

International Rapier Seminar 2014 – Tournament Rules

By Reinier van Noort, School voor Historische Schermkunsten, 28-02-2014

Introduction

The following document contains the rules for the tournament held during the first International Rapier Seminar 2014, in Delft. The idea behind this rules set is to encourage artful and technical fencing as described in the treatises. The rules are not meant to represent a “Real Fight”. We believe that the historical masters had the best insight into what was needed to gain the maximum educational advantage from tournament fighting. Therefore, these rules are heavily based on historical fencing rules.

We do not believe that the following rule set should be used in all rapier tournaments worldwide. We do believe that a diversity of rule sets can help exploring the historical material, by forcing fencers to fight under different conditions. For example, the following rules heavily emphasise thrusting over cutting, and force fencers to go for the deeper targets. We expect that this will result in cleaner, more technical fencing.

We hope that the participants of the tournament will play in the spirit of the rules, and will emphasise technical creativity over competitiveness.

The tournament is to be fought with single rapiers.

Please note that these rules may be changed at any time before the tournament at the discretion of the organisers. Such changes will be communicated verbally to the participants before the tournament.

The rules in short

The tournament is held following the rules used historically by Dutch and Belgian fencing guilds, in which one fencer, the Champion, is challenged by a second fencer, the Challenger. If the Champion wins, he remains Champion for the next fight. If the Challenger wins, he becomes the new Champion.

- The winner of the tournament is the fencer who is Champion at the end of the tournament.
- All fencers have three venues. Every time they lose a bout, they lose a venue. Once they are at 0 they are out of the tournament. The tournament ends when all fencers except one (the final Champion and winner of the tournament) are reduced to 0 venues.
- The Challenger wins a bout if he places a clean hit on the Champion. Only hits to the upper body, upper arms and head count. After being hit, the Champion is allowed to make one foot movement (i.e. one step, one pass or one lunge) with which to place an afterblow on the Challenger. If the Champion scores a hit, hits with an afterblow, or if a double hit is made, the Champion wins. The Challenger does not profit from an afterblow, and needs a clean hit to win.
- All fencers sit in a waiting line on the bench. After a bout, the losing fencer sits down at the end of the line, and the first fencer in line becomes the new Challenger.

Weapons and safety equipment

The tournament is to be fought with single rapiers.

Weapons allowed are rapiers with reproduction type blades, such as Darkwood practice blades and bated rapier blades, Danelli rapiers etc.. All blades must have a safe, blunt tip.

Not allowed are sports fencing foil or épées blades, double wide épée blades, Schlager blades and similar blades, and blades with a sharp tip. Darkwood Rapier foil blades, though based on historical blade designs, are not allowed.

The final decision on whether a blade is deemed acceptable lies with the tournament staff.

The following safety equipment is **mandatory** for fencers in the tournament:

- **All bare skin must be covered.**
- Fencing **mask** with a 1600 N bib rating. The mask must be in good order.
- A fencing **jacket**. A gambeson can also be allowed if it closes properly with good overlap. A jacket with a 350 N or better rating is recommended.
- Protective **gloves**. Leather gloves or fencing gloves are recommended.
- **Groin protection**, for men
- **Solid breast plate**, for women
- **Gorget**
- Indoor **shoes**

Fencers are recommended to also wear the following:

Mask cover

- **Groin protection**, for women
- 350 N fencing **breeches**
- 800 N fabric **underplastron**

The participants

During a bout there are five (seven)¹ people active in or at the ring.

These are:

- The fencers - The fencers are the two people fighting. One fencer is the Champion. The other fencer is the Challenger.
- The referee - The referee's job is to coordinate the fight. He will be provided with a staff to separate the fencers when needed and to give additional signals.
- The judges - There will be two (four) judges helping the referee determining what happened. They watch the fight from outside the ring, and call "Hit!" when they see a valid hit. Judges will be provided with flags to indicate who was hit.

Venues, points and winning the tournament

- All fencers start with a set number of venues. Each time a fencer loses a bout, he loses one venue. When a fencer runs out of venues, he is eliminated from the tournament.
- When a fencer wins a bout, he gains one point.
- The winner of the tournament is the fencer who is Champion when all other fencers have lost all venues.

The Champion and the Challenger

- During each bout, one fencer is the current Champion. The first Champion is determined at random.
- The other fencer is the Challenger, and challenges the Champion. Any Challenger can become the next Champion by scoring a clean valid hit on the current Champion.
- The Champion is marked in red.

The ring and stepping out of the ring

The ring is a square of 8 m x 8 m.

- When a fencer steps out of the ring with either foot, the referee will call "Halt!", and notify the fencer. If the same fencer steps out of the ring once more in the same bout this will count as a valid hit against that fencer.
- Stepping out of the ring when retreating after scoring a valid hit does not warrant such a notification, if the valid hit is awarded.

The exchange and the bout

- An exchange (exchange of blows) begins when the referee calls "Fight!" and ends when the referee calls "Halt!".
- An exchange will only be ended for safety reasons, when a valid hit has been reported by one of the judges or was seen by the referee, when a fencer grapples his opponent, or when one of the fencers has stepped out of the ring with one foot.

¹Depending on available staff, either there will be either two or four judges.

- Before the start of each exchange, the fencers retreat into their own corner of the ring.
- A bout is a series of exchanges between two fencers that ends when either fencer wins an exchange.

A valid hit

- A valid hit is any thrust connecting to the head, the torso (from above the groin upwards), or the upper arm (above the elbow). The blade must show some flex to indicate that the thrust has pressure behind it and would have penetrated the target.
- Cuts are not counted as hits.
- A valid hit is also scored when a fencer steps out of the ring for the second time in a bout.

Afterblow and double hits

The afterblow rule encourages fencers not to fight recklessly and to keep up their guard after hitting the opponent.

Only the current Champion is allowed to make an afterblow.

- When a valid hit is placed on the Champion, he is allowed to make one step or pass in order to score a valid hit as an afterblow on his opponent.
- Performing a lunge counts as this one step.
- If the fencer had one foot in the air when he was hit, placing this foot on the ground counts as his one step. (His opponent very neatly took the tempo of the step he was making, and this is to be encouraged.)

A double hit occurs when both fencers place a valid hit on each other within one tempo. This means that both fencers hit simultaneously, or that the attack of the second fencer had already been initiated when he was hit by the first fencer.

Both a double hit and a successful afterblow will score a win for the current Champion.

Grappling, throws and falls, hand parries, blade grabs and disarms

- Grappling the opponent's body is not allowed. When a grapple at the body does occur, the referee will stop the exchange and start a new exchange.
- Throwing the opponent is not allowed, and can result in a warning or heavier penalty at the referee's discretion.
- Parrying or putting aside the blade of the opponent with the free hand is allowed, so long as it is done with an open hand. Taking hold of the opponent's sword is not allowed, except at the hilt.
- If you lose your weapon during an exchange, either by dropping it, or by being disarmed, you lose the bout, unless you lose your weapon due to an excessive action by your opponent (such as an excessively hard cut or grapple, at the referee's discretion).
- If you lose your balance and fall during an exchange, unless due to an excessive action or a throw by your opponent, you lose the bout.

Scoring a hit and awarding a point

When a possible valid hit has come to the attention of the referee he ends the exchange by calling “Halt!”.

- A valid hit can come to the referee's attention through:
- A judge calling “Hit!”
- One of the fencers indicating he received a valid hit. A fencer indicating that he thinks to have scored a valid hit will be ignored. Repeatedly doing so may result in a warning or further penalties.
- The referee's own observation.
- Once the action has stopped, the referee will consult the judges (see flag signals), and potentially the fencers. After that the referee will make a decision. Once made, the referee's decision is final.
- When consulted, the judges will indicate whether they saw one or more valid hits using their flags.
- Depending on the outcome, the referee either declares a winner for the bout or starts a new exchange.
- Note that this means that hits to non-valid targets (legs, lower arm, etc.) will be ignored.

Flag signals

- After a possible valid hit has come to the attention of the referee and he has called “Halt!”, the referee will ask the judges to indicate what valid hits (if any) they observed.
- Each judge can use the following signals:
- “I did not see any hits or do not know what happened.” = cross flags in front of legs.
- “Fencer 1 scored a valid hit.” = Lift the flag of fencer 1 horizontally to the side.
- “Fencer 1 scored a hit, but it was not a valid hit (for instance a hit to the leg)” = Point the flag of fencer 1 diagonally down and to the side.
- “Both fencers scored a valid hit at the same time. A double hit.” = Hold both flags out to the side.
- “Fencer 1 scored a valid hit. Fencer 2 scored a valid afterblow.” = Hold the flag of fencer 1 out horizontally. Lift the flag of fencer 2 straight up. Only the current Champion can score an afterblow.
- The final outcome is decided upon by the referee.

Warnings and penalties

Penalties can and will be awarded for the following offenses. Note that this list is not necessarily complete, and the referee may decide to give penalties for other behaviour as well.

- Cuts are not counted as hits. Whilst making cuts is not forbidden, fencers can be warned/penalised for making overly hard cuts.
- Indicating that you think to have scored can result in a warning.
- Verbally or otherwise abusing the referee and/or judges and tournament officials can result in immediate disqualification.
- Causing injury to your opponent through unsafe behaviour will result in disqualification.

Whether an injury was caused through unsafe behaviour is decided at the discretion of the referee and the judges.

- Receiving several warnings can result in a penalty, such as loss of venues or disqualification.
- The referee can give warnings and penalties at his discretion. Judges can advise the referee to give a warning or penalty.

Disqualification

When a fencer is disqualified, he is removed from the tournament. He loses all venues and points, and cannot win any prizes. The outcomes of any bouts he fought before being disqualified do still count for the fencer's opponents.