THMS Open 2025 Sabre Rules

1. Statement of Purpose

The THMS Open Sabre tournament rules are based on the following principles, in order:

1. Safety
2. Fairness
3. Providing an interesting game

That means we will penalize unsafe actions harshly. Make sure you read the Code of Conduct and Penalties sections, so you know what behavior is expected and what is not allowed.

That means the rules have been written with ease of judging in mind. Judges are humans and make mistakes. The intent is to reduce the mental load of the judges and the risk that single mistakes sway the outcome of matches. In addition, the rules invalidating and/or penalizing more violent physical actions are intended to even the playing field just as they are intended to make the fencing safer.

That means we prioritize a balanced game and incentives towards actions we consider interesting, fun, challenging, safe, etc. over any idea of “simulating” lethal combat. In this event, “who would have died” is not a relevant question. We can discuss that in the bar after the event. The scoring is based on the kind of fencing we like to see, not who’d be hurt worse.

2. Code of Conduct

THMS Open is dedicated to providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for everyone. If any guests or staff violate this code of conduct, the event organizers may take any action they deem appropriate, including expulsion from the event without refund and a ban from all future THMS events.

We do not tolerate harassment or abuse of any kind. Harassment includes, but is not limited to, offensive language related to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, religion (or lack thereof), or physical appearance, as well as deliberate intimidation, stalking, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention.

Violations of safety include seriously injuring another person due to an intentional action or neglecting to follow safety protocols given to you by staff or instructors.

Report violations to one of our staff immediately.

3. Sabre specific rules and considerations

These are the key differences between Longsword and Sabre in THMS Open.

- NO WRESTLING or GRAPPLING of any sort.
- You can not use your non-weapon hand in any way. If your non-weapon hand is in-between your torso / neck / head and gets hit, the hit gets counted as one hitting the area behind it. *So it is advised to keep the hand to your side or behind your back.*
- For CUTS and SLICES the Sabre only has “edge” on false edge the topmost one thirds of the blade length. True edge has an “edge” on full blade length.
- FINGERS of the weapon hand are not a valid target and deliberately trying to hit them is penalized.
- TORSO is also a priority target for cuts. See deep attack priority rules on section 4.1.
- At the START of the bout when the judge orders you to salute your opponent you both step forward, keep your sword extended forward and tap the opponents sword. Then you back off to the starting positions and the match starts when the judge tells you to fence.

Swords used in the tournament are CURVED. Sigi Sabre Big Curved to be exact by Sigi Forge. Check the link below for more details.
https://sigiforge.com/products/sigi-saber-big/

4. Scoring

All scoring actions are worth one point. In case of a double hit, i.e. both fencers perform a valid scoring action within the lockout time, by default neither fencer scores a point. In some circumstances one fencer may have priority and score a point when there's a double hit; see under Priority.

The lockout time for a double hit is very tight, roughly 1/5th of a second from the first valid scoring action. This is based on the judges' estimation and won't be perfectly accurate. There is no afterblow, any action after the lockout time is late and is ignored for scoring purposes.

Valid scoring actions:

- **Cuts.** *Notice that the Sabre only has "edge" on false edge the topmost one thirds of the blade length. True edge has an "edge" on full blade length.* Cuts must land with the edge on a valid target. A cut scraping the surface of protective equipment with the tip will not score. Cuts must land with good edge alignment; flat hits will not score. Cuts must travel a significant distance or arc; small motions will not score. Cuts must display intention by the fencer; incidental cuts will not score. Cuts which appear to be mostly parried by a part of the sword in the path of the strike will not score, nor will cuts that bounce off parries and then land elsewhere; trying to smash through parries will not work. Impact force is not a quality criterion and a cut can score even if it lands lightly, as long as it demonstrates intent, travel, and edge alignment.
- **Thrusts.** Thrusts must land with the point on a valid target. Thrusts must demonstrate travel lengthwise along the blade into the target. The point doesn't have to stick to the target nor does the blade have to flex to score; it's enough to land with the point and demonstrate that the point could have traveled into the target. A point barely reaching the surface will not score, nor will a point sticking to the surface of a target and then being pushed sideways so that the blade flexes.
- **Slices.** Slices must be performed with good edge alignment and a strong structure on a valid target and demonstrate intent. No sawing motion is required. Rubbing a target with a weak structure, such as after missing a cut or thrust, will not score.
- **Ring outs.** A fencer may score if their opponent steps out of the ring of their own accord. Being out of the ring means having both of your feet outside the borders of the ring. A fencer will not score if they physically push their opponent out of the ring.
- **Exposed back.** A fencer may score by getting their opponent to expose their back. Under these rules, "exposed back" includes having the head or torso angled more than 90 degrees away from the other fencer. This includes crouching down low enough to expose the back to a standing fencer. Miming a strike to the exposed back is not required, scoring is automatic whenever an opponent's back is exposed. A fencer is responsible for doing their best not to strike the spine or back of the head of an opponent who has exposed their back.

Valid targets: For **cuts, *slices* and thrusts**, valid targets include the whole body with the exception of the ***fingers of the weapon hand***, **feet, back of the ankles and knees, groin,**

spine, and back of the head. If your action immediately leads you to expose your own back, stumble out of the ring, fall down, etc. that action will not score.

4.1. Priority

A fencer may score a point in case of a double hit if their action has priority, according to the following hierarchy of actions: Point-in-line > Deep attack > Riposte

In short:

1. If Red skewers themselves into Blue's obvious extended point, Red loses the exchange regardless of whether Red also lands a strike on Blue.
2. If Red ignores an obvious incoming attack to a deep target from Blue and counterattacks without trying to defend themselves, then Red loses the exchange regardless of whether Red's counterattack also lands.
3. If Red strikes at Blue, Blue obviously defends against the strike and immediately strikes a riposte, and Red ignores the riposte, then Red loses the exchange regardless of whether Red continues spamming attacks.

Point-in-line. A fencer has point-in-line if they have their point aimed at the opponent's head, neck, or torso and their arms fully extended forwards, towards the opponent (not to the sides). They must have committed to this position clearly before the opponent commits to their attack, and they must maintain it throughout the opponent's attack. The hit must be a consequence of the opponent moving into the point. In this case, if an opponent attacks and the result is a double hit, the fencer with point-in-line has priority and scores a point.

Deep attack. A fencer is attacking deep if they attack with a cut or a thrust towards the head, neck, or torso. An attack is towards these targets if it is traveling directly towards them and would reach them, even if they hit hands or arms on their path. An attack begins when a fencer takes the final step that brings them into range to reach the target **and** physically commits their blade to accelerate towards the final target. If a fencer attacks a deep target and the opponent counterattacks and the result is a double hit, the deep attack has priority and scores a point.

Riposte. A fencer is performing a riposte if they cut, thrust or slice to the upper body (above the belt line) immediately after performing a defensive action that prevents an opponent's strike from landing. Usually this means they have parried a strike and throw a strike in response immediately after, but it can also be following a voiding action with the body against a committed strike. If a fencer strikes a riposte while the opponent strikes again (renewal/remise/redoublement/continued attack) and the result is a double hit, the riposte has priority and scores a point.

It is a fencer's responsibility to clearly demonstrate they have priority by committing to a point-in-line, deep attack, or riposte. In unclear cases, judging will default to no priority and no score.

Point-in-line example 1: Blue fencer stands arms fully stretched in front towards Red fencer, point straight towards Red's chest. Red then leaps forwards, striking a cut at Blue, ignoring the obvious threat of the point. Blue remains arms extended and point forward throughout. Blue's point lands on Red's chest and Red's cut lands on Blue's torso. The result is a double hit, but Blue scores a point because point-in-line has priority over an attack.

Point-in-line example 2: Blue fencer stands with point-in-line as before. Red now beats Blue's blade to the side, so that Blue's point is well to the side or below Red's torso. With the threat of the point removed, Red launches an attack. Blue responds by bringing their point back towards Red's chest, ignoring the threat of the incoming attack. Blue's point lands on Red's chest and Red's cut lands on Blue's arm. The result is a double hit and no score, because point-in-line was removed with the beat, and the attack wasn't to a deep target.

Deep attack example 1: Blue fencer commits to a step forward and direct descending cut at Red's head. Red responds by just lifting their hands into the path of Blue's cut while counterattacking with a cut at Blue's head. The result is a double hit, but Blue scores a point because a deep attack has priority over a counterattack – Red's hands being in the way don't change the fact that Blue's attack was at a deep target.

Deep attack example 2: Blue fencer attacks as before. Red responds by stepping back far enough that Blue's attack couldn't reach Red's head. Red counterattacks as before. Both strikes land on the arms. The result is a double hit and no score, because Blue's attack is no longer towards a deep target.

Deep attack example 3: Blue fencer commits to a step forward and feints a direct descending cut at Red's head. Red responds by just counterattacking with a cut at Blue's head. Blue pulls their feint and then commits to the final extension of the blade with a cut from the other side at Red's head. The result is a double hit and no score, because Blue's attack only started with the final blade extension.

Riposte example 1: Blue fencer attacks as before. Red fencer parries the attack and immediately strikes a riposte at Blue's arms. Blue continues attacking and strikes a cut around at Red's head. Both strikes land. The result is a double hit, but Red scores a point because riposte has priority over the continued attack.

Riposte example 2: Blue fencer attacks as before. Red fencer parries the attack. Both fencers bind for a moment, not committing to strikes. Then both fencers strike at the same time, both landing. The result is a double hit and no score, because there was no immediate riposte.

Riposte example 3: Blue fencer performs a committed thrust with a step. Red steps back, successfully defending by voiding Blue's attack fully. Red then immediately strikes a riposte. Blue ignores the riposte and takes another step to continue with a thrust. Red lands a cut on Blue's arms, Blue lands their thrust on Red's chest. The result is a double hit, but Red scores a point because riposte has priority over the continued attack.

Video examples of some common cases

- Point in line priority vs attack (double hit, point in line priority point Left): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsTU2po5Ofc
- Point in line not fully established before attack (double hit, deep attack priority point Right): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjgb7NttoCY
- Point in line beaten aside, then deep attack vs counterattack (double hit, deep attack priority point Right): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc1JN8QIYUA
- Deep attack vs counterattack (double hit, deep attack priority point Right): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SrVWowSsJA
- Deep attack vs counterattack with hands in the way (double hit, deep attack priority point Left): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKbfapQlsW8
- Deep attack becomes shallow with a void (double hit, no priority no score): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQkK3vUIW24
- Deep attack vs preparation of an attack (double hit, deep attack priority point Left): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKmhsgrJhdY
- Simultaneous deep attack (double hit, no priority no score): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZRAZ879Axg
- Immediate riposte vs continuation (double hit, riposte priority point Right): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpjuJ-FRilw
- No immediate riposte (double hit, no priority no score): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMYtzaUqQAQ

Playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNxUqcsN5J2VBNWWRUjoKf3uOBjzvss0o

5. Penalties

Forbidden actions include:

- Targeting the fingers of the weapon hand of an opponent. (ie. thrusting inside the cup and other such actions).
- Using your non-weapon hand for any action.
- Grappling or wrestling of any kind and also including once below.
- Any unarmed strikes, including punching, elbow strikes, kicks, knees, etc.
- Grabbing or otherwise manipulating your opponent's mask with any part of your body.
- Tackling or body checking the opponent, or otherwise violently impacting the opponent with your torso.
- Ramming or running violently into the opponent.
- Joint locks.
- Strikes with the cup/pommel of the sword.
- Any offensive actions after break is called.
- Strikes with a complete lack of control.
- Excessive force, brutality, violent or vindictive actions.
- Throwing your sword.
- Striking the floor.
- Refusal to obey the referee or tournament manager.

Penalties are escalating according to the following:

1. Yellow card. An official warning. All following infractions in that match by that fencer will be red cards instead.
2. Red card. The opponent receives one point. A second red card for the same infraction or a third red card for any reason in the same match leads to a black card instead.
3. Black card. The fencer is disqualified for this match.

All penalties are under the referee's full discretion and based on the severity of the infraction. The referee may penalize any action they view as unsafe or interfering with the order of the tournament. The referee may skip steps of the escalation depending on the severity of the infraction. After a black card, the referees and the tournament manager may together decide to expel that person from the event.

A fencer may never score a point in an exchange where they were carded, unless they receive a yellow card while their opponent receives a red card (in which case the result is 1 point for the fencer receiving the yellow card).

A fencer or their second may politely address the referee during a match to ask for a clarification. Abusing this ability, trying to influence the judges or staff, or attempting to argue with any member of the staff will be penalized.

Penalization of unsafe actions are not based on effects, such as injuries, but the behavior. For example, if the Blue fencer runs hilt-first at Red fencer's face, that is unsafe and will be penalized whether Red happens to be concussed that time or not. However, if a fencer's

unsafe actions caused an opponent to be unable to continue the match, that match is not considered a forfeit by the injured fencer. For example, if Blue concusses Red with a forbidden action, and Red cannot continue the match, then depending on the severity of the infraction that match is either considered a disqualification of Blue or as if it had never happened.

6. Tournament Structure

Each tournament consists of pools followed by a single elimination bracket and then finals for the medals.

The fencers will be seeded and split into pools. Each fencer of a pool will have one match against each other fencer in that pool. These matches consist of a single round, to 6 points with a running clock of 3 minutes. If the match has not ended when there is 10 seconds left on the clock, “last exchange” is called and the current (or, if this happens between exchanges, the next) exchange is allowed to run its course before the match ends.

After the pools phase the fencers will be seeded according to their performance in the pools, using snake drafting based on the following criteria:

1. Match points (win 9, draw 6, loss 3, averaged based on number of matches)
2. Win rate
3. Points for minus points against
4. Points against

Every fencer will continue to the elimination bracket. Depending on the number of fencers, the top seeds will get a bye in the first round. Winners continue to the next round until the semi-finals. These matches also consist of a single round, to 6 points with a running clock of 3 minutes.

The losers in the semi-finals continue to the bronze medal final. The winners of the semi-finals continue to the gold medal final. These final matches are best-of-three rounds, each round to 6 points with a running clock of 3 minutes.

If an elimination/final match is a draw after the last round has ended, the match goes to sudden death. Whoever next wins a point in an exchange wins the match.

If a fencer’s gear fails during a match, the match is halted, and they have 3 minutes to replace the failed gear. If they are not ready to continue with proper replacement gear after 3 minutes, they are considered to have forfeited the match.

If a fencer is injured during a match, the match is halted, and medical staff will examine the fencer. If the medical staff clears the fencer to continue, and the fencer wishes to do so, the match can continue. If the match cannot continue within 3 minutes, the fencer is considered to have forfeited the match.

If a fencer forfeits a match or is disqualified, the result will be recorded as a victory with the relevant maximum points regardless of the score at the time of the forfeit.

If a fencer withdraws or is ejected from the tournament during the pool rounds, that pool is handled as though that fencer never participated in the tournament.

If a fencer withdraws or is ejected from the tournament prior to an elimination match, it is handled as though they had forfeited the upcoming match.

7. Equipment

The swords used in the competition are provided by the organizer. They are **Curved Big Sabre by Sigi Forge**.

All protective equipment must be inspected prior to competition. A fencer must show up to gear check wearing their equipment.

The following is required of all competitors:

- Fencing mask with back of the head protection.
- Padded HEMA jacket with a blade catching collar.
- Throat protector.
- Hard elbow protection that covers all 3 points of the joint.
- Gloves suitable for sabre fencing. Red Dragons or better.
- Undergloves, if the gloves would otherwise leave skin on the hand exposed.
- Knee guards that provide some protection for the sides of the knee.
- Shin guards.
- Indoor shoes.
- Athletic cup (for men).

Recommended:

- Hard gloves. Clamshell or otherwise is recommended for non weapon hand.
- Professionally made jacket made of penetration-resistant materials.
- Rigid throat protector that covers the whole length of the trachea between the sternum and the jaw.
- Forearm protectors.
- Added chest protection, e.g. plastic Olympic fencing protector, especially if wearing a light jacket design.

Further protective equipment is allowed.

Banned:

- Masks without EN 13567 certification.
- Exposed metal protective equipment, other than mask shell.
- Too soft gloves and gloves not suitable for sabre fencing.
- Any exposed skin.

Throat protector and (where relevant) athletic cup and rigid chest protector are to be worn under the outermost layer of clothing.

The mask must be in good condition, including the padding/suspension inside. The mesh must be intact with no large dents that could catch thrusts or be pressed into the wearer's head. It must fit tight on the wearer and not come off too easily. The mesh must not touch the wearer's face when pressed from the front.

The jacket must not have any gaps e.g. in the armpits. It must have significant overlap at the zipper, unless this is in the back.

The gloves must be in good condition, with no significant cracks or tears. They must fit the wearer well, without any part of the wearer's hand slipping out while fencing. If there is any part left uncovered by the protective glove, an underglove must be worn to cover the skin. Penetration/tear resistant undergloves are recommended.