

Gear Guide for Historical Fencing

[Key Advice](#)

[Detailed advice for protective equipment](#)

[Head](#)

[Neck](#)

[Body](#)

[Arms](#)

[Legs](#)

[Hands](#)

[Groin](#)

[Feet](#)

[What to look for in a sword for fencing and competition](#)

[Longsword / Two Handed Sword](#)

[Sidesword, Sword & Buckler](#)

[Rapier](#)

Key Advice

Below is a table showing examples of different ways to put together a full tournament kit depending on your budget. Kit for club sparring doesn't need to be as comprehensive - see the [Club Sparring Rules](#) for details.

When buying gear, you don't need to get everything at once. Start with the most important and most fun stuff:

1. Mask and Sword (do you need a SWORD straight away? No but there's a reason you are doing sword fighting)
2. Gloves
3. Gorget/Neck Protector, Groin protection (cheap and very useful), and a Fencing Jacket
4. Everything else

		Budget	Affordable	Premium
Longsword / Two Handed Sword	Head	Basic Mask, Vectir Overlay, Vectir Occipital Overlay (back of head protector)	Advanced Fencing Mask or Leon Paul Mask, SF Pro Overlay	HorseBows Fencing Helmet (\$750), or Plastic Helmet Overlay & mask (\$420)
	Neck	SF Gorget	SF Neck Protector or Vytis Gorget	Vytis Gorget
	Body	350N long sleeve T-Shirt plus chest protector	Basic HEMA Jacket (plus chest protector) or FG Light	Spes FG light or AP light
	Arms	Spes Vectir forearm and elbow	Spes Vectir forearm and elbow OR Spes	Spes Vectir forearm and elbow OR

			Gecko forearm+elbow	Spes Gecko forearm+elbow
	Legs	Basic HEMA Pants and Spes shell knees	350N Spes Locust Pants and Spes shell knees	350N Spes Locust Pants and Spes shell knees
	Hands	Spes Lobster Heavies or Sparring Glove Mittens	Spes Lobster Heavies or Sparring Glove Mittens	Gabriel gloves (\$550) OR Darkwood Fingered Gauntlets (\$1400)
	Groin	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)
	PPE Total	\$ 1040	\$ 1450	\$ 2100-3000
	Weapon	Regenyei Feder or Big Feder \$450-470	Regenyei Trnava (light flex), Regenyei Feder, or Big Feder \$450 - 550	Regenyei Trnava (light flex) or Big Feder \$450 - 550
Sidesword / Sword & Buckler	Head	Basic Mask, Vectir Overlay, Vectir Occipital Overlay (back of head protector)	Advanced Fencing Mask or Leon Paul Mask, SF Pro Overlay	HorseBows Fencing Helmet (\$750), or Plastic Helmet Overlay & mask (\$420)
	Neck	SF Gorget	SF Neck Protector or Vytis Gorget	Vytis Gorget
	Body	350N long sleeve T-Shirt plus chest protector	Basic HEMA Jacket (plus chest protector) or FG Light	Spes FG light or AP light
	Arms	Spes Vectir forearm and elbow	Spes Vectir forearm and elbow OR Spes Gecko forearm+elbow	Spes Vectir forearm and elbow OR Spes Gecko forearm+elbow
	Legs	HEMA Basics Pants and SPES shell knees and hockey/brushcutter shins (\$30)	350N Spes Locust Pants and Spes shell knees, and hockey/brushcutter shins (\$30)	350N Spes Locust Pants and Spes shell knees, and hockey/brushcutter shins (\$30)
	Hands	Firestone 2, or SF Master Gloves, or Red Dragon Gloves	THOKK Gauntlets (\$450) OR Firestone 2, or SF Master Gloves	THOKK Gauntlets (\$450) OR Fingered Gauntlets

	Groin	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)
	PPE Total	\$ 900	\$ 1300	\$ 2150-2600
	Weapon	Regenyei Wideblade Sidesword \$590	Regenyei Wideblade Sidesword \$590	Regenyei Wideblade Sidesword \$590
	Buckler	Buckler \$150	Buckler \$150	Buckler \$150
Rapier	Head	Basic Mask, Vectir Occipital Overlay (back of head protector)	Advanced Fencing Mask or Leon Paul Mask, SF Pro Overlay	HorseBows Fencing Helmet (\$750), or Plastic Helmet Overlay & mask (\$420)
	Neck	SF Gorget	SF Neck Protector or Vytis Gorget	Vytis Gorget
	Body	350N long sleeve T-Shirt plus chest protector	Basic HEMA Jacket (plus chest protector) or SPES Light jacket	Basic HEMA Jacket (plus chest protector) or SPES Light jacket
	Arms	Spes Shell Elbow	Spes Shell Elbow	Spes Shell Elbow
	Legs	HEMA Basics Pants and SPES shell knees and hockey/brushcutter shins (\$30)	HEMA Basics Pants and SPES shell knees and hockey/brushcutter shins (\$30)	350N Spes Locust Pants and Spes shell knees, and hockey/brushcutter shins (\$30)
	Hands	Padded Gloves	Kevlar Gloves or Padded Gloves	HF Fencing Gloves, or Kevlar Gloves
	Groin	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)	Groin Protector (mandatory for men, optional for women)
	PPE Total	\$ 900	\$ 1400	\$ 1400 - 1850
	Weapon	HF Club Rapier \$280	Regenyei Rapier or Darkwood Economy Rapier \$500 - 700	Darkwood or Tim Harris Rapier \$600 - 800

The above table is meant to be an example, not an exhaustive list - the things included on the table are either standard items that are easy to purchase from [the School of Historical Fencing](#), basic items available from many

different suppliers, or highly recommended options for which there is no real alternative.

Detailed advice for protective equipment

Head

I recommend the Leon Paul Club Mask for most purposes, however more substantial protection is also available.

You can start sparring in the club with just a mask, however it is best to get a back of head protector and overlay to work at a higher level of intensity, and is necessary to enter competitions.

We need to protect the eyes from sword tips, and the whole head in general from hard blows (as well as from puncture from a broken blade). To achieve this the modern olympic fencing mask is the standard piece of head protection; it is however designed for a different activity to HEMA and so protects you from puncture but it's not so good at protecting our brains from impact, so adding padding/suspension and an overlay is necessary. For this reason it can be a good idea to get a mask a little larger than you need so that you can put extra padding inside the mask, or wear a rugby scrum cap underneath.

Masks come in two standards, CEN1 and CEN2. The difference between these is that CEN2 has a stronger mesh and a more puncture resistant bib.

Recommended Fencing Mask

The mask that I recommend is the Leon Paul club mask which has the same mesh as their CEN2 mask but is CEN1 rated because the bib is 350 N rather than 600 N. The reasons for choosing the Leon Paul club mask are as follows:

1. The front of the neck is already covered by a rigid throat protector so the effective neck protection is higher already.
2. We want the bib to be more flexible so that the mask sits on our head properly on top of the neck protector (that the mask isn't designed for) and the 350 N bib is much more flexible than the 600 N bib.
3. By getting a premium CEN1 mask we save money compared to most CEN 2 masks and the mesh of the Leon Paul Club mask is the same as the CEN 2 version.
4. Leon Paul masks have more adjustable padding on the inside and are made with a strong keel shape which helps to prevent waffling (waffle marks formed on your face when your mask mesh is pushed inwards by a hard blow).

What could be better than a mask?

The best option, if you can afford it and are willing to wait 6+ months for it to arrive, is a helmet specifically designed for historical fencing. The helmets made by Horsebows are a good option

<https://www.horsebows.com/fencing-masks.php>

The suspension system inside the helmet is the main advantage over a regular mask, though the durability, resistance to acceleration, appearance, and custom fit are important advantages too.

Another helmet alternative is the Wukusi Cobra Helmet, which is nearly as good as the Horsebows one, and is more affordable. It can be bought from stock in standard sizes, but does not have the internal suspension system or weight of the Horsebows mask. If getting a Cobra Helmet make sure to get the level 2 version which can be purchased in Australia from - [Black Armoury Oz - Adelaide Sword Academy](#)

Personally I have one of each, a fencing mask for drills and light sparring (quicker to put on), and a helmet for everything else.

Further reading: <https://www.keithfarrell.net/blog/2017/09/difference-350n-fencing-mask-1600n-fencing-mask/>

Other people's advice: <https://ecsfencer.substack.com/p/fencing-kit-buying-guide>

Neck

I recommend getting the Vytis Gorget if you want something low profile and articulated. Otherwise the SF Neck Protector is a good alternative.

The neck is a very important and delicate part of your body. We need to protect it from being stabbed (in case a blade breaks sharp) and from being crushed. Puncture protection should be provided by the combination of the bib of the mask, a rigid neck protector (gorget), the back of head protector, and the collar of your fencing jacket. The crush risk is to the windpipe specifically i.e. the front of your neck, this is also where the majority of attacks to the neck land anyway. The main thing that protects you from crushing is the rigid neck protector.

The SF Neck Protectors protect against crushing well and fit everybody and there are many other suppliers making very similar products. This design sometimes it has more of a gap at the top than is ideal. If you have a longer neck or want something with more movement and a lower profile then the Vytis gorget or a metal gorget is much better.

Metal gorgets typically cover all around the neck, including the back of the neck, can be bought in a range of sizes from various suppliers or can also be made to measure by a smith specialising in historical fencing/SCA/HMB. It is very important that a metal gorget fits properly.

Body

Choose your body protection so that you can move easily, and then based on how much padding you want, and how you want it to look.

The body should be protected from puncture. This protection can be found in any garment that is Newton rated (350 N is the minimum) or in a garment made out of material that has been punch tested (this is an SCA test that can be applied to any fabric to determine its resistance to puncture). The other stuff that can be included in a fencing jacket is just for comfort and to avoid bruises.

Jacket padding can be done in different ways. The difference between a standard AP or FG for example and the light versions of the same is that the standard jackets have thick in built padding everywhere, which can get very warm. The light versions have foam padding pockets covering the areas that get hit often/hurt more, the padding can be removed/replaced/modded easily and the rest of the jacket is quite thin so you stay much cooler. The JF Jacket and Supfen Longsleeve T-shirt have no padding at all, just puncture resistance - so the only reason to get the JF rather than the T-shirt is because you like the look better.

Chest protectors can be combined with any jacket and provide very good impact protection to the chest including the sides.

It is important that you can move in your jacket so it needs to fit well and be designed for fencing. If buying a standard size, you either want to be very sure from your measurements and the reputation of the manufacturer/jacket, or you should try it on before you buy. Again, [the school](#) keeps a stock of jackets for sale for this reason. The other great option is to get a custom fit jacket, most manufacturers will offer this service for a small additional fee - talk to me if you want to get anything from SPES.

Arms

The arms are generally a very close target to the opponent and therefore get hit often, especially with more “cutty” weapons. We want to avoid damage to the elbow joint and wrist, as well as minimising bruises to the forearm.

For tournaments it's best to always cover the bony parts of the elbow with rigid material no matter what weapon you are using. Whereas if you are using harder hitting/more cutty weapons e.g. longsword or sidesword then the forearm is best covered by rigid material too (this partially covers the wrist, the rest of the wrist protection comes from the glove/gauntlet cuff) For club sparring with rapiers rigid elbow or forearm protection is often not necessary, though of course it doesn't hurt!

There are lots of options for arm protection, most of them in very similar designs e.g. rigid strips wrapped around the forearm plus a rigid cup shaped piece over the elbow - SPES Gecko and Vectir are just that.

Legs

Much like the body, the most important thing is to protect yourself from puncture here. 350 N protection covering the inside thigh and groin is necessary for tournaments. Modern olympic fencing (MOF) trousers (always white but cheap), or the standard HEMA black trousers with pockets for additional padding, lots of options will do the job. For casual club sparring this is less important - blades are unlikely to break and because the fencing is less intense and with less psychological pressure fencers are much more able to stop if a blade were to break.

The main advantage of HEMA specific pants, like the SPES Locust pants, over MOF pants is that they include attachment points to hold knee protection on and have pockets for additional padding if you want that. The knees are also quite delicate and deserve rigid protection covering the front and sides - again rigid plastic knee covers have solved this problem with little fuss. Rigid shin protection is generally required for single handed weapon tournaments or any other time where you expect to get hit in the shin.

Hands

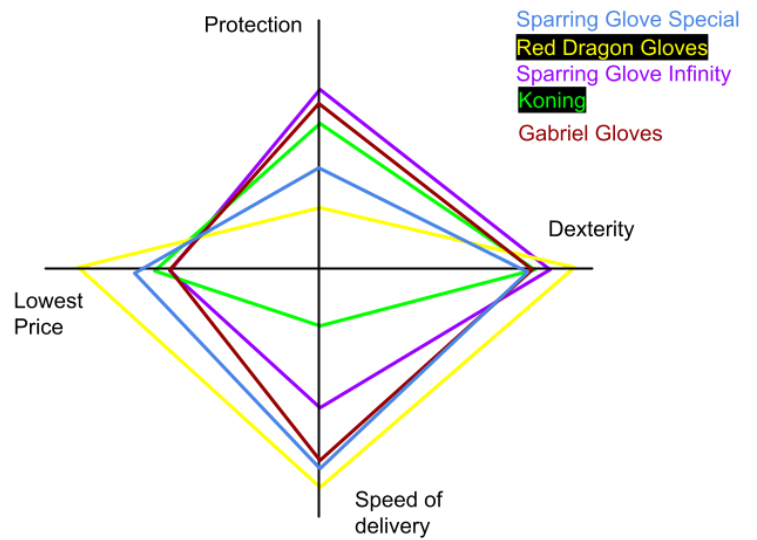
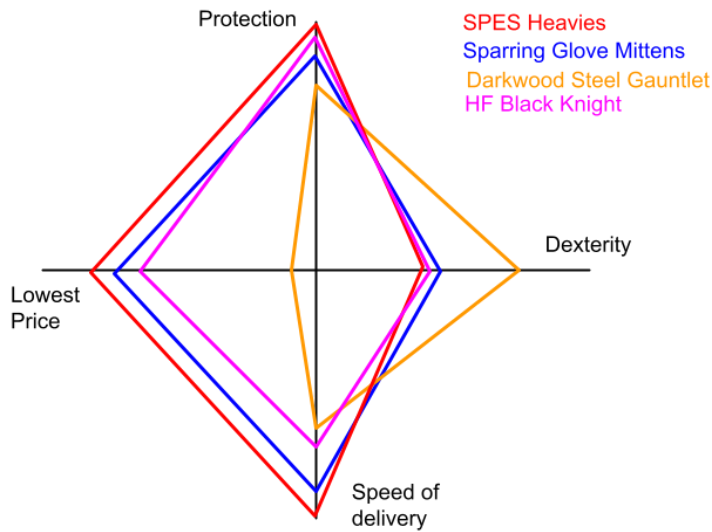
Protecting the hands from harm when fencing with historical weight weapons is really tricky. As with all things like this we all want high levels of protection, heaps of mobility, a low price, and very quick shipping, but we can only pick two at best. It's also important to seriously consider the intensity and level of contact you expect to be using - with roughly 3 different levels: light sparring games and drills, friendly free fencing usually within your club, and tournament where attacks are much faster and fencers are more keen to win.

Rapier

For rapier and other complex hilted swords or lightweight swords (like smallsword) the choice is easy. Get lightly padded gloves, or motorcycle gloves. If you would like more protection than these offer, get Kevlar Gloves with inbuilt finger tip protection. All these options are fine.



Longsword



Longsword gets a bit harder, for drills and light sparring games, kevlar gloves are a good option - great movement with some padding and fingertip protection. For friendly club sparring at limited intensity substantially padded gloves that cover the whole hand can be a good affordable option. Red Dragon gloves, HF Firestones, Wyvern gloves, SF Master Gloves are all roughly equivalent for this level of intensity.

For more safety and fencing at interclub and tournament intensity gauntlets with rigid protection are required.

SPES Lobster Gauntlets probably the most protective but quite bulky. For a bit more movement and nearly as much protection the Sparring Glove Mittens work well although they wear out sooner. Some people like to get these mittens with an extended cuff that covers the whole forearm, but personally I prefer to keep the forearm and the glove separate because the separate forearm guards are more protective and more modular.



The Sparring Glove Infinity is a relatively new five finger glove design, it costs a little more and covers each finger separately with rigid plastic plates giving fairly good protection and movement. Sadly these gloves take much longer to get because they have to be custom made to your hand. The same company also make a slightly more slimline glove with five fingers, the Sparring Glove Special, it uses a resin to make each rigid finger section - be warned the resin can break down and needs repair and I would not recommend this glove for longsword tournaments (although there are a few people in club who use it and it is usually accepted at gear checks.)

Konings are a five fingered glove from another manufacturer that are back in production- a leather inner and outer glove with plastic plates and padding sandwiched between. Mobility is pretty good, protection is ok, and definitely better than the resin based alternative but not as good as a proper hard shell finger like the Infinity Glove. The Konings are quite good as a crossover glove for sidesword, arming sword, and longsword.

Gabriel Gloves are a five fingered gauntlet made with plastic plates, the protection and movement is pretty good. Durability seems decent though all complex gloves are more likely to need repair. These also can work as a crossover glove for single handed swords too.

Steel gauntlets can also be a great option for a five fingered longsword gauntlet as well, however steel gauntlet quality is highly variable and generally for this option to work well it is best to have them custom made by a smith who knows what they are doing. Off the shelf the steel gauntlets from Darkwood Armory look the best. In general to get a steel gauntlet that is truly better than a HEMA specific product expect to pay a lot (\$1000 or more). If

Single Sword, Sword & Buckler

Singlesword/Sidesword, and Sword & Buckler are probably the trickiest weapon combinations to get gloves for. You absolutely need more dexterity than a mitten gauntlet can provide, especially because you need to be able to put one finger over the cross of the sword. You also need nearly as much protection as you get from a longsword gauntlet.

The best economy option for right now is a one of the padded lacrosse style gloves like the HF Firestone 2, or the SF HEMA Sparring Glove. Others that work well enough are Red Dragon gloves or a well padded lacrosse glove, which will require additional protection for the tips of the fingers, so get some Spes fingertip protectors and put them in. All of the padded lacrosse style gloves above need some aftermarket modification as the protection for the web of the thumb gets in the way and makes it hard to hold the sword. The best thing to do is to cut some space out of the padding to fit the rear quillion.

The best overall compromise between protection, movement, price, and shipping speed at the moment is probably the THOKK Weaponmaster gauntlets. Other reasonable options are five finger longsword gloves like the Sparring Glove Special, Konings, or Gabriels. These are protective enough but can have some dexterity or bulkiness issues.

For careful club freeplay (not tournaments or intense sparring) Kevlar Gloves are a dextrous and cheap option - my personal single sword glove solution is a heavily modified pair of these (my mods almost make this into a completely new glove)

Sabre

For minimal hilted sabre like the 1796 and polish sabre red dragon or firestone gloves are good - you can also cut out any of the foams that you don't need if it helps with movement.

For military sabre, I use a kevlar glove with some extra foam taped over the knuckles and around the wrist. It is very tricky to find the right level of protection for sabre especially when sabre is such a broad term.

Whereas for a lighter sabre, like the castille duelling sabres - the kevlar glove on it's own is pretty good.

Groin

Groin protectors are a standard and required piece of kit for men. Groin protection for women is also available and is recommended but not required. Get one made for martial arts, the ones designed for ball sports like cricket don't give the coverage to the bottom and sides that are best for HEMA . [The school](#) keeps a stock of groin protectors for sale but you can just as well get them from any sports shop or online.

Feet

Flat soled shoes that allow you to move and feel the ground are best for historical fencing. Some people use fully medieval shoes - while they are cool I don't think medieval shoes are necessary and the leather soles are quite slippery on modern surfaces. Shoes for wrestling, MMA, or boxing are popular and personally I use barefoot/minimalist shoes as these are an affordable equivalent to a medieval shoe with a modern rubber sole.

Here are some I have had success with:

[Sisstke Wrestling Shoes](#)

[Whitin barefoot shoes](#)

What to look for in a sword for fencing and competition

Table of sword properties in general

	Blade Length (tip to cross)	Handle length (including pommel)	Weight	Flex	Point of Balance (distance from the cross)	Common Competition requirements
16th C Longsword / Two Handed Sword	100 - 115 cm, 41 - 45"	35 - 40 cm, 13" - 16"	1.5 - 1.8 kg	5 - 10 kg	5 - 10 cm	Flex < 11 kg, Blade Length <102 cm, Mass< 1650 g
15th C Longsword	90 - 96 cm, 35 - 38"	28 - 30 cm, 11 - 12"	1.3 - 1.6 kg	5 - 10 kg	4 - 9 cm	Flex < 11 kg, Blade Length <96 cm, Mass< 1600 g
Sidesword	80 - 94 cm, 31 - 37"	14 -15 cm	900 - 1200 g	5 - 7 kg	4 - 10 cm	Flex < 8 kg, Blade Length <93 cm, Mass< 1150 g
Italian Rapier	99 - 110 cm, 39 - 43"	13 - 16 cm (14 - 15 is ideal)	850 - 1200 g	3 - 6 kg	3 - 8 cm	Flex < 7 kg, Blade Length <112 cm, Mass< 1330 g
Spanish Rapier	92 - 104 cm, 36 - 41"	10 - 15 cm	850 - 1200 g	3 - 6 kg	4 - 13 cm	Flex < 7 kg, Blade Length <112 cm, Mass< 1330 g

The above table gives the easily measurable properties of swords for sparring and competition. These should be used as a rough guide but shouldn't necessarily exclude something with slightly different properties. The most important requirement to consider a sword safe for sparring is that it be blunt and meet the overall weight and the flex max limits - so you should consult with Gindi before committing to buy anything that exceeds the maximum weight or flex given in the table.

Longsword / Two Handed Sword

For Medieval Longsword styles get a Regenyei feder that matches the specification above. The Trnava with lots of flex is best.

For Renaissance Longsword / Two Handed Sword get a big feder with the minimum lengths for two handed sword (as set out in the table) this is the best option for safe sparring, with a wide variety of opponents.

Ideally everyone would have a blunt replica sword for training, a sharp sword for practicing cutting and a flexible feder style longsword for sparring & competition. Feders should generally have slightly more weight in the hand than a blunt replica does because reducing the point of balance reduces the impact in a strike and we need to keep longsword fencing as safe as we can.

For 16th century styles of fencing you can see that the swords shown in Marozzo's book go from the ground up to the shoulders of the fencers using them. Generally speaking for training purposes it is best to have a sword of approximately this size. However, for sparring purposes shorter is safer and still works very well using this system. It's also really nice to use something that can spar with people doing other systems like Meyer or 15thc German Longsword.

Tournaments will often have varying maximum lengths, weights and stiffness. Commonly in Melbourne max flex will

be 12 kg, but max length can be 96 cm, or 101 cm, or 105 cm depending on the aim of the comp and which club is running it.

Sidesword, Sword & Buckler

Sideswords can vary in their hand protection significantly.

Generally speaking when paired with a buckler you want a sword with minimal protection so that you can use the buckler and sword close together without them catching on each other or opening gaps between them.

Fencing with a sword alone more hand protection can be nice to have and reduces the requirements for your glove. That being said, if your goal is to recreate Bolognese fencing the hand should still be targetable and the sword should be light and have its balance further out into the blade than a fully basket hilted sword.

If you want to get a simple cruciform hilted sword i.e. an arming sword, be warned that there are many reenactment swords out there. These are generally much too heavy and stiff for fencing with, so make sure to investigate the supplier and sword carefully before you buy one.

The school keeps Regency wide blade side swords with extra flex in stock as these are the best option out there. Other suppliers worth considering are Castille Armory, Kvetun, Malleus Martialis, and Balefire. New suppliers appear all the time so don't consider this an exhaustive list.

Rapier

It is very important that your rapier suits your body and desired style of fencing.

I recommend that the overall weight of your rapier be in the lower end of the safe range i.e. 900 - 1100 g, which makes for a much more comfortable sword to use. Be warned however that historical rapiers varied wildly and could be significantly heavier than this too.

Grip thickness - make sure that when holding the sword you can touch your ring finger to the base of your thumb. You may need to make some playdough or something to measure this for yourself without a sword.

For Italian Rapier, the grip length should be roughly the same as the distance from the heel of your hand to the base of your index finger measured on the palm. This is so that when you hold the sword the pommel rests on the wrist and is aligned with the valley in the heel of your hand - this is usually 10-11 cm.

For Iberian styles of rapier it is often better to have a shorter grip so that the pommel doesn't get in the way of certain style specific movements, this is especially important if you choose to hold the sword with two fingers over the cross.

Balance generally speaking for people with smaller wrists and forearm muscles it is better to get a lighter rapier with the balance more towards the hand. To do this I recommend choosing shorter blades i.e. 39-40 inches, and also a heavier pommel i.e. 250 - 300 g. Simple cup hilts, minimalistic swept hilts, or simple clam hilts are lightest and will still provide plenty of protection.

Further advice about choosing a rapier for the iberian tradition can be found here -

http://www.puckandmary.com/blog_puck/2010/12/destreza-choosing-a-weapon-for-the-spanish-tradition/

Here's a convenient listing of rapier models/manufacturers

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-HTACRfjha3b9_7E6yiLWYZRbDdoukJH5VbZF29VFj4/edit?usp=sharing