlook faults caused by inexperience. Ignorance of the rules may be widespread, but it is not an excuse for improper fencing or bad behavior.

- Learn the rules thoroughly. Penalty rules are complex, and referees often hesitate to apply them when they are unsure. In particular, rules for corps á corps, covering target, the use of the unarmed hand, and violent or disorderly fencing must be mastered. The *USFA Penalty Reference Chart* will help. It is imperative that you realize that this chart is only a reference chart. It will not replace a thorough knowledge of the penalty rules.

- Apply penalties and warnings in a courteous, firm and unemotional manner that precludes emotional response from the fencers. Penalties should not disrupt the match. Be sure to immediately record on the score sheet the type of card issued.

- Be philosophic. Understand that a student, upon finding out a grade for a class, will say, "*I got* an A." Or the student will say, "*The teacher gave* me an F." Remember that the fencers' incorrect fencing *requires* the penalty; *you* do not penalize the fencer.

Here are some common situations that require the referee to issue cards:

- Covering Target: Not applicable for épée; it occasionally occurs in saber; but it is a frequent occurrence in foil. Covering can be done with the back arm (including the hand), the head, and hair. As to the back arm and hand, it is important to remember that the covering must deny access to the target by the opponent. That means that even though a fencer's hand and arm are in front of her or his

metallic vest during an adjustment of the fencer's mask when the two fencers are far apart, no card should be issued. Covering with the head in foil is to be called when the fencer places the head down so that the back of the head and the spine are parallel to the strip; it should not be called when a fencer makes a long and low lunge. Any touch scored by the fencer who covered target is annulled.

- Corps à Corps—Body Contact: "Halt" must always be called whenever corps à corps takes place. (Yes, even in épée!) In foil and saber, a card must be issued to the fencer who caused even the slightest contact. And if the contact jostles the opponent or the fencer caused the corps à corps to avoid a touch, a card must be given in all weapons, even épée. If both fencers caused the illegal contact, then both fencers are to be given cards. It is important to realize that in situations with attack and counter-attack, the counter-attacker most often causes contact. If a fencer attacks with a fleche or a fast advance lunge and the opponent causes illegal contact by stepping into the path of the attacker, the opponent must be given a card. If the fencer who caused the illegal contact landed a touch, the touch is annulled.

- Turning the Back: In all weapons, it is illegal to turn one's back toward the opponent. (This is *not* turning the head. Do not give fencers a card if they turn their heads so that they look behind themselves.) This warning should be given when the fencer turns her or his back toward the opponent; it is not judged by the angle to the strip. The warning is not given when a fencer goes past the opponent, as "Halt" would be called at the passing. Any touch scored with an action with the turning of the back is annulled.

Starting and Stopping the Bout

Problems can arise from such apparently simple situations as starting or stopping the bout. Some situations may even lead to controversy. Much of this controversy can be avoided.

The basic rules for stopping and starting the bout are found in Article t.18 of the *Rules Book*. The first paragraph refers to starting the bout and states:

> "As soon as the word 'Fence' has been pronounced, the competitors may assume the offensive. No movement (action) made or initiated before the word 'Fence' is counted."

This is straightforward, and most referees experience little difficulty here. However, referees must be alert for premature starts, which can be avoided if the rules of t.17, "Coming on Guard," are applied. The pertinent section states:

> "Competitors come on guard when the referee gives the order 'On guard,' after which the referee asks: 'Are you ready?' On receiving an affirmative reply, or in the absence of a negative reply, he gives the signal for the assault to commence with the word 'Fence.' The fencers must come on guard correctly and remain completely still until 'Fence' is given by the referee."

The question of a "correct" on guard position is no longer open to interpretation. Referees are to have the fencers take the position indicated by the drawings in the *Rules Book* that show the targets for each weapon. Also remember—"at foil and saber no fencer may come on guard with his point in line." The key to the proper starting of the bout is to make sure that the fencers are *completely still*. A fencer may not argue with a referee on what a correct on guard position is nor about remaining immobile until the command "Fence" is given.

Stopping of a bout is much more complex than starting it, and, therefore, more questions can arise from improper handling. Paragraph 2 of Article t.18 states in part:

> "As soon as the order 'Halt' has been given, a competitor may not start a new action; only the movement which has been begun before the order was given remains valid. Everything which takes place afterwards is entirely non-valid."

To properly interpret this instruction, a referee must understand what constitutes an action and that the halt occurs when the referee says he/she

said “Halt.” Example: épée fencers come together causing corps á corps without a touch landing; there is then an immediate remise from one side which arrives. Here the referee calls “Halt” at the corps á corps and does not allow the remise. The fencer who landed the touch may say to the referee: “but you didn’t say halt until after I started the remise—I even heard the buzzer on the machine before I heard your halt.” In this case, the referee must simply state: “I called halt at the corps á corps; the remise is after the halt and therefore not allowed. No touch.” *Nothing* more should be said!

Thus, in all cases, the referee must decide whether or not the critical action started before or after the halt and should announce the decision quickly. (Avoid using the phrase “with the halt” as this can be confusing. An action started either “before” or “after the halt.”) This decision cannot be appealed, and, therefore, attempts to justify it by superfluous description, which can lead to argument, must be avoided. *Do not attempt to support your decision further*!

In the light of the foregoing discussion, referees should realize that *hesitation in announcing the halt must be avoided* to prevent misunderstandings.

The stopping of the bout when fencers leave either the end or the side of the strip also provides situations that can lead to controversy. The referee’s attention is split between the action and the position of the fencers on the strip. Since the primary duty of the referee is to the action, it is not surprising that referees have to interpret strip position liberally.

It is difficult (if not impossible) to determine precisely the instant a fencer’s feet cross the boundaries. A judgment must be made as much by instinct as by eyeball when an action occurs. Referees are advised to make this decision without attempting to describe the precise position, attitude, or movements of the fencers.

This advice is not always easy to follow with actions that occur as a fencer leaves the strip. For example, one often hears heated arguments when a fencer near the edge of the strip jumps into the air during an action. Again, the director must judge whether one (or both) of the fencers was on or off the strip and avoid describing the precise position of the fencer at any specific time. If a touch lands, this decision may affect the awarding or annulment of that touch. If no touch lands, this decision will affect where the fencers are replaced on guard. In these situations the referee’s judgment is paramount. Arguments about whether the fencer was off the strip while in the air during the action are completely superfluous. The strip is a volume and not just a surface; if a fencer jumps in the air over the physical strip, the fencer is still “on” the strip.

It is important to remember that when a fencer leaves the side of the strip with both feet, the opponent *advances* one meter from where she or he was when the fencer left the strip. (It is a common myth that a fencer loses a meter when crossing the side of the strip.) And, when the fencer who left the strip is placed by the application of this rule behind the rear limit of the strip, that fencer is considered as having been touched. The correct distance between fencers when they come on guard, other than when on their on guard lines, is established by having both fencers in the on guard position with their weapon arm extended and the points not overlapping.

Referees are advised to be strict with fencers who tend to fence near the side of the strip, and to discourage such tactics by annulling touches that are made by the fencer who is off the strip with both feet and by penalizing that fencer, whether or not that fencer has landed a touch.

Judgments about stopping a bout are important to the tempo of fencing. A referee must allow the fencers to continue fencing, especially when in-fighting.

On the other hand, the referee must be prepared to call an immediate halt when a blade cannot be wielded correctly, a fencer leaves the strip, a penalty situation occurs, or there is possibility of injury. It is especially important to call a halt whenever corps á corps occurs, especially in épée where a fencer could register a touch by hitting herself or himself. Just as it is incorrect to call "Halt" too late, it is also incorrect to call it too early.

In addition, referees must be consistent in the calling of halt, so that fencers do not stop prematurely expecting a command that is not given and perhaps receive a touch as a result. The feeling for "timing" a command of halt is developed with experience and by thoughtful observation of first-line referees.

In all of the situations just outlined, the referee's judgment is called into play. Competitors, spectators, other officials, et cetera may not agree with a referee's decision on strip position or the timing of the call of halt, but as long as the referee refrains from describing positions, foot placements, et cetera and reasons why the fencer was off or on the strip at a particular time, that judgment must prevail—and cannot be appealed.

- Fencers are advised to accept such judgments because, in most cases, they are secondary to the analysis of the action, which must be the referee's first priority.

- Referees are advised that almost all protests are caused by the referee hesitating or simply saying too much. Remember to describe actions precisely using only fencing terminology. Do not "get caught" describing activity.

Referee Position

After you have inspected the strip for holes and checked to see that there is sufficient space around the strip, you have to know where to stand. Where you place yourself is very important in allowing you to make the correct calls. Referees should always place themselves between the fencers so that they may see both fencers equally. Standing to one side of the competitors will frequently incorrectly influence one's decision as to right of way.

It is also important for the referee to be able to see the scoring apparatus. A referee must devote most of her or his attention to actions, but at the same time it is critical that the referee is able to see when a light comes on. (Is it any wonder that referees are always requesting extension lights?) In a fencing phrase consisting of attack, riposte, and remise, the referee has to know if it was the attack that landed or the remise if lights on both sides are on. This is impossible unless the referee can see the scoring apparatus. This is impossible if the referee does not move with the fencers.

Referees should also allow themselves enough room to preside. (This assumes that the organizers give you enough space.) One should stand, at a minimum, approximately eight feet from the edge of the strip in order to have sufficient vision to observe everything one has to observe. You might wish to stand somewhat closer when refereeing épée due to the slightly lower visual line of site that is used to allow you to be better able in discern a floor touch and to make judgments as to a fencer being on or off the strip.