

So you're interested in fencing in tournaments? The website we use to locate and sign up for tournaments is: askfred.net

On the main page, on the top bar, you'll see a tab for upcoming tournaments. Hover over it, then click on browse tournaments. There will be a number of search options in the top box. Choose the correct:

1. Weapon
2. Gender - appropriate gender or mixed
3. Age Group - Youth refers to the age groups up to 14 yrs old, Cadet is under 17, Junior is under 20, and Senior is open to all ages
4. Division - New Jersey, or anywhere else in the world you want to fence.

Hit Search and it'll give you a list of all tournaments matching that criteria. At the top right of each tournament listing, to the right of the tournament date, you'll see 4 boxes.

The first one is to pre-register for the tournament online. I recommend this if you want to go as it usually is cheaper than doing so at the door.

The second is to see who else is registered. This gets more and more important the more you fence. You need to know who you're up against. You can also check the ratings of the other fencers in the competition. Fencers begin their career unrated. They can then earn a rating if they do well in certain tournaments that fulfill set requirements. Ratings go from E-A, with A being the highest rating a fencer can achieve. While A rated fencers aren't always the best fencers in the tournament, it's a good general indicator of strength.

The third is more info on the tournament. It'll tell you all about what the tournament is, when you need to register by, price, location and directions, and everything else you might need to know. Also a very important tool.

Most tournaments are USFA sanctioned, and will require that the fencer has a USFA membership. These can be attained through the USFA website, for various lengths of time. Alternatively, there is a single day membership fee that can be paid to allow the fencer to compete in that tournament only.

Tournaments are a lot like going to the airport. There are a number of things that a fencer may have to get accomplished before they are able to fence in the tournament, so it's important to show up early enough to get it all done. Registration will end at the time given, so it is important that the fencer goes to the registration table and checks in before that time. Make sure to bring your USFA card or information. They will ask for it at registration. For tournament of any importance, there will also be an equipment check before the tournament begins. The fencer will be required to bring all their electric gear (mask, lame, overglove, cords, and point weapons) up to the armorer's table and have it tested to make sure it's functioning properly. It will be approved and stamped, or rejected. In big tournaments, all pieces are checked by the director on the strip to make

sure they are all stamped passed. The director will also check for plastrons. Bigger tournaments may require the fencer's name stenciled on the back of the lame or up the side of the leg.

Tournaments usually are organized the same way. All competing fencers will be put into a list before the tournament begins (after registration) depending on their current ratings, with A rated fencers at the top and Unrated fencers at the bottom. If fencers have the same rating, the ones with newer rating will be put at top. The fencers on this list will then be separated into pools of anywhere from 5 to 9 fencers. All A rated fencers will be separated first into pools so there will be as little overlap as possible, then the same will happen for B's and so on until all pools have a similar structure of high to low-rated fencers. The reason is to avoid having a pool with a lot of top rated fencers. If there are no fencers with ratings competing in the tournament, then this becomes inconsequential.

The fencers will then fence everyone in their pool in 5 touch bouts, accumulating a pool record. After all fencers have completed their pools, they will be re-listed back in one big list in order of their pool record. If the records are the same, they go to indicator (touches scored - touches received) and so on until they are properly ordered. Sometimes, depending on the tournament, a certain percentage of fencers at the bottom of this new list will be excused. Whether this step happens or not, the remaining fencers will then enter an elimination bracket. The person with the best record out of pools will fence the person with the worst and so on until there is only one fencer left. These bouts will all be 15 touches long.

As a result, it is extremely important to do well in pools to avoid having to face a really good fencer early on. That's why we need to start quickly. Every touch counts.

Aside from that, all I can say is a few words of advice. While going to some major tournaments can be cool and fun, You're probably not going to win much right off the bat. Fencing, as with all individual sports, relies heavily on a fencer's confidence. You will not succeed if you do not believe you can compete. Mental fortitude is at a premium. Entering into a lot of tough competitions is going to kill that confidence so mix it up. Find some smaller competitions and age-appropriate ones and hack away at them until you make headway.

The experience of competition is invaluable in sports. Nothing compares. Soak up everything. Stay and watch the finals, and don't get upset if things don't go well. This sport is built on respect, so temper your emotions. There will be days when a director will call everything against you and will single-handedly knock you out of the competition. I always say, you're fencing two people out there, the other fencer and the director. Everyone directs differently. Every club has different fencing and directing habits. Learning these will help along the way and never let them bother you for long. Like in all sports, always look to the next play.

Always be drinking, If you're going to be drinking Gatorade, cut it with water. Eat before you go and eat during. You'll lose energy like you wouldn't believe since you're wearing many layers of clothes, but you can't take anything off because you'll go cold in between rounds. In fact, in between rounds put on a warm up suit over the fencing attire. It'll be hot, so you must stay hydrated, but it'll prevent tightening up. You don't want to start a bout tight.

What else...find a routine before the tournament. Warm up, stretch, and fence around a bit so when you start in the tournament you're ready to go. Pitchers in baseball pitch a ton before they come in so they're in mid-stride by the time they hit the mound. You'll have to do as well because poor performance in the beginning will make it harder for you later on.

Video Tape your bouts. Watching video of yourself fence is an invaluable tool. It allows you to see things about yourself you never would have seen otherwise. I am always happy to sit down with my students and watch their bouts with them.

I've got nothing else right now so if you have any questions feel free to email me and ask. Good luck, I hope you enjoy it!