

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

General Tournament Rules (All Tournaments)

Conduct

- All participants are expected to behave in a sportsmanlike and respectful manner consistent with the Valour HEMA Academy Code of Conduct that is mandatory for all participants to have signed and agreed to prior to the start of the Tournament of Valour at the Cook's Creek Medieval Festival 2026. Failure to sign the waiver and code of conduct will disqualify a participant from competing.
- Excessive force, uncontrolled behavior, or unsafe conduct may result in warnings, point penalties, disqualification, or removal from the event and event grounds.
- Tournament officials retain final authority in all disputes and safety matters.

Match Duration

- All matches across all tournaments are a maximum of 2 minutes in duration unless otherwise specified.

Targeting

The following are **prohibited** in all tournaments:

- **Strikes to the back of the head**
- **Strikes to the spine**
- **Throws**
- **Grappling with intention to injure or after a hold has been called**
- **Strikes delivered after a hold has clearly been called**

Minimum Force

- **The minimum force of a blow will be to positive pressure (the blow can be felt by the opponent). There is no need for force beyond this minimal amount of applied force.**
- **Force that causes injury, however temporary or passing, is considered excessive force.**
- **Force that causes bruising is considered injurious. Be mindful of the force standard and that a Yellow, Red, Black, and Purple card system is in effect and will be judiciously applied to all participants.**

Weapon Inspection

All weapons must:

- Be steel and purpose-built for Historical European Martial Arts
- Be blunt and safe for tournament use **including a rubber blunt tip**
- Pass inspection by tournament staff

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

Weapons may not have:

- Sharp edges
- Sharp points
- Cracks
- Excessive burrs
- Loose hilts
- Unsafe flex
- S-curves

Protective Gear Inspection

Tournament staff reserve the right to reject:

- Damaged equipment
- Inadequate protection
- Improperly fitted gear

No exposed skin is permitted during steel weapon tournaments.

1. Longsword Tournament – Open- (Saturday Afternoon)

Format

- Simulated Unarmoured - Point-based HEMA tournament – First to 10-Points
- Double elimination
- Maximum 2-minute matches

Scoring

- + 1 point — Extremities (arms or legs)
- + 2 points — Cuts to torso
- + 3 points — Thrusts to torso
- + 3 points — Any strike to head (cut or thrust)
- + 1 point — Pommel strikes to the face
- + 1 Point — Strike with control (opponents is grappled at the arms or the sword at the time of the hit)
- + 1 point — Ring out (Both Feet must be out of the ring)

Grappling

- Grabbing of sword by hilt, cross, or blade is allowed. If a sword is grasped by the blade and the blade is twisted and pulled it will count as a cut against the hand. If the blade is displaced and released or the blade is unable to be moved/twisted it will not count as a cut against the hand.

-Grappling of the person is **prohibited** as are throws or takedowns. There **shall not** be any joint locks or joint manipulation. Grappling is limited to manipulation of the blade or disarms of the blade for the purposes of a follow-up strike or pommel strike.

- Pommel strikes MAY stop before mask contact and if contact is made it is to the lightest touch practicable and are only legal towards the face of the opponent. If a mask is dented

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

from a pommel strike or a person is injured even temporarily it shall be an automatic red card. A pommel strike is a 3-point hit. To indicate to the judges that a pommel strike and motion is intentional the combatant making the pommel strike will call out loudly, "POMMEL" when the pommel is in front of the opponent's mask.

- Combatants will be cognizant that if a bind into grappling occurs judges will call a hold before the grappling gets to the point where a fall or take down would occur. Be mindful of the judges calls for hold in the case of a grapple.

Draw cuts / Push Cuts

- The blade must be pushed/pulled at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total blade length with positive pressure applied the entire time.

- A missed thrust does not constitute a push cut. However, if an intentional thrust into push cut occurs where $\frac{1}{3}$ of the blade is pressed into the opponent it will count as a push cut. Draw cuts after a thrust will also count.

Afterblows

- Afterblows where the opposing weapon is in motion at the time of the first hit and lands within one-half tempo (ie just blade motion without a step). In the event of an afterblow the initiating attack will score 1 point regardless of target, the afterblow itself does not score.

- Judges may negate the points of the attack and award 1 point to the afterblow in instances where it is deemed the initial attack was a "suicidal" attack launched with disregard for one's own defense and is a failure to withdraw. For further clarification this rule is specifically to negate points of combatants who attack with no regard to defense which places an increased risk of injury to all parties sometimes referred to as a "rhino attack".

- In the case of true doubles where in the judge's opinion there does not appear to be an issue of failure to withdraw or "suicidal/rhino attack" at play, both combatants will receive 1 point regardless of hit location and the match will continue. In the event this leads to a draw the match will be decided via sudden death with the first clean hit winning the match.

Allowed Weapons

- Steel feders
- Blunted steel longswords
- Historical longsword simulators

Weapon Restrictions

- Maximum blade length: 42.5 inches
- Maximum overall length: 53 inches

Mandatory Protective Gear

- 350N HEMA-rated jacket
- Rigid elbows and knees
- Gorget with front and back neck protection

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

- Fully rigid longsword-rated gloves
- Fencing mask with back-of-head protection
- Shin guards
- Male groin protection (cup)
- Female rigid plastron chest guard

Recommended Protective Gear

- Thigh protection
 - Female jill-style groin protection
 - Forearm guards
 - Shoulder guards
-

2. Single Rapier Tournament – Open (Saturday Afternoon)

Format

- Double elimination
- Judged scoring – Continuous fighting
- Two-minute matches

Judging Criteria and Scoring

Tournament Philosophy

This tournament rewards historical fencing rather than athletic point fighting. Judges should prioritize clean historical technique, tactical decision-making, blade control, and martial effectiveness over speed alone. A technically complete historical fencer should be rewarded over a competitor relying primarily on athleticism or repetitive attacks.

Valour Historical Fencing Judging Rubric (6 Points Total)

1. Tactical Dominance (2 points)

This is **not** simply "who landed the most hits." It measures who controlled the fight.

Judges should consider:

- Number of clean scoring actions
- Control of measure
- Initiative (who dictates the tempo)
- Ring/patch control
- Ability to force opponent into mistakes
- Good judgment of when to attack and when not to
- Overall command of the bout

A fighter who is consistently controlling the engagement should receive these points even if the exchange count is relatively even.

2. Historical Technique & Technical Breadth (2 points)

This category rewards fencing that actually resembles historical fencing.

Judges should look for:

- Proper historical guards
- Proper body mechanics
- Good posture

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

- Correct footwork
- Proper point presence
- Variety of techniques demonstrated
- Use of multiple tactical solutions rather than repeating the same attack
- Appropriate use of historical actions from the source tradition

Examples:

- ✓ Invitations
- ✓ Cavazione
- ✓ Stringering
- ✓ Counter-time actions
- ✓ Feints
- ✓ Voids
- ✓ Gain of the blade
- ✓ Opposition
- ✓ Passing steps

rather than Advance → lunge → recover repeated for two minutes.

This category should heavily reward a technically complete fencer.

3. Defensive Excellence (1 point)

Award to the fighter demonstrating the superior defensive fencing.

Examples include:

- Successful parries
- Deflections
- Voids
- Counter-attacks in tempo
- Defensive blade presence
- Distance management
- Preventing doubles
- Recovering safely after attacks

Simply backing away is **not** considered good defense.

4. Offensive Excellence (1 point)

Award to the fighter demonstrating the superior offensive fencing.

Judges should consider:

- Intelligent attack selection
- Well-timed attacks
- Successful feints
- Compound attacks
- Taking initiative
- Creating openings
- Provoking reactions
- Effective use of second intention

Running forward throwing attacks should not score well.

Points will be awarded to 1 fighter only in each category per judge. Each match will have 3 judges scoring. Scores will be totaled and a winner announced. If a tie occurs a sudden death single point round without afterblow will be fought to determine winner.

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

Allowed Weapons

- HEMA steel rapiers simulators from recognized manufacturers.

Weapon Restrictions

- Maximum blade length: 45 inches
- Maximum overall length: 50 inches

Mandatory Protective Gear

- 350N HEMA-rated jacket
- Leather gloves
- Fencing mask with back-of-head protection (soft hood acceptable)
- Gorget protecting front of neck
- Knee protection
- Shin protection
- Male groin protection (cup)
- No exposed skin

Recommended Protective Gear

- Elbow protection
 - Forearm protection
 - Padded gloves
 - Female rigid plastron chest guard
 - Female jill-style groin protection
 - Full gorget with rear neck protection
-

3. Rapier & Off-Hand Tournament – Open (Sunday Afternoon)

Format

- Double elimination
- Judged scoring – Continuous fighting
- Two-minute matches

Judging Criteria

Tournament Philosophy

This tournament rewards historical fencing rather than athletic point fighting. Judges should prioritize clean historical technique, tactical decision-making, blade control, and martial effectiveness over speed alone. A technically complete historical fencer should be rewarded over a competitor relying primarily on athleticism or repetitive attacks.

Valour Historical Fencing Judging Rubric (6 Points Total)

1. Tactical Dominance (2 points)

This is **not** simply "who landed the most hits." It measures who controlled the fight.

Judges should consider:

- Number of clean scoring actions
- Control of measure

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

- Initiative (who dictates the tempo)
- Ring/patch control
- Ability to force opponent into mistakes
- Good judgment of when to attack and when not to
- Overall command of the bout

A fighter who is consistently controlling the engagement should receive these points even if the exchange count is relatively even.

2. Historical Technique & Technical Breadth (2 points)

This category rewards fencing that actually resembles historical fencing.

Judges should look for:

- Proper historical guards
- Proper body mechanics
- Good posture
- Correct footwork
- Proper point presence
- Variety of techniques demonstrated
- Use of multiple tactical solutions rather than repeating the same attack
- Appropriate use of historical actions from the source tradition

Examples:

- ✓ Invitations
- ✓ Cavazione
- ✓ Stringering
- ✓ Counter-time actions
- ✓ Feints
- ✓ Voids
- ✓ Gain of the blade
- ✓ Opposition
- ✓ Passing steps

rather than

Advance → lunge → recover repeated for two minutes.

This category should heavily reward a technically complete fencer.

3. Defensive Excellence (1 point)

Award to the fighter demonstrating the superior defensive fencing.

Examples include:

- Successful parries
- Deflections
- Voids
- Counter-attacks in tempo
- Defensive blade presence
- Distance management
- Preventing doubles
- Recovering safely after attacks

Simply backing away is **not** considered good defense.

4. Offensive Excellence (1 point)

Award to the fighter demonstrating the superior offensive fencing.

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

Judges should consider:

- Intelligent attack selection
- Well-timed attacks
- Successful feints
- Compound attacks
- Taking initiative
- Creating openings
- Provoking reactions
- Effective use of second intention

Running forward throwing attacks should not score well.

Points will be awarded to 1 fighter only in each category per judge. Each match will have 3 judges scoring. Scores will be totaled and a winner announced. If a tie occurs a sudden death single point round without afterblow will be fought to determine winner.

Allowed Main Weapons

- HEMA steel rapiers simulators from recognized manufacturers.

Allowed Off-Hand Weapons

- Main gauche / parrying dagger
- Buckler (maximum 13" diameter, no rotellas/targe)
- Cloak
- Cane / Scabbard / Staff
- Lantern / tea pot

Weapon Restrictions

Rapier

- Maximum blade length: 45 inches
- Maximum overall length: 50 inches

Dagger

- Maximum blade length: 14 inches

Buckler

- Maximum diameter: 13 inches

Mandatory Protective Gear

- 350N HEMA-rated jacket
- Leather gloves
- Fencing mask with back-of-head protection
- Soft hood permitted
- Gorget protecting front of neck
- Knee protection
- Shin protection
- Male groin protection (cup)
- No exposed skin

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

Recommended Protective Gear

- Elbow protection
 - Forearm protection
 - Padded gloves
 - Female rigid plastron chest guard
 - Female jill-style groin protection
 - Full gorget with rear neck protection
-

4. Smallsword Tournament – Women and Under-Represented Genders (Sunday Afternoon)

Format

- First to 10 points – 1 point full body targeting
- Maximum 2-minute matches
- Round robin seeding into single elimination

Scoring

- Thrusts score 1 point regardless of hit location
- Afterblow/doubles = both score 1 point
- Afterblows must be in motion at the time of the initial hit and must land within one-half tempo
- Cuts are not counted for this and small swords are assumed to not have sharp edges

Ties

- Sudden death exchange

Allowed Weapons

- HEMA smallsword simulators
- Olympic epee (French grip / straight grip)
- No modern pistol grip epee unless orthopedic requirement (doctor's note necessary)

Weapon Restrictions

- Maximum blade length: 35 inches
- Maximum overall length: 40 inches

Mandatory Protective Gear

- 350N HEMA-rated jacket
- Leather gloves
- Fencing mask
- Gorget protecting front of neck
- Male sex organ groin protection (cup)
- No exposed skin

Recommended Protective Gear

- Additional elbow padding
- Additional forearm padding
- Female rigid plastron chest guard

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

- Female sex organ jill-style groin protection
-

5. No Quarter – Grim Reaper's Cup Tournament (Sunday Finale)

Format

- Single elimination, random matching
- Mixed one-handed steel weapons
- Maximum 2-minute matches, if a match ends without a winner after 2 minutes both fighters are eliminated.

Core Rules

This is what is often referred to as a Pine Box Tournament and is a simulation of a duel to the death with no healing between duels. It is possible to have no tournament winner, in which case the grim reaper wins.

- Wounds persist throughout the tournament
- No healing between matches
- Body hits and head hits are kills via either cut or thrust
- Limb wounds remain active for future rounds
- Limbs are broken down to hand, arm, legs.
- A hit to the hand disables the hand but the arm remains
- A hit to the arm disables arm and hand
- If both hands or arms are disabled it is a loss (though if the opponent does not kill that combatant they are counted as "alive" for the tournament ending)
- A hit to either leg disables both legs and a hold will be called to allow the fighter to continue fighting from a seated or kneeling position. If a fighter is legged and the opponent has use of both of their legs then the standing fighter must fight from within 160 degrees to the front of the downed fighter. It is proper etiquette to allow the downed fighter to find their measure/range by having the downed fighter extend their sword towards the opponent and for the opponent to walk forward to the end of the sword. Afterwards the opponent will step back, and the judge will commence the continuation of the fight.
- If both fighters are legged the judge will have the combatants enter within mutual weapons range (misura stretta) and have both combatants have their weapons held completely vertical and will call the fight to commence at which point both combatants may proceed to fight from the ground.
- Judges calls are final, self-calling is encouraged
- Judges will call a hold if they see a hit that is not acknowledged to instruct the combatant to lose the use of the limb or to call a kill. Continuous fighting may persist if the fighter acknowledges the loss of the limb.

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

Afterblows

- Afterblows count wherever they land
- Afterblows may kill
- Double kills may occur
- An afterblow will only count if it is in motion at the time of the initial hit and is within one-half tempo of the initial hit. An afterblow will not count if the limb that delivered the afterblow was hit prior to the afterblow landing.

Double Kills

- Simultaneous fatal strikes result in double loss and elimination of both fighters

Allowed Main-Hand Weapons

Single handed, HEMA rated steel swords:

- Rapier
- Saber (Polish, Hungarian, Italian – Dueling/Cavalry/Olympic)
- Sidesword
- Scottish broadsword
- Schiavonna
- Messer
- Arming sword
- Dussack
- Smallsword
- Other one handed swords as approved

Main-Hand Weapon Restrictions

- Maximum blade length: 45 inches
- Maximum overall weapon length: 50 inches

Off-Hand Weapons Allowed

- Dagger
- Buckler
- Cloak
- Cane
- Scabbard

Off-Hand Weapon Restrictions

- Maximum blade length: 14 inches
- Staff/scabbard/cane maximum length: 50 inches

Buckler Restrictions

- Maximum diameter: 14 inches

Mandatory Protective Gear

- 350N HEMA-rated jacket
- Rigid elbows and knees

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

- Gorget with front and back neck protection
- Fencing mask with back-of-head protection
- Shin guards
- Male groin protection (cup)
- Female rigid plastron chest guard

Hand Protection by Weapon Type

- **Complex hilt with open areas: Rapier, Italian Dueling Saber, etc:**

Padded leather gloves with rigid fingertip protection

- **Fully enclosed hilts: Scottish broadsword, Schiavonna, etc:**

Light leather gloves

- **Open hilts: Smallsword, Messer, Sidesword, Hungarian saber, Polish saber, Open dagger, Cloak, Staff, Cane, Scabbard, etc:**

Fully rigid gloves such as clamshell gloves, Gabriels, etc.

Recommended Protective Gear

- Thigh protection
 - Female jill-style groin protection
 - Forearm guards
 - Shoulder guards
-

Tournament Authority

Tournament marshals, judges, and organizers retain final authority regarding:

- Rules interpretation
- Scoring disputes
- Weapon legality
- Equipment legality
- Match stoppages
- Disqualifications
- Safety enforcement

Warning Card system will be in use:

Yellow card:

Consequence: Warning – 3-point deduction, 2x Yellow = automatic red card

Meaning: Judge's discretion for warning a combatant about a safety issue bordering unsafe conduct such as increasingly heavy hits, suicidal and unsafe attacks, and failure to withdraw.

Red card:

Cook's Creek Medieval Festival – HEMA Tournament Ruleset

Consequence: Unsafe conduct - Ejection from match, automatic loss, automatic win for opponent. 2x Red = automatic black card.

Meaning: Judge's discretion to eject a combatant from that match for unsafe conduct rising to the level of potential for injury but without malicious intent or for obtaining 2x yellow warning cards in any given tournament in any given match. Automatic review by head judges for possible issuance of a black card.

Black Card:

Consequence: Minimum - Ejection from tournament / Maximum - Ejection from event grounds

Meaning: Gross unsafe conduct and/or malicious intent. Can be issued immediately without having received previous warnings or yellow/red cards. Will be issued upon review of any attack, whether injurious or not, where a fighter takes an intentional blow after a hold has been called (revenge blows).

If there is doubt as to whether the combatant heard the hold, benefit of the doubt may be granted down to a red card at the judge's discretion. *Benefit of the doubt should not be granted to any persons who have shown an increasing level of unsafe intensity or if a prior card (yellow or red) has been issued.*

Persona Non-Grata:

Consequence: Lifetime ban from all Valour HEMA Academy events of any form.

Meaning: Gross unsportsmanlike conduct violating the Valour HEMA Academy – Code of Conduct and Ethical Framework with aggravating circumstances.