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ELITE FENCING COACHING

PRIVATE COACHING RESOURCE SERIES

The Complete Tournament Parent Survival Guide

Everything You Need to Know Before, During & After a Fencing Tournament



Registration, equipment, filming, etiquette, what to say, what to watch for, and how to be the calm in the storm.

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A Note from Coach Derek

Tournament day is exciting, stressful, confusing, and emotional – all at once. After 20 years of coaching fencers from their first local event to national championships, I can tell you this: the parents who have the best experience are the ones who arrive prepared, stay calm, and know what their job actually is (hint: it's not coaching from the sidelines).

This guide covers everything. Registration, packing, arrival, filming, etiquette, what to say after a win, what to say after a loss, what to watch for, and how to be the emotional anchor your fencer needs. It's long because tournament day is long. But if you read this once before your first competition, you'll feel like a veteran by the time pools start.

Print it, bookmark it, or keep it on your phone. You won't need all of it every time – but the one time you do, you'll be glad you had it.

– Coach Derek

What to Expect at a Fencing Tournament

A realistic preview so nothing catches you off guard.

- Lots of waiting. Periods of intense action followed by long breaks.
- Schedule delays are normal – events almost never start exactly on time.
- Crowded, loud venues with scoring machines beeping constantly.
- Referees speaking quickly and using hand signals you may not recognize yet.
- Fencers warming up in hallways, lobbies, and open spaces.
- Parents trying to figure out where to stand (that's normal – everyone does it).
- Equipment failures: body cords breaking, weapons failing, masks needing inspection.
- Your fencer feeling nervous before pools. This is healthy and expected.
- Your fencer feeling emotional after losses. Also normal and expected.
- Big momentum swings within a single bout. A 0-3 deficit can become a 5-3 win.
- Bad calls from referees sometimes. It happens. Your fencer must learn to move past them.
- The day lasting longer than you expected. Plan for the full day, not just the morning.
- Your fencer needing food and hydration before they think they do.
- Parents needing patience, snacks, comfortable shoes, and a calm face.

COACH'S TIP: The most important thing you bring to a tournament is your composure. Your fencer will glance at you after a tough touch. What they see on your face matters more than anything you say.

Tournament Registration & Pre-Planning

Registration

- Register for the tournament as early as possible.
- Check whether the tournament has registration caps or late fees.
- Confirm the exact event: weapon, age category, rating restrictions, gender category.
- Confirm whether the event is local, regional (SYC/RYC), or national (NAC/JOs/Summer Nationals).
- Save or screenshot the registration confirmation.
- Screenshot event start time, venue address, and check-in deadline.
- Confirm whether check-in closes BEFORE the listed start time (it often does).
- Check whether the tournament uses AskFRED, USA Fencing, or Fencing Time Live.
- Re-check the tournament page a few days before in case times change.

Membership & Eligibility

- Confirm a current, valid USA Fencing membership of the appropriate type.
- Screenshot the membership card in case the venue has poor cell reception.
- Confirm birth year eligibility and correct club affiliation.
- If required, confirm SafeSport or parent account requirements.
- Verify the fencer's name is spelled correctly in the registration system.

Money & Payment

- Bring cash for registration (about \$20–40 for local events, more for nationals).
- Bring extra cash for snack bar, parking, vending machines, and emergency equipment.
- Bring small bills.
- Bring credit/debit card as backup.
- Bring money for coach fees if a private coach will be present.

Tournament Travel & Arrival

Before Leaving Home

- Confirm venue address and check traffic/parking instructions.
- Leave earlier than you think you need to. Always.
- Plan to arrive at least 60 minutes before check-in closes.
- For large tournaments or events requiring equipment check, arrive even earlier.
- Bring a printed or digital schedule and your fencer's registration confirmation.
- Charge phones and portable battery packs.
- Make sure the fencer has eaten breakfast and used the restroom.
- Pack all gear the night before. Do a final weapon bag check before getting in the car.

Upon Arrival

- Find tournament check-in IMMEDIATELY. Do not unpack first.
- Confirm the fencer is officially checked in.
- Ask where pools will be posted and where equipment check is located.
- Find the bathrooms, water fountains, snack bar, armorer, and medical table.
- Locate the bout committee table.
- Confirm where parents are allowed to stand.
- Have the fencer warm up before pools begin.
- Have the fencer report to the strip before the referee calls names.

COMMON MISTAKE: Parents who arrive on time but spend 15 minutes finding parking and unpacking, then realize check-in has already closed. Arrive early. Check in first. Unpack second.

Fencer Equipment Checklist

Check this the night before AND again before leaving. Every item matters.

Main Gear (All Weapons)

- Fencing bag
- Fencing jacket
- Fencing pants/knickers
- Mask (check bib condition)
- Glove
- Underarm protector/plastron
- Chest protector (if required)
- Long socks that fully cover the shin up to the knee
- Fencing shoes (athletic shoes as backup)
- Warm-up jacket and pants
- Extra T-shirt, extra socks, extra underwear (long days)
- Hair ties/headbands for fencers with long hair
- Small towel for sweat
- Deodorant
- Plastic bag for sweaty clothes afterward

Foil-Specific Gear

- Foil lamé
- 2–3 working foils
- 2–3 body cords
- Mask cord (if required)
- Extra foil tip screws, springs, and tape
- Foil test weight

Épée-Specific Gear

- 2–3 working épées
- 2–3 body cords
- Extra épée tip screws and springs
- Épée test weight and shim gauge (if available)
- Check bell guard, socket screws, and tip travel

Saber-Specific Gear

- Saber lamé
- 2–3 working sabers
- 2–3 body cords
- Mask cord and saber mask with conductive bib
- Saber glove/cuff
- Check lamé, bib, and glove conductivity

Backup Gear

- Extra glove, body cord, mask cord, weapon, shoelaces, socks, lamé
- Extra water bottle, hair ties, towel, athletic tape
- Extra braces/supports if used

Tool Kit & Repair Kit

- Small screwdriver (flathead + Phillips) and jeweler's screwdriver
- Allen wrench, adjustable wrench, small pliers, needle-nose pliers
- Wire cutters, multitool, X-Acto knife, small scissors
- Electrical tape, foil tip tape, zip ties, safety pins
- Spare tip screws, springs, contact springs, tip barrels, sockets
- Grip tape, spare pommel (French grip), spare pistol grip screws
- Weapon test box, weight/shim gauges (if available)
- Alcohol wipes, Q-tips, clean cloth, small container for tiny parts

First Aid & Body Care

- Band-Aids, blister Band-Aids, moleskin padding
- Athletic tape, KT tape, pre-wrap
- Neosporin, antiseptic wipes
- Instant ice pack or reusable ice pack in cooler
- Ibuprofen or acetaminophen (if parent-approved)
- Allergy medication, inhaler, personal medications
- Knee/ankle/wrist brace, compression sleeve
- Sunscreen (if venue has outdoor areas), lip balm
- Hand sanitizer, tissues, wet wipes, small trash bag
- Feminine products, extra contacts/solution, glasses case

Food, Hydration & Energy

What your fencer eats and drinks directly affects how they fence. Plan ahead.

Tournament-Day Drinks

- Large water bottle + backup water bottle
- Gatorade, electrolyte drink, or coconut water
- Electrolyte packets (Liquid IV, Nuun, etc.)
- Sip regularly – don't chug only when thirsty
- Drink between bouts, after warm-up, after pools, and before DEs
- Avoid trying brand-new drinks for the first time on tournament day

Smart Snacks

- Bananas, apples, oranges, grapes, berries
- Protein bars, granola bars, trail mix
- Pretzels, crackers, peanut butter crackers
- String cheese, yogurt pouch, turkey sandwich, bagel
- Rice cakes, applesauce pouch, dried fruit, beef/turkey jerky
- Hard-boiled eggs (if your fencer likes them)
- Simple lunch that won't upset the stomach

Foods to Avoid or Limit

- Candy as the main fuel source (spike and crash)
- Soda and energy drinks
- Very greasy food or giant heavy meals right before fencing
- New foods the fencer has never eaten before competition
- Too much sugar at once
- Anything that causes stomach discomfort

COACH'S TIP: Your fencer needs steady energy over 4–8 hours, not a sugar spike. Think like you're fueling a marathon, not a sprint. Small, frequent bites between bouts.

Filming Your Fencer's Bouts

Good footage is the foundation of effective bout review. These guidelines will help you capture video that's actually useful for coaching.

Before Filming

- Charge your phone fully
- Clear phone storage (at least 2-3 GB free)
- Bring a portable charger
- Put phone on Do Not Disturb
- Turn off flash
- Clean your camera lens

How to Film

- Hold the phone HORIZONTALLY (landscape mode)
- Start recording BEFORE the referee says "Fence"
- Keep recording UNTIL the touch is awarded
- Record the ENTIRE bout without stopping – don't start/stop between touches
- Capture BOTH fencers' full bodies – not just your fencer
- Get the entire strip if possible
- Include the scoring machine in the frame if possible
- Watch the footwork, distance, and the setup before the touch – not just the hit
- Follow the action smoothly – don't jerk the camera
- If fencers move quickly, zoom OUT rather than chasing them

Best Filming Position

- Stand behind your fencer when possible
- Stay several feet back from the strip
- Do NOT block the referee, coaches, or other spectators
- Do NOT stand next to the scoring table unless permitted
- Avoid moving alongside the strip during active fencing

What NOT to Do While Filming

- Do NOT coach while recording
- Do NOT yell instructions or react loudly after every touch
- Do NOT groan after mistakes or argue with the referee on video
- Do NOT stop recording after a bad touch
- Do NOT film only the upper body – footwork matters
- Do NOT make disappointed comments that your fencer might hear

After Each Bout

- Label the video IMMEDIATELY with the event, round, and opponent

Example: "Y12 Foil Pool Bout 3 vs. Smith" or "DE Table of 16 vs. Lee"

- Back up footage to cloud storage or Google Drive at the end of the day

WHY THIS MATTERS: If you want Derek to review a bout, the quality of the footage directly affects the quality of the analysis. Good footage = better coaching = faster improvement.

Parent Tournament Etiquette

The most helpful fencing parents are not the loudest or most intense – they are the calmest.

During Bouts

- Stand behind your fencer if possible
- Keep your face calm and your body language supportive
- Avoid disappointed looks, shaking your head, sighing, or pacing nervously
- Let the coach coach. Let the referee referee. Let the fencer fence.
- Stay positive even if the score is rough
- Remember: your fencer may glance at you after a mistake. Make sure what they see is belief, not panic.

What to Say During a Tournament

- "One touch at a time."
- "Stay focused." / "You've got this." / "Breathe."
- "Reset." / "Next touch." / "Keep working."
- "Trust your training." / "Stay present."
- "Good effort." / "Keep fighting."
- "Control what you can control."
- "Listen to your coach."
- "Let's get some water."

What to NEVER Say

- "You should have won that." / "Why did you do that?"
- "What were you thinking?" / "That was terrible."
- "The referee stole that from you."
- "You always do this." / "You beat this kid before."
- "You're fencing badly." / "Stop missing." / "Don't lose."
- "You're embarrassing yourself."
- "You have to win this." / "This should be easy."
- "I paid all this money for this?"

WHY THIS MATTERS: Even when meant as motivation, comments like these crush focus and confidence. Your fencer internalizes your energy. If you're frustrated, they feel it. If you're calm, they feel that too.

What to Watch For During a Bout

You don't need to understand everything. But knowing what to look for makes tournaments dramatically more enjoyable.

Score & Referee Signals

- Watch which side the referee raises their hand toward — that fencer gets the point
- In épée, both hands may be raised for a double touch
- In foil, white lights mean off-target (no point)
- In foil/saber, both lights do NOT automatically mean both fencers score — the referee determines priority
- Yellow card = warning. Red card = point to opponent. Black card = expulsion.

Fencer Behavior to Watch

- Does your fencer reset mentally after each touch?
- Do they stay calm after being scored on?
- Do they rush when behind, or coast when ahead?
- Do they argue with the referee?
- Do they salute properly and shake hands respectfully?
- Do they stay focused on the next touch instead of dwelling on the last one?

Technical Skills to Watch

- En garde position — knees bent, balanced stance
- Clean advances and retreats (feet should not cross)
- Proper lunges with quick recovery
- Blade held with control, relaxed shoulders, stable head
- Attacking from proper distance (not too close, not too far)
- Not falling forward after missing
- Using the whole strip wisely

Tactical Awareness to Watch

- Is your fencer attacking with a plan or just rushing in?
- Are they changing rhythm and adapting to the opponent?
- Are they making the same mistake over and over?
- Are they using feints to set up scoring actions?
- Are they adjusting after the first few touches?

Post-Bout Conversation Scripts

What you say in the 60 seconds after a bout can build confidence or destroy it. Here's what works.

After a Win

- "Great job. What worked well?"
- "I loved how you stayed focused."
- "You made a smart adjustment."
- "Stay ready for the next one." / "Enjoy that one, then reset."
- "Let's get some water."
- "What does Coach want you thinking about next?"

After a Loss

- "I'm proud of your effort."
- "That was a tough bout, and you kept fighting."
- "Take a breath." / "You're okay."
- "One bout does not define the day."
- "What did you learn?" / "What's one thing you can adjust next time?"
- "Every bout gives you information."
- "Let's go talk to Coach."

After a Bad Referee Call

- "Reset." / "Next touch." / "Let it go."
- "Control what you can control."
- "Do not give away the next point emotionally."
- "Stay composed. Fence the next action."

REMEMBER: Reacting visibly to referee calls gives the opponent psychological energy. Neutral body language and an immediate reset are more powerful than being right about the call.

The Parent's Job: A Summary

This is your role on tournament day. Everything else is someone else's job.

- Register early and get the fencer there on time
- Make sure membership is valid
- Help pack equipment the night before
- Bring food, water, and cash
- Help manage downtime between bouts
- Film when useful (using the filming guidelines above)
- Stand in the right place
- Stay calm. Be encouraging. Keep your face neutral.
- Let the coach give fencing corrections — avoid technical advice unless you are the coach
- Help the fencer reset emotionally after tough bouts
- Keep the fencer hydrated and fed
- Watch for fatigue and hunger before they become problems
- Help label videos after each bout
- Help track the schedule and strip assignments
- Keep perspective
- Praise effort, resilience, focus, and growth
- Be the safest emotional place in the room. When everything else at the tournament feels chaotic and stressful, your fencer should be able to look at you and feel steady.

Extra "Nice to Have" Tournament Items

Not required, but veterans bring these.

- Folding chair or stadium seat
- Small blanket (gyms can be cold)
- Cooler bag for drinks and snacks
- Clipboard, notebook, bout journal, pen, Sharpie
- Printed pool sheet
- Portable charger and charging cable
- Phone tripod (for steady filming)
- Small first aid kit
- Hand sanitizer, wet wipes, gum or mints
- Book or activity for siblings
- Earbuds
- Warm layers and comfortable shoes for parents
- Trash bag and plastic bag for wet gear
- Label tags for equipment
- Club patch (if needed)
- Safety pins
- Copy of tournament schedule, hotel reservation (if traveling), membership card, and emergency contacts



Final Coach's Note

The most helpful fencing parents are not the loudest, the most intense, or the most technical. They are the calmest. They help their fencer arrive prepared, fed, hydrated, equipped, and emotionally steady. They know when to film, when to cheer, when to be quiet, when to give space, and when to simply say, "I'm proud of you. Reset. One touch at a time."

Fencing is fast, emotional, confusing, and beautiful. The goal is not to understand everything on day one. The goal is to help the fencer love the sport long enough to grow into it.

You're already doing the right thing by reading this guide. That tells me you care. And that's the most important thing your fencer needs from you.

— *Coach Derek*