

DEREK SNYDER



ELITE FENCING COACHING

PRIVATE COACHING RESOURCE SERIES

The Advanced Footwork Manual

20 Competition-Ready Exercises



Train the way you compete – high-pressure footwork drills that replicate the speed, fatigue, and decision-making of real bouts.

Derek Snyder

ELITE FENCING COACHING
dereksnyderfencing.com

A Note from Coach Derek

If you've completed the Beginner and Intermediate Footwork Manuals, you have strong fundamentals and tactical awareness in your feet. You can move correctly, you understand why you're moving, and you can read the distance, tempo, and patterns of a bout.

This manual is different. These exercises are designed to replicate the conditions of real competition: fatigue, pressure, unpredictability, and the need to make split-second decisions while your legs are burning and your heart rate is elevated.

Advanced footwork is not about learning new movements. It's about executing everything you already know at competition speed, under competition pressure, with competition-level decision-making. The gap between what a fencer can do in a warm gym at practice and what they can do in the third period of a DE bout at a national tournament – that's the gap this manual closes.

These drills are hard. They're supposed to be. If practice is harder than competition, competition feels easy.

– Coach Derek

How to Use This Manual

Each exercise includes a tactical purpose, description, key details, and recommended volume. Many of these drills require a partner, a coach, or specific strip conditions. They are designed for fencers who train at least 4–5 days per week and are competing at regional or national level.

These exercises are organized into five categories: Explosive Power, Decision-Making Under Pressure, Fatigue Resistance, Multi-Action Sequences, and Competition Simulation. Each category targets a specific aspect of competitive readiness.

Prerequisite: You should be comfortable with all 20 exercises from the Intermediate Footwork Manual before starting this program.

COACH'S TIP: Advanced footwork training should be periodized around your competition schedule. Increase intensity 4–6 weeks before a major tournament. Reduce volume the week before competition. These drills build the engine; rest lets it perform.

Explosive Power

At the advanced level, the difference between scoring and missing is often a fraction of a second. These exercises build the explosive power that turns good footwork into devastating footwork — the ability to cover distance faster than your opponent can react.

1. Depth Lunge from Deep Squat

Tactical Purpose: *Building maximum explosive power from a deep en garde position.*

Start in an exaggerated low en garde — deeper than normal, thighs parallel to the floor. Hold for 3 seconds. Then lunge at maximum distance and speed. The deeper starting position requires more force to initiate the lunge, which builds the explosive strength you need when lunging from a normal depth.

Key Details: Thighs must be parallel to the floor during the hold. The lunge must be full extension — no cheating the depth. Back foot stays flat on the ground. Recovery back to the deep en garde, not to a normal stance. This is a strength exercise as much as a technique exercise.

Reps/Duration: 8 deep-squat lunges. Rest 30 seconds. 5 sets. Add ankle weights after 2 weeks if form holds.

2. Rapid-Fire Lunge Series

Tactical Purpose: *Developing the ability to lunge repeatedly without losing power or form.*

Lunge, recover to en garde, lunge again immediately. Repeat 10 times with no pause between recoveries and lunges. The goal is to maintain the same distance, speed, and form on lunge number 10 as on lunge number 1. In a DE bout, you may need to lunge 30–40 times. Your tenth lunge must be as explosive as your first.

Key Details: Time the series. Each lunge should take approximately the same time from recovery to extension. If later lunges take significantly longer, you're fatiguing — which is the point. Track your times weekly and watch them improve.

Reps/Duration: 10-lunge series. Rest 60 seconds. 4 sets. Build to 15-lunge series over 4 weeks.

3. The Plyometric Advance

Tactical Purpose: *Building explosive forward acceleration for closing distance instantly.*

From en garde, perform a single advance with maximum speed and power. The front foot should strike the ground hard and the back foot should follow with a snap. Think of each advance as a small jump forward, not a step. After each explosive advance, reset to en garde, hold for 2 seconds, then fire again.

Key Details: The power comes from the back leg push, not from leaning forward. Your torso should stay vertical. The advance should cover 25–30% more distance than your normal training advance. If it looks like a small leap forward, you're doing it right.

Reps/Duration: 10 explosive advances with 2-second holds. Rest 30 seconds. 5 sets.

4. The Recovery Sprint

Tactical Purpose: *Building the ability to recover from a lunge and immediately transition into fast footwork.*

Lunge at full depth, recover to en garde, then immediately sprint-advance 4 steps forward, stop in a balanced en garde, and lunge again. This simulates the competition reality of lunging, missing, recovering, and needing to close distance again immediately.

Key Details: The recovery must be clean — no stumbling or standing up. The sprint-advances must maintain en garde form. The second lunge must be just as committed as the first. This is about maintaining quality through a multi-action sequence.

Reps/Duration: 8 lunge-recover-sprint-lunge sequences. Rest 45 seconds. 4 sets.

COACH'S TIP: Power without control is dangerous. If any of these exercises cause your form to break down, reduce the intensity until the form holds. A powerful lunge that goes in the wrong direction is worse than a controlled lunge that lands on target.

Decision-Making Under Pressure

In competition, you don't just move – you choose how to move based on what's happening in real time. These exercises force you to make footwork decisions at speed, training the connection between your eyes, your brain, and your feet.

5. The Reaction Light Drill

Tactical Purpose: *Training instantaneous footwork responses to visual cues.*

A partner stands at the end of the strip and holds up one hand (advance) or two hands (retreat) at random intervals. You respond immediately with the correct footwork. After 30 seconds, the partner adds a third cue: both hands overhead means lunge. The cues come faster and faster.

Key Details: Response time should be under one beat – the moment you see the cue, your feet move. Don't wait to confirm what you saw. Train your body to respond before your conscious mind catches up. Wrong responses are part of the learning process. Speed first, accuracy follows.

Reps/Duration: 30-second rounds. 8 rounds. Rest 15 seconds between rounds. Build to 45-second rounds.

6. The Mirror Drill

Tactical Purpose: *Developing the ability to read and respond to an opponent's footwork in real time.*

Face a partner in en garde. One person leads, the other mirrors. If the leader advances, the mirror retreats. If the leader retreats, the mirror advances. The leader uses all available footwork: advances, retreats, half-steps, check steps, pauses, speed changes. The mirror must match every movement instantaneously.

Key Details: The mirror should be a shadow – there should be no visible delay between the leader's movement and the response. The distance between the two fencers should remain constant throughout. If the distance opens or closes, the mirror is too slow. Switch roles every 45 seconds.

Reps/Duration: 45-second rounds. 8 rounds. Alternate leader and mirror. Add a rule: if the leader lunges, the mirror must retreat and counterattack.

7. The Coach's Choice

Tactical Purpose: *Executing complex footwork sequences on command without preparation.*

A coach or partner calls out footwork sequences in real time: "Advance-advance-lunge!" "Retreat-lateral step-advance!" "Check step-pause-advance-lunge!" You execute immediately. The sequences get longer and more complex as the drill progresses. No sequence is repeated – every call is different.

Key Details: The goal is fluency, not memorization. You should be able to string together any combination of footwork actions without planning. This trains the spontaneous decision-making that competition requires. If you hesitate or execute the wrong action, reset and keep going.

Reps/Duration: 2-minute rounds of continuous calls. 5 rounds. Rest 30 seconds. Coach increases complexity each round.

8. The Two-Option Drill

Tactical Purpose: *Training binary decision-making at competition speed.*

Your partner advances toward you. At a random moment, they either lunge or stop and retreat. If they lunge, you parry and riposte forward. If they stop, you attack immediately into the space they created. You don't know which one is coming – you must read their movement and respond with the correct footwork in real time.

Key Details: This simulates the most common decision in competitive fencing: is this an attack, or is this preparation? Your feet must commit before you're 100% sure. Waiting for certainty means being too late. Train yourself to read the first half-second of movement and commit.

Reps/Duration: 20 repetitions per set (partner randomly chooses lunge or stop). 4 sets. Track your correct response percentage.

COACH'S TIP: Decision-making speed is a trainable skill. Most fencers think they need faster feet. What they actually need is faster decisions. Your feet are fast enough – they just don't get the signal early enough. These drills shorten the time between seeing and moving.

Fatigue Resistance

A 15-touch DE bout can last 9 minutes. A full day of competition can last 8–10 hours. The fencer who moves the same way in the third period as the first period wins. These exercises train your footwork to hold up under fatigue — because in competition, the decisive touches always come when you're tired.

9. The 100-Touch Footwork Marathon

Tactical Purpose: *Building endurance in en garde position through extended continuous movement.*

With a partner, fence continuous footwork (no blades) for 100 touches. A “touch” is counted each time either fencer achieves a clearly superior attacking position (close enough to lunge with advantage). After each touch, reset to en garde at medium distance and continue. No rest breaks.

Key Details: Your form on touch 90 must match touch 10. If your knees straighten, your feet get sloppy, or your rhythm becomes predictable as you tire, those are the specific weaknesses fatigue is revealing. Note them and address them in training.

Reps/Duration: 100-touch marathon. 1 complete set. Perform once per week. Track total time and form quality on final 20 touches.

10. The Interval Sprint

Tactical Purpose: *Replicating the work-rest-work pattern of pool bouts.*

Sprint-advance the full length of the strip (14 meters). Walk back. Sprint-advance again. Walk back. Repeat 5 times. Then immediately fence a practice bout for 5 touches. This simulates the energy demands of pool fencing: bursts of high-intensity footwork separated by brief rest, followed by the need to execute precise technique.

Key Details: The sprints must be at maximum effort with proper en garde form — not just running. Walk-backs are your only recovery. The practice bout at the end is the test: can you fence technically sound footwork with an elevated heart rate? If not, this is your most important drill.

Reps/Duration: 5 sprint-advance lengths + 5-touch bout = 1 set. 4 sets. Rest 2 minutes between sets.

11. The Third-Period Drill

Tactical Purpose: *Training footwork quality specifically in the fatigued state of a late-bout scenario.*

Do 5 minutes of intense footwork drills (rapid advances, lunges, direction changes at maximum speed). Then immediately fence a practice bout starting at the score 10–10 in a 15-touch DE. The pre-fatigue simulates being in the third period. The bout simulates the highest-pressure scenario: close score, tired legs, every touch matters.

Key Details: The purpose is not to win the practice bout — it's to maintain footwork quality while fatigued and under score pressure. Watch for the habits that emerge when you're tired: standing up, shortening lunges, retreating too much, rushing attacks. Those habits are what you lose bouts to.

Reps/Duration: 5 minutes of fatigue work + 10-10 practice bout = 1 set. 3 sets. Rest 3 minutes between sets.

12. The Tournament Simulation

Tactical Purpose: *Replicating the volume and fatigue of a full tournament day.*

Fence 7 practice pool bouts (5-touch each) back to back with only 2 minutes rest between bouts, followed by a simulated DE bout (15 touches). This approximates the workload of a real tournament: 35+ touches in pools, then a long bout when you're already tired. Focus on footwork quality in bouts 5, 6, 7 and in the DE.

Key Details: This is a weekly training session, not a daily drill. It requires a training partner committed to the full simulation. Track your footwork quality across the session — video the first bout and the last bout and compare.

Reps/Duration: 7 pool bouts + 1 DE bout = 1 session. Perform once per week during competition preparation blocks.

COACH'S TIP: Fatigue doesn't create bad habits — it reveals them. The mistakes you make when you're tired at practice are the same mistakes you'll make in the third period of a close DE. Fix them here, not at the tournament.

Multi-Action Sequences

Real fencing rarely involves a single footwork action. Attacks are prepared with multiple steps. Defenses chain into counterattacks. Touches come at the end of complex sequences where each step sets up the next. These exercises train your feet to flow through multi-step tactical sequences without breaking rhythm.

13. The Attack Chain

Tactical Purpose: *Building seamless multi-action offensive sequences.*

Execute a full offensive sequence from long distance: advance-advance-check step-pause-advance-advance-lunge. Each element flows into the next without stops. The check step disrupts timing. The pause resets information. The final advances build momentum into the lunge. Vary the sequence each repetition.

Key Details: The sequence must feel like one continuous action with tempo changes, not seven separate movements. The lunge at the end should arrive with the accumulated forward pressure of everything before it. If the sequence feels choppy, slow down and work on the transitions.

Reps/Duration: 8 full attack chains. 4 sets. Vary the sequence structure each set.

14. The Defensive Conversion

Tactical Purpose: *Transitioning from defensive footwork to an immediate counterattack.*

Your partner attacks with an advance-advance-lunge. You retreat-retreat-parry, then immediately step forward with a riposte, followed by a remise (second attack) if the riposte misses. The full sequence is: retreat-retreat-parry-step forward-riposte-advance-remise. Three defensive steps become three offensive steps in one fluid motion.

Key Details: The transition from defense to offense must happen without a pause. The moment you parry, your weight shifts forward. The riposte and the forward step happen simultaneously. If the riposte misses, the advance-remise follows within one beat. Practice until the entire 7-action sequence feels like one flowing movement.

Reps/Duration: 10 full defensive conversion sequences. 4 sets. Partner provides a real attack each time.

15. The Second-Intention Sequence

Tactical Purpose: *Executing a planned multi-step tactical action where the first action is bait.*

Advance toward your partner with arm extended, inviting a counterattack or parry. When they respond, execute a pre-planned follow-up: if they counterattack, retreat-parry-lunge; if they parry, disengage with a step forward and lunge to the opposite line. The first action is not the attack — it's the setup. The real attack is steps 3 through 5.

Key Details: This is the most advanced tactical footwork concept: planning two steps ahead. You must commit to the first action convincingly while mentally preparing for the second. Your feet need to execute the follow-up automatically based on what the opponent shows you. Practice both branches until they're reflexive.

Reps/Duration: 10 second-intention sequences (5 against counterattack, 5 against parry). 4 sets.

16. The Free-Flow Sequence

Tactical Purpose: *Developing spontaneous multi-action footwork combinations in live conditions.*

With a partner, fence open footwork at competition speed for 60 seconds. No planned sequences. Respond to whatever they do with whatever you need. Attack, defend, counterattack, change direction, use the whole strip. The only rule: never stop moving. If you pause to think, you've lost the drill.

Key Details: This is improvisation. The goal is to make your tactical footwork library available without conscious thought. After 60 seconds, you should have used 8-10 different footwork actions in response to live stimuli. If you defaulted to the same 2-3 actions, you need more variety in your toolkit.

Reps/Duration: 60-second free-flow rounds. 8 rounds. Rest 30 seconds. Debrief with partner after each round: what did you do? What worked? What was predictable?

COACH'S TIP: The best fencers in the world don't think about individual steps. They think about sequences. When they decide to attack, the preparation, the feint, the tempo change, and the lunge are all one decision executed as one fluid motion. That's what these exercises build.

Competition Simulation

These final exercises replicate specific competitive scenarios that most fencers never practice. They combine physical demands, tactical decision-making, and psychological pressure to prepare you for the moments that decide tournaments.

17. The Priority Minute

Tactical Purpose: *Training footwork and decision-making for the priority minute in DE bouts.*

Simulate a priority situation: one fencer has priority, the other doesn't. The fencer with priority must stay patient and manage distance. The fencer without priority must attack decisively within 60 seconds. Practice both roles. The footwork is completely different depending on whether you're hunting or being hunted.

Key Details: With priority: control distance, don't retreat too far, let them come to you. Use small adjustments, not big retreats. Without priority: close distance systematically, use preparation, don't rush the first 30 seconds. Launch the attack in the final 20 seconds with commitment.

Reps/Duration: 60-second priority rounds. 6 rounds each role. Alternate who has priority.

18. The Comeback Drill

Tactical Purpose: *Training composed, aggressive footwork when behind late in a bout.*

Start a practice bout at 10-14 in a 15-touch DE. You have 4 touches to win, they need 1. Fence it out. Then start at 10-13, then 10-12. The purpose is not to win every time — it's to train the footwork and composure required to mount a late comeback: aggressive but controlled, fast but not reckless.

Key Details: The biggest footwork mistake when behind is rushing. Your feet get sloppy because your brain is panicking. This drill trains you to be aggressive without being chaotic. Each touch should be fenced individually with the same footwork quality as touch 1 of a new bout.

Reps/Duration: 3 rounds at 10-14, 3 rounds at 10-13, 3 rounds at 10-12. Track how many comebacks you complete and whether your footwork deteriorated.

19. The Hostile Strip

Tactical Purpose: *Training confident footwork in an intimidating or unfamiliar environment.*

Set up an unfamiliar fencing environment: different surface, different lighting, people watching, music playing, distractions. Fence practice bouts in these conditions. The purpose is to train your footwork to stay consistent when the environment changes — because at a big tournament, the strip, the lighting, the noise, and the pressure will all be different from your home gym.

Key Details: Your feet should perform identically on a gymnasium floor, a raised platform, a concrete surface, or a carpet strip. If your footwork changes when the surface changes, you're not as advanced as you think. Train on every surface available to you.

Reps/Duration: Fence 5 practice bouts per unfamiliar condition. Cycle through at least 3 different environments over 2 weeks.

20. The Full Pressure Test

Tactical Purpose: *The ultimate competition simulation combining every element of advanced footwork.*

This is the capstone drill. Fence a full simulated tournament: 7 pool bouts, a rest period, then a simulated DE bracket of 3 bouts (to 15 touches each). The entire session is filmed. After the session, review the footage specifically for footwork: form under fatigue, decision-making quality, distance management, and tactical variety. Compare the first pool bout to the final DE bout.

Key Details: This requires 3-4 hours and multiple training partners. Schedule it as a monthly training event. The footage review is not optional — it's the most important part. Without watching yourself, you won't see the patterns that fatigue reveals.

Reps/Duration: Full simulation once per month during competition season. Complete footage review within 48 hours with your coach.

COACH'S TIP: The Full Pressure Test is the closest you can get to a real tournament without entering one. The fencer who does this monthly during competition season has a massive advantage: they've already experienced the fatigue, the pressure, and the late-bout scenarios before they arrive at the venue. Nothing surprises them.



Training Integration

These exercises are not a daily routine – they’re a toolkit. Integrate them into your training based on your competition schedule and development priorities.

Weekly Structure: Choose 2–3 exercises from different categories per training session. Pair explosive drills with decision-making drills. Pair fatigue resistance with multi-action sequences. Don’t do all 20 in one week.

Pre-Competition (4–6 weeks out): Emphasize Fatigue Resistance (Exercises 9–12) and Competition Simulation (17–20). Build the endurance engine and sharpen situational readiness.

Off-Season: Emphasize Explosive Power (1–4) and Multi-Action Sequences (13–16). Build raw power and tactical fluency when there’s no competition pressure.

Throughout the year: Decision-Making Under Pressure (5–8) should be part of every training week. It’s the category that transfers most directly to competition performance.

Track your progress. Film your drills monthly. Compare footage from month 1 to month 6. The improvements will be visible in your form, your speed, your recovery quality, and your decision-making. And they’ll be visible in your results.



Final Coach's Note

You've now worked through 60 footwork exercises across three manuals. From the en garde position to full competition simulation. From learning how to stand to training how to win under pressure.

Here's what I want you to remember: footwork is never finished. The best fencers in the world still drill their advances and retreats. Still work on their lunge depth. Still practice their distance management. The difference between a good fencer and a great fencer is not that the great fencer has moved past the basics. It's that the great fencer has made the basics so automatic that they can focus entirely on tactics and decision-making while their feet take care of themselves.

That's the goal. Automatic feet. A conscious mind free to observe, plan, and adapt. The exercises in these three manuals build that automation. Trust the process. Do the work. And when you step on the strip at your next tournament, let your feet do what they've been trained to do.

I'll see you on the strip.

— Coach Derek