



Handbook for New Fencers & Fencing Parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What Is Fencing?	3
Fencing 101	4
Fencing Equipment & Maintenance	6
Fencing Gear Retailers	7
Programs & Leagues	8
Competitions	9
Preparing for a Tournament	10
Tournament Checklist	11
Age Class Eligibility	12
Ratings	13
Private Lessons & Tournament Coaching	14
FAQs	15
Resources & Links	16

What is Fencing?



Welcome to Cape Fear Fencing Association (CFFA) and the sport of fencing!

In simplest terms, fencing is a combat sport involving swords. While historical references to sword fighting schools date back to the 12th Century, modern fencing originated in Italy and France in the 18th Century. Fencing was one of the nine original sports featured in the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896 and in every summer Olympics since.

Fencing increases physical fitness through improved strength, speed, reflexes, flexibility, coordination, balance and agility. Just as importantly, fencing develops decision-making, strategy, focus, confidence, discipline and sportsmanship. Fencing is also one of the safest Olympic sports, with fewer injuries than table tennis, curling or badminton.

There's no minimum or maximum age level for fencers. Kids as young as 8 years old compete at youth tournaments, while fencers 80+ compete as Veterans. Fencing is truly a "sport for life."

There's also no ideal body type for fencers. While tall fencers may enjoy a longer reach, shorter fencers may rely on quickness. With commitment and regular practice, any athlete can experience improvement and the joy of the sport.

Fencing 101



Objective:

The goal of a fencing bout is to score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or five points (in preliminary pool play) before your opponent can do the same or time expires. Each time a fencer scores a touch, they receive a point.

Points are received by making a touch in the opponent's target area. Direct elimination matches in epee and foil consist of three three-minute periods with a one-minute break between each. In saber, the first period lasts for eight touches, and the second period ends when the first fencer scores 15 points.

**Note: Some classifications of fencing, such as Y10 youth classifications and Veteran (age 40 and up), fence 10-touch bouts. In these, there are two periods instead of three.*

Bouts take place on a fencing strip or "piste" that is 14 meters long and 1.5 meters wide.

Fencers begin from their respective "en garde" lines. Referees will announce "On guard. Fencers ready? Fence!" at the start of each point—or in the classical French—"En garde. Prêts? Allez!"

Weapons and Target Areas:



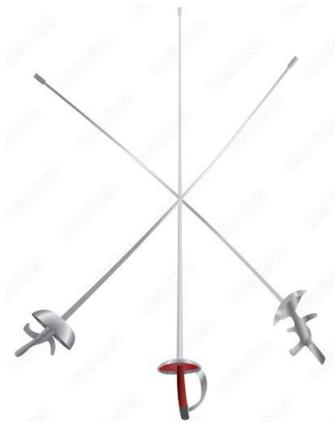
In **epee**, touches are scored only with the point of the blade, and the entire body is the valid target area.



In **foil**, touches are scored only with the point and only the torso and mask bib are targets.



In **saber**, the torso from the bend of the hips up, arms, and entire mask are within the target area. Saberists can score with the edge of their blade as well as their point.



All three weapons (swords) vary in design and weight and are not interchangeable. Shown left (l-r) epee, saber, and foil.

Right of Way:

In epee, there is no right of way, meaning a touch is awarded regardless of who initiated an attack first. In electric epee fencing, a touch is awarded to the fencer whose light appears. Touches that occur within 1/25th of a second of each other result in a point for both epeeists, known as a double touch.

In foil and saber, a fencer must have right of way, meaning they attacked first, in order for a touch to count. Only single touches are awarded in foil and saber. Touches that hit outside of the target area are called “off target” and result in play being halted and restarted. Simultaneous touches, where both lights appear and no right of way can be determined, are thrown out.

Fencing Equipment & Maintenance

Other than socks and shoes, beginning fencers at CFFA can borrow most of the equipment listed below from the club. If you/your child intends to continue with fencing and you're looking to purchase personal equipment, we recommend starting with a mask and glove. Most of the equipment listed below can be purchased through CFFA's Absolute Fencing account at a discount (see following page for details). Items are listed in order of recommended purchase.

- Mask
- Glove
- Long socks (must reach bottom of your knickers – soccer socks work well)
- Fencing shoes or court shoes with low profile and non-slip grip (volleyball shoes or indoor soccer shoes work for many fencers)
- Underarm protector (also called a “plastron”)
- Chest protector (mandatory for women)
- Jacket
- Knickers
- Lamé (the conductive over jacket that is used in foil and saber only)
- Two working weapons (if competing in sanctioned tournaments) - Y10 and Y8 fencers must use weapons with blades no longer than 32.5 inches
- Two working body cords (if competing in sanctioned tournaments)
- Two working mask cords (if competing in sanctioned tournaments) (foil and saber only)
- Fencing bag to carry your equipment
- Tool kit to include screwdrivers for tip and grip, spare tips screws and springs
- Test box, weight and shims to confirm weapon is legal and operating properly

Fencing uniforms and gloves should be laundered regularly and hung up to dry after washing. To extend the life of your uniform, do not use chlorine bleach. In between washings, fencing gear should be hung up to dry out after practice and should not be left damp in a fencing bag.

Masks should be wiped down regularly and can be handwashed with a mild dish detergent or washed (by themselves) in a dishwasher and air dried.

Make sure your equipment is clearly labeled with your name, club and phone number.

Fencing Gear Retailers



[Absolute Fencing Gear](#) - This US-based company offers a wide range of fencing equipment at a variety of price points.

Orders placed through CFFA (not directly through Absolute Fencing) are discounted 20% with free shipping (15% discount for non-Absolute brand products). Order forms can be found at the CFFA gym and should be submitted to Herman Smith. Orders are typically placed on the 1st and 16th of each month.



[Blue Gauntlet Fencing](#)

This US-based retailer offers a range of equipment at prices and quality similar to Absolute Fencing, but with slightly less variety.



[Triplette Competition Arms](#)

Along with weapons and other gear, this North Carolina-based company offers a wider variety of children's sizing than other fencing retailers, along with customized uniforms based on your exact measurements.



[Allstar Uhlmann](#)

A UK-based company offering a solid variety of fencing weapons and gear, with higher quality than Absolute Fencing or Blue Gauntlet.



[Leon Paul Fencing Gear](#)

Based in London, England, this company offer high-end fencing gear (priced accordingly) for the more discerning fencer.

Programs & Leagues



Cape Fear Fencing Association participates in a variety of programs and leagues appropriate for beginning fencers, including, but not limited to:

- Homeschool Program – beginner class meets for 8 weeks on Wed and ongoing during the school year for returning students
- After School Program – classes meet Mon-Thurs and students are encouraged to attend two days per week
- Fencing Camps – weeklong beginner camps in foil, as well as advanced camps in foil and epee, are offered in the summer
- Evening Beginner Classes – these ongoing 6-week classes occur Mon/Wed or Tues-Thurs
- Evening Practice (Tues/Thurs) – generally limited to ages 13 and older and younger fencers who have completed a beginner class or camp and are accompanied by a parent

All students will need a [non-competitive \(Access\) USA Fencing membership](#). Membership follows the USA Fencing season, which occurs between August 1 through July 31. Any memberships purchased after March 31 will be valid through the following USA Fencing season.

Competitions



Typically, CFFA hosts 3-4 USA Fencing-sanctioned tournaments for epee and foil each fencing season, open to fencers 13+. Additionally, CFFA hosts several unsanctioned youth events, with awards to youngsters 12 and under and 9 and under.

As fencers advance, they branch out to regional tournaments in their respective age groups that include fencers from Region 6 (known as Regional Youth Circuit tournaments or RYCs). Super Youth Circuit (SYC) tournaments include athletes from all regions. RYCs and SYCs offer points for fencers to qualify for national events, such as Summer National Championships or Junior Olympics.

[View the USA Fencing regional tournament calendar.](#)

North American Cup tournaments (known as NACs) are large scale events that attract fencers from around the country and world. In any given fencing season, there are typically around six NACs that include youth fencing categories. Fencers who place high enough in NACs earn national points. Fencers must qualify to compete in the National Championships or Junior Olympics, but any member of USA Fencing can compete in a NAC. [View the USA Fencing national tourney calendar.](#)

The jump from local tournaments to regional and national tournaments can be overwhelming for young fencers due to the size of events and competition talent level. If you're uncertain if your fencer is ready for the next level, ask Coach Greg Spahr for guidance before signing up.

Tournament Sign Ups:

<https://www.askfred.net/>

<https://www.usafencing.org/>



Preparing for a Tournament

At least a week before a tournament, fencers should test their weapons to make sure they are in working order. Additionally, fencers should check their weapons with weights (epee and foil only)



and shims (epee only) to ensure they are legal. If they're unsure how to do this, they should speak to one of the CFFA coaches or armorers and ask for help. Additionally, they should verify their body cords (and mask cords for foil and saber) are working, their masks can withstand a punch test, and their glove has no holes. Fencers are required to have at least two working body cords (plus two working mask cords for foil and saber) and two working weapons for competition.



Be sure you have a printed version or screenshot of your USA Fencing membership card to verify your identity and age. At larger tournaments, your card bar code will be scanned for registration check-in. You'll want to upload your birth certificate to USA Fencing well in advance of the tournament so your card will show as "age verified," eliminating the need for you to bring a birth certificate to competition.

The night before a tournament, inspect your gear again and re-test weapons before packing your fencing bag. Make sure you've packed a refillable water bottle and a snack as well.



The day of a tournament, fencers will need to arrive a minimum of one hour before the tournament start time to ensure ample time to check-in, re-test weapons, warm up with stretching and footwork, get dressed, and fence a practice bout or two. Remember: the start times listed are when you need to be *ready to fence*. Fencers who arrive late or with faulty equipment create additional stress for themselves and run the risk of being disqualified.

Listen to the announcer call for final registration check in and the announcement that registration has closed. Look for your pool number and strip assignment as soon as they are posted on fencingtimelive.com and/or on the digital boards at the arena. Head to your assigned strip and check in with your referee.

Keep in mind: at regional tournaments and NACs, you'll need to have your gear (typically cords, mask, glove and lamé) checked in advance at the armory table. Lines can be long, so allow yourself extra time. If you have an early morning start time, if possible, have your gear checked at the armory table the night before you compete.

Tournament Check List

Two Weeks Before a Tournament

- Upload birth certificate to USA Fencing
- Doublecheck tournament dates/times

One Week Before a Tournament

- Test weapons (2 working weapons required)
- Check weapons with weights (foil/epee) and shims (epee)
- Test body cords (2 working cords required)
- Test mask cords (foil and saber only) (2 working cords required)
- Print or take screen shot of age verified USA Fencing membership card

Night Before Tournament

- Re-test weapons
- Armory check (mask, glove, body cords, mask cord-if applicable, lamé-if applicable)

Pack fencing bag:

- 2 Weapons
- 2 Body cords
- 2 Mask cords (if applicable)
- Jacket
- Knickers
- Plastron
- Chest Protector (if applicable)
- Lamé (if applicable)
- Socks
- Shoes
- Tool kit
- Towel
- Refillable water bottle
- Snack

Tournament Day

- Arrive at venue a minimum of one hour before your scheduled start time
- Check in at registration table
- Armory check (if unable to do the night before – allow extra time for this at large venues)
- Re-test weapons
- Warm up with stretching and footwork
- Use restroom
- Get dressed
- Practice bout or two
- Monitor digital boards at arena or fencingtimelive.com for pool number & strip assignment
- Check in with referee on your assigned strip
- Fence and have fun!

Age Class Eligibility

At the age of 13, fencers may fence “Opens” and other tournaments for which they are qualified. However, there are restrictions on fencing in higher or older categories. Find out the rules before your child tries to enter such events to avoid missteps and speak with Coach Spahr if you have questions.

The tables below reflect eligibility information for USA Fencing tournaments for the 2024-25 season based on age and classification or rating.

A. 2024-25 Local/Regional/National Tournaments (October NAC, November NAC, December SJCC, January NAC & Junior Olympics)

CATEGORY	CODE	BIRTH YEARS	CLASS
Division I	DV1	Born 2011 or earlier	A, B or C
Division I-A	DV1A	Born 2011 or earlier	N/A
Division II	DV2	Born 2011 or earlier	C, D, E or U
Division III	DV3	Born 2011 or earlier	D, E or U
Parafencing	PARA	Born 2011 or earlier	N/A
Senior Team	STM	Born 2011 or earlier	N/A
Veteran/Veteran Team	VET/VTM	Born 1985 or earlier	N/A
Veteran 40-49	V40	Born 1976-1985	N/A
Veteran 50-59	V50	Born 1966-1975	N/A
Veteran 60-69	V60	Born 1956-1965	N/A
Veteran 70 & Older	V70	Born 1955 or earlier	N/A
Veteran 80 & Older	V80	Born 1945 or earlier	N/A
Junior/Junior Team	JNR/JTM	Born 2005-2011	N/A
Cadet/Cadet Team	CDT/CTM	Born 2008-2011	N/A
Youth 14/Youth 14 Team	Y14/Y14TM	Born 2010-2013	N/A
Youth 12	Y12	Born 2012-2015	N/A
Youth 10	Y10	Born 2014-2017	N/A
Youth 8	Y8	Born 2016-2018	N/A

B. 2025 March NAC, 2025 April NAC, 2025 National Championships & July Challenge & Associated Regional & Division Qualifying Competitions Only (Post Junior Olympics)

CATEGORY	CODE	BIRTH YEARS	CLASS
Junior	JNR	Born 2006-2012	N/A
Cadet	CDT	Born 2009-2012	N/A

Ratings

Beginning fencers should focus on improvement, rather than ratings, which come in time and with practice. As fencers advance, they can earn individual ratings when they place high enough in tournaments that are rated. Unrated fencers are designated as U (or Unclassified). Ratings start at E and progress D-C-B-A, with A being the highest rating.

Along with the rating itself, a fencer will have the year the rating was earned indicated. If two fencers are both rated “A,” the fencer with the most recent rating is considered the highest rated (in other words an A24 fencer is higher rated than an A22). After four years, if the rating is not renewed, it downgrades by one letter. The chart below illustrates tournament ratings based on size, fencer composition, and final fencer placement.

EVENT RATING	MINIMUM NBR COMPETITORS	RATED FENCERS REQUIRED	RATED FENCERS MUST FINISH	CLASSIFICATIONS AWARDED
GROUP E1	6	NONE	N/A	1 → E
GROUP D1 Changed per BOD 7/09	15	4 E's (or higher)	2 E's (or higher) In top 8	1 → D 2-4 → E
GROUP C1	15	2 C's & 2 D's & 2 E's (or higher)	2 C's & 2 D's (or higher) In top 8	1 → C 2-4 → D 5-8 → E
GROUP C2	25	4 D's & 4 E's (or higher)	4 D's (or higher) In top 8	1 → C 2-4 → D 5-8 → E
GROUP C3	64	24 D's & 12 E's (or higher)	4 D's in top 8 & 4 E's (or higher) In top 12	1-4 → C 5- 8 → D 9-16 → E
GROUP B1	15	2 B's & 2 C's & 2 D's (or higher)	2 B's & 2 C's (or higher) In top 8	1 → B 2-4 → C 5- 6 → D 7-8 → E
GROUP B2	25	2 B's & 2 C's & 2 D's (or higher)	2 B's & 2 C's (or higher) In top 8	1 → B 2-4 → C 5- 8 → D 9-12 → E
GROUP B3	64	24 C's & 12 D's (or higher)	4 C's In top 8 & 4 D's (or higher) In top 12	1-4 → B 5-8 → C 9-16 → D 17-32 → E
GROUP A1 Changed per BOD 7/07	15	2 A's & 2 B's & 2 C's (or higher)	2 A's & 2 B's (or higher) In top 8	1 → A 2 → B 3-4 → C 5- 6 → D 7-8 → E
GROUP A2	25	2 A's & 2 B's & 2 C's (or higher)	2 A's & 2 B's (or higher) In top 8	1 → A 2-4 → B 5-8 → C 9-10 → D 11-12 → E
GROUP A3	64	24 B's & 12 C's (or higher)	4 B's in top 8 & 4 C's (or higher) In top 12	1-4 → A 5- 8 → B 9-16 → C 17-24 → D 25- 32 → E
GROUP A4	64	12 A's & 12 B's & 12 C's (or higher)	4 A's In top 8 & 4 B's (or higher) In top 12	1-8 → A 9-16 → B 17-24 → C 25-32 → D 33-48 → E

Private Lessons & Tournament Coaching



Intermediate fencers can benefit greatly from private lessons that foster good form and footwork at the start. As fencers progress, most find lessons helpful for identifying strengths or weaknesses and adding different moves and tactics to their fencing arsenal.

Private 20-minute lessons with Coach Greg Spahr are available for \$20. Sign up on the CFFA club bulletin board or contact Coach Spahr directly at gregoryspahr@yahoo.com.

Brendan McConville, who leads evening footwork and drills, periodically offers lessons based on his schedule. Contact Brendan directly at mcconvilleb@gmail.com for available times and rates.

At his own expense, Coach Greg Spahr travels to fencing tournaments where CFFA fencers are competing. Parents should expect to compensate Coach Spahr for his time spent warming up fencers before a tournament and coaching fencers while they are on the strip. Please speak with Coach Spahr directly about an appropriate payment arrangement.

FAQs

Q: Is fencing safe for my child?

Yes. Fencers are less prone to injury than most team and individual sports, including soccer, tennis and even swimming. Adherence to proper safety guidelines, including never fencing without wearing complete gear, warming up with dynamic stretching before bouts, and carrying weapons with the tip pointed down toward the floor when not fencing is taught to students from the outset.

[Learn more about fencing injury prevention in children.](#)

Q: Do coaches have background checks and training to ensure my child is safe from abuse?

Yes. Coaches and CFFA board members are required to complete [Safe Sport Training](#) that addresses sexual, emotional and physical misconduct, bullying, harassment, and hazing. Coaches and board members also undergo a criminal background check. At CFFA children under the age of 18 are never left alone with a single adult.

Q: How can I support my beginning fencer?

Do:

- Be a positive role model by demonstrating support for all fencers, coaches, and officials at every practice and competition
- Get your child to practice and events on time
- Show interest in their training and ask questions
- Teach your child to be gracious in victory and in defeat
 - Have realistic expectations of your child's ability - Have your fencer create realistic goals with their coach that are based on improving performance, rather than winning
- Emphasize effort rather than outcome, and the importance of having fun, learning, and developing new skills
- Look relaxed, calm, and positive when watching your child compete (even if you're feeling otherwise!)
- Give unconditional love and support, regardless of the day's results – "I loved watching you fence today," is something you can say in victory and defeat

Don't:

- Think of your child's fencing as an investment for which you want a return
- Impose your goals of success onto your child or live out your dreams through your child
- Compare your child's performance to that of other children
- Ignore your child's behavior when it's inappropriate - Deal with it constructively so it doesn't happen again

- Do anything that will cause your child embarrassment
- Make fencing everything in your child's life - make it a part of life
- Be upset or surprised if your child needs an occasional break from fencing to recharge

Q: Are there opportunities for my student to fence in college?

Yes. Varsity fencing teams compete at the Div I, Div II and Div III collegiate levels. Additionally, many colleges have fencing clubs. [Learn more.](#)

CFFA is proud to have one of its longtime members, [Nicole Mileski](#), competing as an epeeist on UNC-Chapel Hill's varsity fencing team. In 2024, Nicole was the ACC tournament women's individual silver medalist.

Resources & Links

[Cape Fear Fencing Association](#) – Wilmington, NC's largest and oldest fencing club, offering classes, camps, tournaments, lessons and other resources for beginning and advanced fencers



[USA Fencing](#) – Fencing's official national governing body, offering resources for competitive and recreational fencers and coaches

View a glossary of fencing terms at

<https://www.usafencing.org/glossary-of-fencing>

View an overview of fencing rules at

<https://www.usafencing.org/basics-of-competition>

View the official USA Fencing rule book at <https://www.usafencing.org/usa-fencing-rule-book>.

View the USA Fencing athlete handbook at <https://www.usafencing.org/athlete-handbook>.

Find a fencing tournament near you on [askFRED.net](#)

[Join NCFL](#) to match up with other schools in the NC High School Fencing League

[Join NCHEAC](#) (NC Home Education Athletic Commission) to find a home school fencing team

Learn more about the [PISACAFE Youth Circuit](#), a partnership between All-American Fencing Academy, Greensboro Fencing Academy, and Cape Fear Fencing Association that encourages participation in both home and away events for elementary and middle school fencers

Still Have Questions?

Fencing can seem like a complex sport at first, but in no time you and your child will grow more comfortable and confident. Don't hesitate to ask a CFFA coach, board member, or fellow parent for assistance or advice the next time you're at the club. We're all here to help!