

# DEREK SNYDER



ELITE FENCING COACHING

PRIVATE COACHING RESOURCE SERIES

## The Complete Tournament Day Checklist

*For Fencers*



Your step-by-step game plan from the night before through the final touch. One touch at a time.

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# A Note from Coach Derek

*Tournament day is where preparation meets performance. It doesn't matter how many hours you've spent in the club if you walk into the venue unfocused, underfed, or unprepared. I've seen talented fencers lose bouts they should have won because they didn't warm up properly, didn't eat enough, or let one bad touch ruin the next five.*

*This checklist is your game plan. It covers everything from the night before through your last bout. Follow it step by step. Check things off as you go. Build habits that become automatic – so when the pressure comes, you're not thinking about logistics. You're thinking about fencing.*

*The fencers who perform best at tournaments are not the ones with the most talent. They're the ones with the best preparation, the best routines, and the best ability to reset after every touch. This checklist teaches you how to be that fencer.*

*– Coach Derek*

# The Night Before

*Tournament day starts the night before. What you do tonight sets the tone for tomorrow.*

## Equipment

- Pack your entire fencing bag and check every item against the equipment list.
- Test every weapon. Make sure tips depress properly and body cords work.
- Pack at least 2 working weapons and 2 working body cords.
- Pack backup gear: extra glove, extra socks, extra body cord, extra mask cord.
- Pack your tool kit with screwdrivers, tape, spare screws, and spare springs.
- Lay out your uniform: jacket, knickers, plastron, lamé (if foil/saber), long socks.
- Set fencing shoes by the door (with backup athletic shoes).
- Put your bag by the front door so nothing gets forgotten in the morning.

## Nutrition & Hydration

- Eat a balanced dinner — lean protein, carbs, vegetables. Nothing experimental.
- Drink water throughout the evening. Don't try to catch up in the morning.
- Prepare tournament snacks and put them in a bag: bananas, granola bars, trail mix, sandwich.
- Fill water bottles and put them in the fridge.
- Avoid heavy, greasy, or spicy food that might upset your stomach.
- Avoid excessive sugar or caffeine — you need quality sleep.

## Mental Preparation

- Set one outcome goal (e.g., "make the top 8" or "win 3 pool bouts").
- Set two tactical goals (e.g., "attack with a clear extension" and "use distance before lunging").
- Set one process goal (e.g., "reset between every single touch" or "breathe before en garde").
- Spend 5–10 minutes visualizing yourself fencing well. See yourself scoring. See yourself recovering from mistakes. See yourself staying calm after a bad call.
- Choose one focus word for tomorrow (e.g., "patient" or "present" or "sharp").
- Practice your reset routine — what you'll do physically and mentally between touches.
- Put your phone down 30 minutes before bed. No screens.
- Go to sleep early enough to get at least 8 hours.

**COACH'S TIP:** Don't stay up late re-watching old bout footage or worrying about opponents. You've done the work. Trust your training. Sleep is the best thing you can do for tomorrow's performance.

# Morning Of

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*Control the morning, and the rest of the day follows.*

## Before Leaving

- Wake up at least 2 hours before you need to arrive.
- Eat breakfast: oatmeal, eggs, toast, banana, yogurt – something familiar.
- Drink 16–20 oz of water before leaving.
- Use the restroom before getting in the car.
- Double-check your bag: weapons, body cords, glove, mask, uniform, shoes, snacks, water.
- Bring your phone charger and a portable battery pack.
- Review your three goals (outcome, tactical, process) one more time.
- Say your focus word out loud.
- Leave earlier than you think you need to.

## In the Car

- Listen to music that puts you in the right headspace – not the same music for every person.
- Some fencers need energy; some need calm. Know which one you are.
- Do NOT start strategizing about specific opponents. You don't know your pool yet.
- Do NOT scroll social media. Stay present.
- Review your focus word and goals one final time.

**MINDSET:** The car ride is not the time to panic about what might happen. It's the time to get your mind quiet, focused, and ready. You've prepared. Now trust it.

# At the Venue

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*The first 30 minutes at the venue set the tone for the entire day.*

## Arrival & Check-In

- Check in IMMEDIATELY upon arrival. Before unpacking. Before socializing.
- Confirm you are officially registered and checked in.
- Find out where pools will be posted.
- Go through equipment check if required – bring all weapons and body cords.
- Find your strip assignment once pools are posted.
- Know your pool number and which strip you're on.
- Find the bathrooms, water fountain, and armorer.

## Warm-Up (20–30 Minutes Before Pools)

- Light jog or skipping for 3–5 minutes to raise body temperature.
- Dynamic stretches: leg swings, hip circles, arm circles, torso rotations.
- Fencing-specific footwork: advances, retreats, lunges, recoveries.
- Start slow, gradually increase speed and explosiveness.
- Practice 5–10 lunges at full speed.
- If you have a partner, do 2–3 minutes of blade work and distance drills.
- End with 2–3 deep breaths and your focus word.
- Put on full gear and be ready to fence 5 minutes before pools start.

**COMMON MISTAKE:** Many fencers skip the warm-up or treat it as socializing time. Your first pool bout should NOT be your warm-up. If you're cold in the first bout, you've already given away 2–3 touches.

# Pool Round Strategy

*Pools are for information, seeding, and building momentum. Fence smart.*

## Before Each Pool Bout

- Report to the strip when the referee calls your name. Be there early.
- Have your mask and weapon ready.
- Salute your opponent, the referee, and (if present) the audience.
- Take one deep breath before the referee says "Fence."
- Review your tactical goals.

## During Pool Bouts

- Use the first 1–2 touches to gather information about the opponent.
- What is their preferred distance? Do they attack or wait? Do they retreat when pressured?
- Fence the first touch with focus, not desperation. Don't try to score on every action.
- After every touch — scored or received — reset physically and mentally.
- Don't panic after a bad start. A 0–2 deficit in a 5-touch bout is recoverable.
- Don't relax after a good start. A 3–0 lead means nothing if you stop fencing.
- If you get scored on the same way twice, adjust. Don't let it happen a third time.
- If you're losing, simplify. Go back to one action you trust.
- If you're winning, keep doing what's working. Don't change strategy unnecessarily.

## Between Pool Bouts

- Sit down if possible. Keep your legs warm but don't stand the entire time.
- Drink water. Eat a small snack if needed.
- Review one tactical note — one thing you want to do better in the next bout.
- Watch your upcoming opponents fence if possible. Note their tendencies.
- Do NOT check your phone obsessively. Stay present.
- Keep your mask and weapon within arm's reach. Know when you're on deck.
- Do NOT wander away from your strip area.

**SCOUT YOUR OPPONENTS:** Watch the other bouts in your pool. Notice who attacks, who retreats, who counterattacks. This information is free — use it.

# After Pools: Transition to DEs

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*The shift from pool round to direct elimination is a mental reset.*

- Check results and your pool ranking as soon as they're posted.
- Check your DE seeding and find your bracket position.
- Know your next strip assignment.
- Know your opponent's name and seed (if available).
- Eat a real snack or small meal during the break. Steady energy.
- Drink water.
- Warm up again briefly – your body has cooled down during the break.
- Review your three goals. Are you on track?
- Mental reset: pools are over. Every fencer in DEs starts 0-0.
- Regardless of how pools went, DEs are a fresh start. Fence accordingly.

# Direct Elimination Strategy

15 touches. Three 3-minute periods. Every action matters. But not every touch is equally important.

## Before Each DE

- Arrive at your strip early.
- Quick physical activation: 5–10 lunges, footwork, blade work.
- Review your plan: What did you see in pools? What works against this fencer?
- If you've never seen this opponent, plan to use the first period for information.
- Take one deep breath and say your focus word before the bout starts.

## Period 1 (First 3 Minutes)

- Gather information. What does this fencer do?
- Don't panic if you're down 2–4 after the first period. You have two more periods.
- Identify one pattern you can exploit.
- Fence at YOUR pace. Don't let the opponent dictate tempo.

## Period 2 (Second 3 Minutes)

- Make adjustments based on what you learned.
- This is the scoring period. Apply your tactical plan.
- If you're ahead, don't coast. Keep scoring.
- If you're behind, don't rush. Fence one touch at a time.
- Manage the clock. If you're ahead and time is running out, slow the tempo.

## Period 3 (Final 3 Minutes)

- Stay composed. This is where mental training pays off.
- If it's close, fence the touch in front of you. Do not think about the final score.
- If you're ahead, maintain discipline. Don't give away free touches.
- If you're behind, simplify. One action. One touch. Repeat.
- The fencer who stays calmer under pressure wins the close bouts. Be that fencer.

**CRITICAL MINDSET:** The difference between a top-8 fencer and a top-32 fencer is rarely physical. It's who stays more composed in the third period of a close DE. That's a skill you practice, not a talent you're born with.

# The Mental Game: Tournament Day

*Your mind is the most powerful weapon you bring to a tournament.*

## Between Every Touch

- Breathe. One deliberate, controlled breath.
- Relax your shoulders. Drop your weapon hand for a moment.
- Reset your body language. Stand tall. Walk back to your line with purpose.
- Use your one cue word ("sharp," "patient," "present" – whatever you chose).
- Return to en garde and look at the opponent's weapon shoulder.
- Focus on the NEXT action. Not the last mistake.
- Do NOT replay the previous touch in your head.
- Do NOT argue with the referee. It costs you energy and changes nothing.
- Do NOT look at your parents for emotional feedback.
- Do NOT panic if behind. Do NOT coast if ahead.

## After Every Bout (Win or Loss)

- Ask yourself: What worked?
- Ask yourself: What did not work?
- Ask yourself: What did the opponent keep doing?
- Ask yourself: What adjustment should I make for the next bout?
- Ask yourself: Did I stay composed? Did I use my reset routine?
- Ask yourself: Did I fence one touch at a time, or did I fence the scoreboard?
- Every bout is a data point, not a verdict. Learn from it and move on.

**RESET ROUTINE EXAMPLE:** Walk to the line. Plant your feet. Close your eyes for one second. Take one deep breath. Open your eyes. Say your focus word silently. Get in en garde. Fence.

# Post-Tournament

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*The tournament isn't over when the last touch lands. What you do after determines what you carry into the next one.*

- Shake your opponent's hand. Win or lose.
- Thank the referee. Always.
- Find your coach and discuss the day — what went well, what to work on.
- Drink water and eat something substantial within 30 minutes.
- Label all bout videos with opponent name, event, and round.
- Write down 2–3 takeaways in a notebook or phone note while they're fresh.
- Wipe down equipment. Hang up jacket and knickers to dry.
- Charge body cords. Test weapons. Repair anything that broke.
- Reflect honestly: Did you meet your three goals?
- If not, that's okay. Adjust the goals for next time.
- If yes, set the bar slightly higher for the next tournament.
- Upload bout footage to Google Drive or shared folder for review.
- Send Derek any footage you want reviewed.
- Get a good night's sleep. Recovery matters.

**PERSPECTIVE:** No single tournament defines you. Not your best day. Not your worst day. What defines you is what you do between tournaments — how you train, how you prepare, and how you show up the next time.



# One Touch at a Time

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*The single most important concept in competitive fencing.*

You cannot control the final score. You cannot control the referee. You cannot control your opponent. You can only control the next touch.

Before every touch: breathe, reset, focus. After every touch: breathe, reset, focus. That's it. That's the entire game plan. Do this 15 times in a DE, and you'll be amazed at how often the score takes care of itself.

The fencers I've coached who have gone the furthest are not the ones with the most natural talent. They're the ones who learned to stay present, stay calm, and fence one touch at a time. That's a skill. And like every skill in fencing, it gets better with practice.

Now go compete. I'll see you on the other side.

— *Coach Derek*