

Hi, it's Coach Eric. I have a few additional points I would like to address pertaining to fencing competitions.

First, let's address the equipment a fencer is going to need in order to compete. ALL fencers must have the basic dry equipment. That means:

Plastron - this is checked for on the strip for most USFA tournaments, so don't try and sneak out of it. I hated wearing it, but it's all about safety.

Jacket - it must zip up, cover to the waist, to the wrist, and up the neck a bit.

Glove – no holes (although small holes on the palm are rarely cared about), and it must, obviously, be over the jacket sleeve, so the overlap protects from point attacks.

Knickers – you generally don't want them too tight, so you can lunge and move, but not too loose that they are falling off. They should go down to right underneath the knees and up well over the waist.

Socks – Full socks, up to the knee, leaving no skin exposed between them and the knickers. This is enforced the strongest in epee but all weapons should be wearing them. Normally you will see white socks (white is the expected color of fencing equipment because it is the least distracting to the eye), but people are creative, and sometimes wear “unique” selections. This is not just a formal look issue, but also a safety one, as we tend to try and avoid blade contact to uncovered skin.

Plastic Chest-Protector(optional) – yes, optional, but for epee, highly recommended. Foil as well, to a lesser extent.

In addition to the generic dry equipment, all fencers must have some electric equipment as well. This is worn in addition to the dry equipment and varies for all three weapons.

Epee is the easiest, as all you need is a body cord, an electric weapon, and your mask. While foil and sabre share the same body cord (unless you are able to find, and want to use the old bayonet style foil body cord and weapon), the epee cord is unique. It is just two three-pronged connectors attached by a cord. It is worn underneath the jacket, from the weapon, through the top of the Velcro part of the glove (right where it starts at the wrist), down through the sleeve, out the back of the jacket. That's all you need for epee.

Foil requires a little more. Its body cord has one three-pronged connector, whose cord splits into two, one going to an alligator clip, the other to a two-pronged connector. The two-pronged connector connects to the blade. Its cord goes down the sleeve of the dry jacket again, and out the back. The alligator clip is clipped onto the bottom back of the electric lame. The electric foil lame is just a vest. No sleeves as arms are off target.

Sabre has the most electric equipment. It uses the same body cord as foil, but a full electric lame, complete with sleeves, covering the whole sabre target area. As such, I enjoy running the cord just inside the electric lame, and not in the dry one. The alligator clip is again clipped in the same place as foil. The electric sabre mask is special. Its bib is made of the same material as the electric lames. To ensure its connectivity, sabre fencers must attach a head cord from their electric lames to the mask. The head cord has two alligator clips connected by a cord (I personally like the coiled ones, they have good cord length and keeps it compact). The sabre lame usually will have a little tab near the back of the neck. Attach one alligator clip to the tab, and the other to the back top, or

side of the mask. Some people like the clip on the metal, some on the material. Both ways work. Lastly, sabre fencers need either a special electric cuff worn over their dry glove, or whole different, all inclusive electric glove. The choice is yours. You will need one for bigger tournaments.

When you arrive at the tournament, do so well ahead of the stated check-in time. There will be a line at the check-in table (there is one at every tournament, usually referred to as the bout committee, or registration table). Checking in should be your first priority (unless you arrived so early that they are not yet checking in your weapon). Bring your USFA card to the table (if it is still in transition, and you do not yet have your actual card, bring the confirmation of your membership). If you have preregistered for the tournament (which you should because it's cheaper), then you will be on their list. If not, you will have to pay the door fee at the table. If there is a discrepancy, get it worked out.

Larger USFA tournaments (national tournaments, qualifiers, etc.) will require you to have some of your equipment tested before you are allowed to use it in the tournament. This is very important. They will mark the equipment to show it's been tested and this is always checked for at the strip. If they do not see the mark, you are carded. If you cannot switch to marked equipment, they will not allow you to fence.

The weapons are tested at the strip.

All weapons get a visual test. Obviously the visual test is just to make sure the wires aren't sticking out (for point weapons), and other basic things such as bend of the blade.

Both epees and sabres are subject to a shim/gauge test. In epee this is particularly relevant, and is tested almost every time you step onto the strip, or change weapons. The epee shim is a thin metal device of a certain thickness (.5mm) that is inserted between the base of the tip and the part that actually compresses. This is done to ensure that the blade will not register a hit unless the tip compresses a certain distance. This negates an unfair competitive advantage. This used to be checked for in foil too, but isn't anymore.

The sabre shim actually tests thickness of the blade. This is a rarely used test, but I have had it pulled out on me (back during the post-2000 blade crackdown).

Foil and epee must do a weight test everything they step on the strip, or change weapons. The weight is a cylindrical metal device of a certain heaviness (750g for epee, 500g for foil) that has a hole in one end, allowing it to slide onto the tip of the blade. The fencer usually drops down to a knee and holds the tip upwards to allow the director to reach it (as fencers usually are very tall, and a director like me can't reach the top when they are standing up!). Once the weight is slid onto the blade, it is pushed down so that it registers a hit. As we know, sans weight, when the blade scores a touch and the machine lights up, a few moments later the light goes off and it goes back to a state of rest. If one were to continually compress the tip, it would continuously keep reregistering a hit right after the previous one ends. The weight test is designed to make sure the blade goes back to that state of rest even with the weight on it, thereby ensuring that it will take an actual, compressing hit to compress the tip.

For sabre, it is very simple. They really don't test the blades. The immediate years following 2000, they always checked the blades for the 2000 stamp in them (in

2000 they made the blades much stiffer), but this is generally a non-issue unless you own non-2000 blades (I have a number of them still). While sabre blades are very often left untested due to the simple nature of them, it can be given a visual test. Specifically, to check that it's bend conforms to the regulations.

Be careful, not all blades are electric blades. For all three weapons, blades have to have certain features that make it electric. This means sabres too. Electric sabres, aside from having the clip on the inside, should have the inside of the bell painted, an insulated pad inside the guard, a rubber grip, and an insulated pommel. This is done so that the fencer can't accidentally touch a metal part of the sabre to the jacket. If that happens, the blade will become conductive, and if the opponent hits the sabre, it will register as a jacket hit. This happens more than you would like if you have improper insulation, so be careful.

All electric equipment will need to be checked. That means all cords you plan on using (sabre head-cords, and all back-ups included), sabre and foil electric lames, and all masks.

Every cord you plan to use, in every weapon, must be tested. They will check for this. They'll plug them in, wiggle them around, and make sure they work. Get a few tested. Things happen; they break. If you don't have an extra cord tested, at the strip, and ready to be replaced in a timely manner, it will cost you cards and touches. There is a great technique for replacing body cords that does not require taking the jacket off. If I haven't yet taught it to you before you compete, make sure you ask and know it, it will save you time.

The lames (sabre and foil) are visually tested and tested for conductivity. A machine is dragged all along it to check for dead spots that are common on used jackets. In sabre, they show up near the wrist and neck often, since blade contact and sweat are the two main destroyers of a lame. If a dead spot is found, the jacket is unusable. Dead spots on a jacket can be found while the fencers on the strip as well. If that happens...drum roll...the jacket is unusable and must be replaced. NOTE: if the dead spot is small enough, it may be patched successfully by an armorer. I have done this successfully before. But patching is not immediate, so if it happens on a strip or right before a tournament, it's not an option (another reason to get to the tournament with time to spare).

The masks are given special attention for obvious reason. No one allows fencers to use masks that are in disrepair; it is an unnecessary danger. They are visually inspected for holes or tears, or other structural issues. The wire mesh face of the mask is then punch-tested with this little tool. If the punch gets through the face at all, it's unusable. If the face has any indentations in it, it is unusable. For sabre masks, the electric bib cannot have any tears or it must be patched, and it is tested for conductivity much the same as the electric lames.

For national tournaments, your name must be displayed either on the back of the jacket or on the leg of your pants Do not spray paint or marker it on, get a booth at the tournament, or your local shop (Absolute, etc) to stencil it on. It will take a while so don't try to do it 5 minutes before your first national tournament.

Bring extra cords and weapons to the strip with you. I would say 1-2 extra weapons, and 2 extra cords. Can you fence without it? Yes. But one break and you're in

hot water. I've had equipment get slashed and broken on the first touch. I've also broken three separate weapons through the course of a large tournament. One's mentality is so important in this sport, that not being prepared for the unexpected and getting cards and being rushed can throw a fencer off their game.

Don't leave your equipment sitting around out in the open, equipment has a tendency to walk away, intentionally and unintentionally, when it's just sitting out. Keep unused equip in your fencing bag, and when you take equipment off, don't just drop it where you stand for future pickup. Put it away. If you don't have someone there to hold your back-up equipment that you bring to the strip, then keep it by the strip you're fencing at, so you can keep a relative eye on it. Don't stash it in remote corners.

If you can, video tape all your bouts. Go home, relax, and watch it. Pick yourself apart, congratulate yourself on good touches, and generally learn what you can about yourself. We have, as a club, set up an online youtube account for the club for fencers to upload their video to allow me to also watch and give commentary. These videos can be made private so no one but me and the fencer can see them. I encourage every fencer to take advantage of this. I am good at breaking down mechanics and working with a fencer. Feel free to ask me more about this.

Lastly, I encourage all of my competing students who have not done so, to officially sign-up to be a member of Central Fencing Club (CFC). It's an important step for a fencer to become a member of a club, so that all other fencers know who to fear! Plus it has many benefits, not least amongst them is that, all other things equal, many tournaments will make sure club teammates are not all lumped together in the same pools, but spread out evenly to avoid them having to fence each other right off the bat!

I'm sure there's plenty I've forgotten to add, so if you have any unanswered questions feel free to contact me.

Eric Kirberger