Dueling Ruleset

Objective, Vision and Assumptions

The priority when it comes to sparring is to promote martial behavior as much as possible, given the clear dual nature of HEMA as a domain that has some strong martial art aspects or characteristics, but is still fundamentally a sport.

As a consequence, this ruleset was thought of in such a manner that suicidal behavior, actions without proper body mechanics and power generation, overly sporty behavior or bad fencing in general should be discouraged. The vision is based on:

- mentality of the Eastern, Polish-Slovakian system of judging (only 1 person, the Referee, has the final word and is the decision-maker)
- communication between fencers, Referee and Spotter is encouraged so that the Referee has the maximum information available to make their decision; this is also why the fencers have the right to Protest
- all successful hits are scored equally (1 point), regardless of the target hit on the body; this includes the head, neck and dominant hand from the finger-tips to the elbow, which have special status only with regard to the Afterblow; the reason for this is that we want fencers to fight by taking the openings that are presented, not artificially focusing on closed ones (so called “deep targets”) just because they score higher; this principle also allows fencers to express their particular style better than prioritizing targets based on different values
- Afterblows and Doubles are treated differently (as they ARE different in nature, see below)
- an exchange is stopped by the Referee only when one of a series of alternative and **objective conditions** have been met, independent of time.

Assumptions that are the foundation of the Ruleset:

1. A match simulates a “Duel for Honor” or “Judicial Duel” as it would have taken place in the historical period, with sharp swords, and the possibility of disability or death. It DOES NOT simulate a battlefield fight, a street fight OR (the other extreme of) strictly a sports match where no blood is drawn!

2. We consider it as an axiom that MOST hits (regardless of delivery by cut, thrust, or slice etc.) are NOT disabling or lethal. But we DO consider that SOME hits, based on the target that was hit, ARE at least disabling, or even lethal. Hence making any follow-up after them impossible for the fencer that got hit.

3. Since we are using blunt simulators and protective gear, a system of POINTS is used to represent the outcome of an exchange between two fencers. These points can be won by each fencer for good fencing. Each point represents a valid hit on the other fencer.

4. We consider good fencing to be tactical as well as skillful. So the aim of the fencer is to HIT AND NOT BE HIT, which we call “hitting cleanly”.

Human Resources Needed Per Fighting Ring

1 Referee (Judge)

1 Spotter and [optional] 1 Score Keeper (the spotter or judge can be the scorekeeper)

Ring Details

Each fighting ring will be clearly delineated on the ground of the venue. Ideally, without using materials of a different height // level than the ground level of the venue, so that ring outs are easily possible and the fencers don't trip on the lines of the ring.

Each fighting ring will be EITHER circular in shape, OR square.

If circular, the ideal size will be 10 meters in diameter. If not possible due to space constraints, the minimum size will be 8 meters in diameter.

If square, the ideal size will be a square with each side measuring 8 meters. If not possible due to space constraints, the minimum size will be a square with each side measuring 6 meters in diameter.

If it is not possible to organize fighting rings in a circle or square shape, they may be rectangular, the ideal size being at least two sides measuring 8 meters and the smaller sides no smaller than 6 meters.

Ideally, at least 2 rings (with their own required staff), will be operating in parallel to save time with the fights. But the more that can be organized in parallel, the better.

Scoring System

A match starts with a pool of **uneven points to be won in total**! This pool is available to both fencers together, not separately (i. e. there are not 7 points PER fencer, but 7 in total). The number of points up to which the duel can be conducted can be agreed upon between players.

A match consists of a number of exchanges. The number of exchanges may vary, depending on the result of each of these exchanges and the number of points left.

Each exchange starts when the judge says "Start!" or "Fence!" and ends when the judge says "Stop!" or "Halt!".

"Stop!" conditions for each Exchange

The judge will say "Stop!" under the following, ALTERNATIVE, conditions:

1. BOTH fencers have been hit (completed **Afterblow** or **Double** - see below).

2. One of the fencers has **hit the other** fencer AND, after this moment, **either one** of the fencers has **taken 3 steps**, or more, **in any direction**.

3. One of the fencers **hit the other fencer** AND then **parried the Afterblow**.

4. One of the fencers **has hit the other fencer 2 consecutive times, without being hit**.

5. One of the fencers **has disarmed** the other fencer, making the weapon fall completely from their hand(s) or taking it altogether.

6. One of the fencers **pushed the other fencer with both feet out of the ring.**

7. One of the fencers voluntarily, or due to inattention, **exited the ring** with both feet.

8. The two fencers have entered **grappling, 5 seconds have passed**, and **none of the other Stop conditions have been met**.

(**Note here:** immobilizing your opponent, which is called “achieving dominance”, is not a Stop condition in this Ruleset. If you have immobilized your opponent [or at least their weapon], you must then proceed to land a valid hit, disarm, or push them out of the ring in order for the exchange to stop and win the point.).

NOTE: In any situation in which only PART of a Stop Condition has taken place (only one of the actions that make up a Stop Condition composed of more than one action - like Stop Conditions 1, 2, 3 and 4), but the whole condition is not fully met, the Referee will loudly and clearly say: **"Keep fencing!"**, so that the fencers are informed that they need to perform some other action to win the point (take more steps, hit again etc.). And not be confused or under the illusion that the exchange is over.

Example: *After the exchange starts, fencer A quickly hits fencer B and then they both freeze, or remain in relatively the same positions, neither of them taking 3 steps or more, nor performing any other actions, just looking at each other, both under the false impression that the exchange is over.*

NOTE ALSO that:

- conditions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are POSITIVE Stop Conditions, with regard to the fencer that accomplishes either one of them as the Attacker (not the Defendant). They represent a tactical (and martial) success for that fencer. In other words, all fencers should try to accomplish one of these Stop Conditions! Focus on all of them as (alternative) objectives for each of the exchanges in the match.

- condition 7 is a failure for the fencer that exited the ring.

- condition 1 is either a failure for both fencers (**Afterblow** and **Innocent Doubles** - see further down) or for the fencer that ignored the incoming attack (**Bad Doubles** - see further down).

- condition 8 can either be seen as a stalemate (no tactical error on any fencer's part), or a failure for both fencers (due to insufficient technique), depending on your personal perspective; in any case, the exchange is stopped and no points are awarded.

Valid hits, invalid hits and points awarded

All **targets on the body** are **scored equally**: **1 point** for a valid hit.

A hit is **invalid** if it is:

- **weak**: an attack that is not performed with correct body mechanics and power generation [<- unfortunately, with current technologies and gear, this is subjective and for the Referee to decide]; if a hit is considered weak, the Referee will loudly and clearly say: **"Keep fencing!"**, so that the fencers are informed that they need to perform some other action to win the point

- **flat**: any attack in which the blade connects with the target without proper edge alignment (in the case of a cut or slice), or without making contact with the tip (in the case of a failed thrust); [<- unfortunately, with current technologies and gear, this is subjective and for the Referee to decide];

- **incidental**: an attack that was aimed at a different target, but got parried (badly), its energy dissipated, but the blade got redirected to another target that it hit. [<- unfortunately, with current technologies and gear, this is subjective and for the Referee to decide];

A **note on thrust quality**. For a thrust to be valid, it requires “minimal observable contact”. Meaning that the **blade bends on the target, at least a bit, visibly.** [<- unfortunately, with current technologies and gear, this is subjective and for the Referee to decide];

“Torso” does not include the shoulders and anything below the belt (a modern belt that sits on the hips, not the medieval kind that sat on the navel).

⚠️Before the beginning of the competition (or the day of bouts), the organizers (via the Referees or whomever they decide), should demonstrate the types of “no quality” instances (weak, flat and incidental), so that all fencers have a clear representation of what they are.

Scoring result of an exchange

Each exchange between 2 fencers (Fencer A and Fencer B), may result in **only one** of the following 4 scoring scenarios:

- 1 point for fencer A
- 1 point for fencer B
- 1 point each (1 point for fencer A AND 1 point for fencer B)
- 0 points each (0 points for fencer A AND 0 points for fencer B)

When a point has been won by a fencer, 1 point is deducted from the total pool of existing points to be won. *[Ex.: After the first exchange of the match is stopped, 1 point is awarded to fencer B. This means that the score in the match is Fencer A 0 points - Fencer B 1 point. And there are 6 points left to be won in the match, if the match is played until 7 points].*

The only exchanges that end with **1 point being awarded to both fencers** are those containing an **Afterblow**. In such exchanges, **2 points will be deducted from the pool of existing points to be won**. *[Ex.: After the first exchange of the match is stopped, 1 point is awarded to Fencer A and 1 point is awarded to fencer B. This means that the score in the*

match is Fencer A 1 points - Fencer B 1 points. And there are 11 points left to be won in the match].

The only exchanges that end with **0 points being awarded to both fencers** are those containing a **Double**. In such exchanges, **0 points will be deducted from the pool of existing points to be won.** However, each fighter will be awarded a **warning** (yellow card)**.** *[Ex.: After the first exchange of the match is stopped, 0 points are awarded to Fencer A and 0 points are awarded to fencer B. This means that the score in the match is Fencer A 0 points - Fencer B 0 points. And there are still 7 points left to be won in the match].*

End of match conditions

A match lasts until there are no more points left to be won from the initial points pool.

VICTORY is achieved by the fencer who has the most points at the end of the match, or when there are no more points in the pool, left to be won, in the match.

[Ex.: After several exchanges, there are 0 points left to be won, from the initial total pool of 7 points. And the score at this point is: Fencer A 4 points - Fencer B 3 points. Fencer A has won the match].

If there are no more points in the pool, left to be won, and both fencers have the same score, the match will proceed at **Sudden Death**, until one of the fencers wins.

Sudden Death means that the fencer that wins the next exchange has won the match.
If the next exchange ends with 1 point being allotted to each fencer (Afterblow), or 0 points allotted to each fencer (Double), no fencer has won the exchange. And the match will continue at Sudden Death until only one fencer is allotted 1 point in the exchange. Doubles will still be awarded warnings during the Sudden Death phase.

There is **no DRAW** result possible for a match.

Afterblow

We define an afterblow as the action of a fencer that hits the opponent after the opponent has initiated an attack first, before said fencer, and this attack was completed and has landed on the fencer's body.

Validity of the Afterblow

An Afterblow can only be valid if:

1. it is performed by the fencer that got hit while this fencer takes a MAXIMUM number of 3 steps, after getting hit
2. the initial hit suffered by the fencer was not in the following targets:
    a. head
    b. neck
    c. dominant hand (from the finger-tips to the elbow)

All hits to these body targets make an Afterblow invalid, as they are considered disabling or lethal targets. The fencer in question will not be penalized for attempting the Afterblow! It will simply not be scored and considered to not have taken place.

We encourage in our club to always make the Afterblow, for two reasons:

- nurture the reflex to Riposte (even if it's no longer a proper one, because you got hit)
- keep the opponent alert and nurture their reflex to Parry any Afterblow

Doubles

A double is defined as the action of a fencer that starts to attack their opponent:

- AT THE SAME TIME that the opponent attacks said fencer
- or AFTER the opponent has started an attack first, before said fencer, BUT STILL DURING this attack, as it is traveling towards the target and HAS NOT YET LANDED.

In this Ruleset, **all 5 of the scenarios described in Annex 1** are to be fictionally considered to be the same ONE scenario, given the name **"Double"**, and scored the same (0 points each fencer), for the reasons detailed in the annex.

Obstruction

If you **let go of the weapon with one hand and raise this hand** to protect from an incoming **cut or thrust** to the head, this will be considered an **Obstruction** and the other fencer will still be considered to have hit you in the head, with all the derived consequences:

> - 1 point for the other fencer, if they hit you first, since any follow up from you is now invalid;
> - 1 point for each of you, if you got hit in the raised hand as an Afterblow performed by the other fencer;
> - or 0 points for each of you if you got hit in the raised hand as part of a Double with the other fencer.

If you **keep both hands on the hilt** and raise them but get **hit in the hilt**, you will be considered as having been hit in the **HAND**, with the deriving consequences:

> - 1 point for the other fencer, if they hit you first; it is presumed that your hand that was hit is the right hand, so any follow up from you is now invalid;
> - 1 point for each of you, if you got hit in the hilt as an Afterblow performed by the other fencer;
> - or 0 points for each of you if you got hit in the hilt as part of a Double with the other fencer.

Special sequences of scoring actions that may arise

A. A hit to the head, neck or dominant hand (from fingers to elbow), makes any other scoring action invalid, including ring-out or disarm. So, if Fencer A hits fencer B in the head, neck or dominant hand (from fingers to elbow), then exits the ring voluntarily, is

pushed out of it or is disarmed by Fencer B, the exchange still ends with 1 point allotted only to Fencer A.

B. If Fencer A hits Fencer B first, without getting hit, then tries to make a second attack to end the exchange in his/her favor, but is hit by Fencer B DURING this attack, and before any of the fencers has taken more than 3 steps, this exchange will be ruled as if containing an Afterblow (1 point awarded to each fencer), not a Double.

C. A ring-out or a disarm is equivalent to a valid hit. So, if Fencer A hits fencer B with a valid hit, but not in the head, neck or dominant hand, and then exits the ring (voluntarily or pushed) or is disarmed by Fencer B, the exchange will be ruled as if containing an Afterblow (1 point awarded to each fencer).

D. If a fencer pushes another fencer out of the ring, but they also exit the ring while doing so, this exchange will be treated as if containing an Afterblow: ring out for both fencers (1 point awarded to each fencer).

E. If fencer A, without any interaction or contact with fencer B, hits themselves with the weapon, fencer A will be considered to have taken a valid hit. Fencer A may then make a single attack on Fencer B, by taking a maximum of 3 steps but BEFORE Fencer B manages to take 3 steps themself and the following outcomes arise:

    a. If Fencer A succeeds on landing the attack cleanly, and does not get hit again, the exchange will be ruled as containing an Afterblow (1 point awarded to each fencer);
    b. If A succeeds on landing the attack, but is also hit by Fencer B AFTER Fencer A's attack landed, the exchange will still be considered as containing an Afterblow (1 point awarded to each fencer);
    c. If A succeeds on landing the attack, but is also hit by Fencer B BEFORE Fencer A's attack landed, the exchange will be ruled as won by Fencer B, for 2 consecutive clean hits (1 point awarded only to Fencer B);
    d. If either of the fencers have taken more than 3 steps before fencer A manages to land the attack, the exchange will be considered as having been won by Fencer B (1 point awarded only to Fencer B).

Forbidden Actions

A. Grabbing the sword with both hands on the blade and hit with the crossguard or pommel as a blunt weapon (The Mortschlag).
B. Performing a **half-swording attack**, meaning to grab the Longsword on the middle of the blade to make it more rigid so that it thrusts more powerfully. It is, however, **allowed to PARRY while half-swording** the weapon, as long as the **tip is not oriented toward the other fencer**.
C. Strike or manipulate any of the other fencer's joints so that they move contrary to their natural mode, which may lead to them breaking.
D. Excessive violence, aside from the expected and authorized kind of aggressiveness in the ring, it is forbidden to manifest violent physical behavior (including but not limited to): spitting, pushing, or hitting any participant, including staff and guests.

E. It is forbidden to strike with anything other than the weapon during the match (headbutt, fists, elbows, knees, feet etc.).
F. It is forbidden to **intentionally** throw the other fencer to the ground in any way. If the other fencer falls due to bad footwork or posture, the original fencer will not be punished.
G. It is forbidden to intentionally hit the back of the other fencer, especially the back of the head.
H. It is forbidden to continue fighting or to hit after “Stop!”.
I. It is forbidden to **FULLY** turn your back to your opponent before the Referee says “Stop!”. (You are allowed to move backwards and to the side, exposing MOSTLY your flank, and part of your back, as an attempt to fulfill the Stop Condition that requires you to take 3 steps after a successful attack).
J. It is forbidden to interrupt the Referee when the Referee is deliberating, announcing the score or announcing anything that pertains to the Referee’s role.
K. It is forbidden to manifest violent verbal behavior (including but not limited to: yelling, swearing, or slandering any participant, including staff and guests).

Grabbing the opponent’s blade

Grabbing the opponent’s blade for strategic advantage is NOT forbidden. But such an action must meet the following conditions **cumulatively**:

> - the blade was **not traveling directly towards** the fencer that grabbed it when they grabbed it (but rather at an angle, to the side, or away from the fencer)
> - once the blade was grabbed, the grip is rigid so that **no further blade movement is possible or observed by the Referee // Spotter (no slicing); if the grip happens past the 1st third of the blade, a flexing of the blade is a clear indication (presumption) that the grip is solid and no movement takes place, but in all cases, whether the blade was grabbed appropriately is still subjective and for the Referee to decide.**

Grabbing the blade while obeying the conditions above rewards no points to the fencer that made the grab (unless followed by a disarm, which does, for the disarm). But is also not considered a scoring action against the fencer grabbing the blade. In other words, grabbing the blade correctly is a tactical advantage, but it must still be followed by a valid hit.

If any of the conditions above is not met, grabbing the blade will be treated as a regular hit for the opponent (1 point awarded to the opponent).

Sanctions

There is a system of cards to represent the seriousness of the offense (the forbidden action performed) and the correlated punishment:

1. Yellow Card 🟨 = Warning given to you. Handed out for the following forbidden actions:

- performing a double hit (both fencer receive a warning)
- turning your back FULLY to your opponent before the Referee says “Stop!”.
- interrupting the Referee when the Referee is deliberating, announcing the score or announcing anything that pertains to the Referee’s role.

- manifesting violent verbal behavior (including but not limited to: yelling, swearing, or slandering any participant, including staff and guests).

2. Red Card 🟥 = Point given to your opponent. Handed out for the following forbidden actions:

- striking with anything other than the weapon during the match (headbutt, fists, elbows, knees, feet etc.).
- **intentionally** throwing the other fencer to the ground in any way. If the other fencer falls due to bad footwork or posture, the original fencer will not be punished.
- intentionally hitting the back of the other fencer, especially the back of the head. If this action resulted in the injury of the other fencer, this automatically turns the sanction into a black card and you are disqualified from the Contest.
- continuing to fight or to hit after “Stop!”. If the actions that you perform after “Stop!” result in the injury of another participant (fencers or staff), this automatically turns the sanction into a black card and you are disqualified from the Contest.

3. Black Card ⬛ = Disqualification from the Contest. Handed out for the following forbidden actions:

- grabbing the sword with both hands on the blade and hitting with the crossguard or pommel as a blunt weapon (The Mortschlag).
- performing a half-swording **attack**, meaning to grab the Longsword on the middle of the blade to make it more rigid so that it thrusts more powerfully.
- striking or manipulating any of the other fencer’s joints so that they move contrary to their natural mode, which may lead to them breaking.
- aside from the expected and authorized kind in the ring, manifesting any violent physical behavior (including but not limited to: spitting, pushing, or hitting any participant, including staff and guests).

The system for multiple offenses is the following:

- Four Yellow Cards per match lead to the match ending with a loss. In case both fencers reach 4 warnings, it will end in a double loss.

- Four Red Cards overall turn into a Black Card. (4 x 🟥 => ⬛) and lead to the fencer being disqualified from the contest

⚠️The red cards are transferred from one match to the other, over the course of the competition. **If a fencer continues to perform forbidden actions** again in the following matches, they **may be disqualified from the Competition.**

Judging Guidelines

The Referee's Conduct

At the beginning of the match, the Referee will ask:
A. [optional] **"Scorekeeper ready?"** and wait for express confirmation.
B. **"Spotter ready?"** and wait for express confirmation.
C. **"Fencers ready?"**. No need for express confirmation. Just allow 1-2 second pause. If either one of the fencers is NOT ready, it is their duty to raise their hand or speak up LOUDLY. Otherwise, the fencers are presumed to be ready to fight.

After the above, the Referee will say **"Fencers, salute!"** and wait for the fencers to salute each other.

Then the referee may start the match using the formula **"Start!"** or **"Fence!"**. The fencers will fight until they hear the formula **"Stop!"** or **"Halt!"** from the Referee. So, an exchange lasts from when the Referee says "Start!" to when he/she says "Stop!".

The Referee says **"Stop!"** when one of the stop conditions described in the "Scoring System" chapter has been met (see further up in this document).

The Referee may also stop the exchange each time the Spotter raises their hand suggesting that one of the conditions has been met. The Referee may also IGNORE this signal from the Spotter and let the exchange continue, if they consider that none of the conditions have been met.

The Referee may also decide to rule the exchange as **"Nothing done!"** (0 points awarded to each fencer), even after stopping the exchange at the spotter's signal and hearing what they and the fencers have to say.

Whenever there are weak, flat or incidental hits (which are not scored), the Referee must use the formula **"Keep fencing!" + ["weak"] // ["flat"] or // ["incidental"]**.

The Referee should also raise their hand, say **"Stop!"** and then call out **"GEAR CHECK!"** or **"MEDICAL!"** if they notice that one of the fencer's gear pieces is falling off or is otherwise improper or if they notice one of the fencers having medical difficulties.

After each exchange has ended (apart from gear or medical issues), the referee must follow the verbal pattern below to **NARRATE what they saw in the exchange** and announce the score:

1.1. [color of fencer - Attacker] + [cut / thrust / sliced / pommeled] + [color of other fencer - Defender] + in the [body part] +- (if applicable) a lethal target hit, making any Afterblow invalid +- (if applicable) with a light hit / incidental blow / the flat.

OR

1.2. [color of fencer - Attacker] + [disarmed // pushed out of the ring] + [color of other fencer - Defender].

2. (if applicable) [color of other fencer - now Attacker] + [cut / thrust / sliced / pommeled] + [color of the first fencer - now Defender] + in the [body part] +- (if applicable) with a light hit / incidental blow / the flat

3. Stop condition fulfilled

4. (if applicable) After-blow // Double // Ring-Out // Disarm // Nothing done.

5. [exact number of points awarded] + [color of fencer they are awarded to - both if necessary].

Specific examples:

> *Exchange1: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the torso. Then took 3 steps away. => 1 point Black fencer.*
>
> *Exchange2: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the leg. Then the Red fencer took 3 steps away. => 1 point Black fencer.*
>
> *Exchange3: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the left arm. Then parried an attack from Red fencer. => 1 point Black fencer.*
>
> *Exchange4: Black fencer thrust Red fencer in the head. Making any Afterblow invalid. Red fencer cut Black fencer in the head with an Afterblow, but it is invalid. => 1 point Black fencer.*
>
> *Exchange5: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the left arm. Black fencer then cut Red fencer again, in the torso. 2 consecutive hits for Black fencer. => 1 point Black fencer.*
>
> *Exchange6: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the torso. Red fencer thrust Black fencer in the head with a light hit. =>1 point Black fencer.*
>
> *Exchange7: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the left arm with a light hit. Red fencer cut Black fencer in the head with the flat. Nothing done. No points awarded.*
>
> *Exchange8: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the leg. After the attack landed, Red fencer cut Black fencer in the right arm. Afterblow. => 1 point each.*
>
> *Exchange9: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the torso. Red fencer thrust Black fencer in the torso during Black fencer's attack. Double. => 0 points each. Warning Each*
>
> *Exchange10: Black fencer disarmed Red fencer. => 1 point Black Fencer.*
>
> *Exchange11: Black fencer pushed Red fencer out of the ring. => 1 point Black Fencer.*
>
> *Exchange12: Black fencer exited the Ring. => 1 point Red Fencer.*
>
> *Exchange13: Black fencer cut Red fencer in the leg. Then black fencer exited the ring. => 1 point each.*

After calling "Stop!", **IF the Referee is unsure** of what happened in an exchange, either because they saw something but not clearly, either because they did not see anything but decided to accept the signal to stop from the Spotter, either because the fencers, Spotter and Referee all declare different things happened, it is the Referee's DUTY to gather as much information as possible (by asking everyone involved), before giving their final decision.

This means:
1. First consulting with the Spotter. And/or video camera if available.
2. Second, consulting with each fencer.

⚠️After gathering this information, **the Referee is STILL the only decision maker** and will rule according to their judgment, despite input from the Spotter and/or fencers, the referee may accept said input or discard it completely.

However, there are a few rules of thumb we recommend:

1. If one of the fencers (or both), admit a hit against them, the Referee should accept their information as altruistic and with a high probability of being true. **In general**, the fencers know best if they were hit (with some exceptions in the case of some extra-protective gear). **In general**, they SHOULD know better than the Referee. And as such they **MUST be honest and honorable and admit it**. When they DO admit it, we are of the opinion that the Referee should agree with their version of events. And in such cases, the Referee should also use the formula **"Thank you for your honor!"** and rule according to the information given by the fencers. **HOWEVER**, the Referee is under NO obligation to always agree with the fencers version if they protest to their detriment. If the Referee believes the fencer is being too modest // indulgent // friendly or just plain confused as to what happened, the Referee STILL has the final decision and should exercise their own judgment!

2. If there is complete consensus among fencers and the spotter as to what happened, the Referee should accept the information and rule accordingly.

3. If there is consensus ONLY between the fencers as to what happened, but the Spotter disagrees, the Referee should accept the fencers' version.

4. If there is disagreement between the fencers as to what happened, and the Referee has no clear idea of the exchange, they should accept what the Spotter saw.

5. If there is disagreement between the fencers as to what happened, the Spotter did not see clearly either and the Referee did not see clearly either, the exchange will be ruled as a "**Nothing done"** and no points will be scored. The point pool remains the same.

The Referee will **discipline the fencers and issue warnings** if:

1. They perform any of the forbidden actions.

2. They display aggressive or uncivilized behavior towards each other, the staff, or other people in the room. (Aggressive behavior is not limited to physical manifestations, but includes verbal assault and swear words.)

3. They talk out of turn or try to influence the Referee or the Spotter (especially before the Referee has given his decision and allocated the score).

4. They display any other disruptive behavior considered unacceptable by the event organizers and Referee (stalling for time, taking off gear while in the match etc.).

5. They performed several Doubles already. And advise them to fight less recklessly and focus on clean hits.

Note: Regarding the “Fencers ready?” prompt, it is our decision that it is a useful prompt and the Referee should use it before every exchange, before they say “Start!”.

Note: The Referee should NOT be static but move on their part of the ring, opposite to the Spotter, but complemented by the Spotter, at all times, for maximum coverage and best angles to see what is going on. (The Spotter tries to move in sync with the Referee, not the other way around).

The Spotter’s Conduct

The Spotter is simply there as an extra set of eyes and ears for the Referee and should be located on the other side of the ring to the Referee, for better visibility.

Their job is to pay attention to each exchange and:

1. Raise their hand if they consider that one of the Stop conditions for the exchange has been met.
2. Give information to the Referee regarding what happened in the previous exchange, but only IF solicited by the Referee! The spotter may give this information orally (<- faster) or by a system of sign language (<- more formal; perhaps more appropriate for big tournaments where talking might be hindered by background noise).
3. If the Referee did NOT consult the spotter before giving the decision and the score, and the Spotter disagrees with it, he/she should raise his/her hand immediately after the Referee has said the score, to signal the Spotter disagrees and has different information.
4. Raise his/her hand and call out **“GEAR CHECK!”** or **“MEDICAL!”** if he/she notices that one of the fencer’s gear pieces is falling off or is otherwise improper or if he/she notices one of the fencers is having medical difficulties.
5. Keep time of the match, starting the timer when the Referee says “Start!” and STOP it each time the referee says “Stop!” or there is a gear or medical problem.

Note: The Spotter is NOT static, they should be mobile, moving on their part of the ring, opposite to the Referee, but complemented by the Referee, at all times, for maximum coverage and best angles to see what is going on. (The Spotter tries to move in sync with the Referee, not the other way around).

The Score Keeper’s Conduct

The Score Keeper can be one of the two above, or a different person, whose job is to:

1. Write down the points awarded to each fencer, as well as any warnings, as they are called out by the Referee after each exchange and perform the calculations to update, in real time, each fencer’s score and the pool of points remaining to be won. (If a computer software is available to be used for this purpose, great. Not necessary to do it manually).
2. Call back the scores they heard from the Referee and write down, after each exchange.
3. [optional] Write down in the score sheet the part of the body where each fencer was hit in each exchange (head, neck, dominant hand from finger-tips to elbow, torso, arms, legs).

See the match scoring below.

Match Scoring

Within “The Challenge” dueling competition each match will be scored as follows:

For each exchange, the score keeper will write the point in the corresponding column for the player who has won the bout. Also, for easier tracking, the number of remaining points will be marked.

After no points are remaining, the winner will be the fencer with the most points. If there is a draw, Sudden Death will be played until a winner can be determined.

For example where a match is conducted until 7 points:

Challenger Name (Player 1)	Remaining Points	Challenged Name (Player 2)	Explanation (this should not be in the scorecard)
1	6	0	Player 1 hit Player 2 => 1 point to P1, 6 points remaining
1	5	0	Player 1 hit Player 2 => 1 point to P1, 5 points remaining
1	3	1	Player 2 hit Player 1, followed by an afterblow from P1, each 1 point. 3 points remaining
0 (w)	3	0 (w)	Double, no points, each receives a warning, 3 points remaining
0	2	1	Player 2 hit Player 1, 1 point P2, 2 points remaining
0	1	1	Player 2 hit Player 1, 1 point P2, 1 points remaining
1	0	1	Player 1 hit Player 2, followed by an afterblow, each 1 point, zero points remaining with equal score leading to sudden death
1	SD	1	Redo exchange
1	SD	0	Player 1 hit Player 2 => 1 point to P1, end match
6		5	Winner P1

The Fencer’s Conduct

A Fencer will take their position in the designated part of the ring (drawn line or corner) and will await commands or instructions from the Referee.

If the Referee says **“Fencers ready”** before each exchange, the fencer must not do anything UNLESS they are NOT ready, in which case they should signal to the referee by raising their hand and calling out, verbally.

A Fencer may ONLY begin fighting AFTER they have heard the **“Start!”** command from the Referee.

After hearing the **“Stop!”** command from the Referee, the fencer MUST stop. Any continuation or new action of attack after “Stop!” will receive a warning. And if the fencer continues this way later in the match, they may be disqualified.
After the judge calls **“Stop!”** both fencers must go to their starting/marked positions and may not leave them until given permission from the judge. (i.e. fencers can't chat with each other or do other things, while the judge is deliberating the call).

The ONLY action a fencer should do after “Stop!” is to **BACK AWAY slowly, facing the opponent**, to confirm that the opponent has also heard the “Stop!” command. If NOT, the fencer is allowed to DEFEND, but **only to DEFEND, while backing away**. After “Stop!” the fencer will wait for the Referee to deliberate and give their decision and score.

Only **AFTER hearing THE SCORE**, the fencer may **Protest.** The Protest is a tool given to the fencer in order to contest the Referee’s decision if the fencer considers the Referee did not see correctly what happened. To Protest, a fencer must raise their hand and CLEARLY SAY: **“Protest!”**, sufficiently loud so that the Referee hears it.
When the Referee allows the fencer to speak, the fencer may explain what they think happened in the exchange as opposed to what the Referee said happened. **The Referee may then ACCEPT the Protest and change the score, or DENY it.**

If the Referee DENIES the Protest, the fencer must stop contesting the exchange and has no recourse left for that exchange.

The fencer is allowed to **Protest X times per match**. After which, the right to protest is lost for that match. (X = Number of total points played per match divided by 3, rounded down, so, for example if the match would be played up to 7 points, then the number of allowed protests is 7/3=2.33 rounded down =2)

The fencers can **Protest AGAINST decisions beneficial to themselves**. For example, informing the Referee that they missed a hit that the fencer felt on. We recommend all fencers act honorably at all times and use Protest in such a manner, if applicable.

A fencer may also raise their hand and call out **“GEAR CHECK!”** or **“MEDICAL!”** if they notice that one of their or the opponent’s gear pieces is falling off or is otherwise improper or

if they, or the opponent, are having medical difficulties.

Annex 1 - Doubles

From a physics, real-world perspective, there are 5 possible scenarios, or combinations of actions elapsed in time, that the community considers to fall under the category of “Double”, as we have just defined it. And most rulesets just call each of these scenarios “Double”, despite the fact that there are differences between them with regard to the unfolding of actions in time. And there is a radical tactical difference between scenarios 1, 2 and 3, 4, 5. Which will be explained below.

Note that some rulesets do address this tactical difference by distinguishing between “Open Doubles” and “Closed Doubles”, which is useful and good conceptually. The scenarios are the following.

Scenario 1 - INNOCENT DOUBLE 1: (SAME EXECUTION SPEED OF ATTACK)

t0 -> judge calls start; both fencers are in the preparation phase, not attacking each other
t1 -> fencer A starts attack on fencer B; fencer B starts attack on fencer A
t2 -> both fencers get hit at the same time
t3 -> judge calls stop
IDEAL RESULT: no points either + point pool remains the same

Scenario 2 - INNOCENT DOUBLE 2: (ONE FENCER ATTACK EXECUTION FASTER THAN THE OTHER’S)

t0 -> judge calls start; both fencers are in the preparation phase, not attacking each other
t1 -> fencer A starts attack on fencer B; fencer B starts attack on fencer A
t2 -> fencer A gets hit
t3 -> fencer B gets hit
t4 -> judge calls stop
IDEAL RESULT: no points either + point pool remains the same

Scenario 3 - FAILED STOP-ATTACK 1 [BAD DOUBLE 1]:

t0 -> judge calls start; both fencers are in the preparation phase, not attacking each other
t1 -> fencer A starts attack on fencer B
t2 -> fencer B starts attack on fencer A
t3 -> both fencers get hit at the same time
t4 -> judge calls stop
IDEAL RESULT: 1 point Fencer A

Scenario 4 - FAILED STOP-ATTACK 2 [BAD DOUBLE 2]:

t0 -> judge calls start; both fencers are in the preparation phase, not attacking each other
t1 -> fencer A starts attack on fencer B
t2 -> fencer B starts attack on fencer A
t3 -> fencer B gets hit first [OR A gets hit first in a NON-disabling or lethal target]
t4 -> fencer A gets hit second [AND B gets hit second]
t5 -> judge calls stop
IDEAL RESULT: 1 point Fencer A

Scenario 5 - SUCCESSFUL STOP-ATTACK [BAD DOUBLE 3]:

t0 -> judge calls start; both fencers are in the preparation phase, not attacking each other
t1 -> fencer A starts attack on fencer B
t2 -> fencer B starts attack on fencer A
t3 -> fencer A gets hit IN A DISABLING OR LETHAL TARGET
t4 -> fencer B gets hit
t5 -> judge calls stop
IDEAL RESULT: 1 point Fencer A (for good tactical behavior) OR 1 point Fencer B (for luck and athleticism, though suicidal); depending on your philosophy…

As can be seen from above, there is no such thing as just one kind of “Double”.
In scenarios 1, 2 both fencers made tactically sound decisions. They just happened to decide to attack at the same time and acted on this decision at the same time. No one is to blame. (Which is why we call these 2 scenarios "Innocent Doubles").

In scenarios 3, 4 and 5, Fencer A makes a sound tactical decision (attack first), while Fencer B is reckless and tactically in error. Because they start a purely offensive action DURING a purely offensive action already initiated by their opponent. (Which is why we call these 3 scenarios "Bad Doubles").

Of course, Fencer B could make the tactically sound choice to perform both an offensive AND a defensive action DURING a purely offensive action already initiated by his opponent - which we call an Indes action, characteristic for Meisterhauen, in the Liechtenauer tradition - in which case Fencer B would be safe, while Fencer A would be hit. But that is a different scenario, not among the “Double” type ones we are discussing here. That scenario would be scored 1 point Fencer B by this Ruleset.

Now, with regard to how each of the 5 scenarios should be scored, we can see above what our opinion of an IDEAL result should be, for each of them:
- no points either fencer + point pool remains the same for scenarios 1, 2
- 1 point Fencer A for scenarios 3, 4 and, in our opinion 5 as well, to punish Fencer B’s reckless behavior and tactical error
- POSSIBLY 1 point Fencer B strictly for scenario 5, if you’re a fan of pure luck and recklessness in fighting, or value athleticism over tactics

Practical reasons why all scenarios will be considered the same:

- the Judge and Spotter, as human observers, cannot realistically differentiate between them on the spot, during a match (in our opinion, the concept of Open and Close Doubles is a great one, but prone to many errors in practice, due to human fatigue and limited processing power of the brain at the milliseconds level; as is, regrettably that of the Vor systems proposed as alternatives, for the same reasons)
- the perceptions of the fencers themselves are unreliable under pressure
- No available technology to perfectly analyze an exchange (ex: sensors, A.I. etc)

Therefore we encourage judges to consistently make fair calls; which, in our opinion means scoring the exchange as a “Double” and “unclear” - 0 points each fencer; meaning nothing was gained unfairly or questionably and everything is reset to the previous situation, where fencers can restart and, hopefully, make better tactical choices or have more luck not to attack at the same moment; in any case, what is clear with this system is that if any point IS awarded, it is awarded for clear exchanges only, which is very important to us.

Annex 2 - Gear Requirements

	For Metal	For Synthetic
Fencing mask (FIE level 2 recommended)	mandatory	mandatory
Back-of-head protection (occipital overlay), adequate for HEMA*	mandatory	optional
Gorget (neck protection), RIGID, adequate for HEMA	mandatory	optional
Gambeson (fencing jacket) adequate for STEEL sparring	mandatory	mandatory
Plastic chest protector (worn under gambeson) OR leather chest protector (worn over the gambeson)	mandatory	mandatory (for women)
Elbow protection, adequate for HEMA	mandatory	optional
Adequate forearm protection, adequate for HEMA	mandatory	optional
Gloves adequate for HEMA	mandatory - Red Dragon not allowed	mandatory , incl. Red Dragon
Hard shell groin protector	mandatory for men	mandatory for men
Minimum 350N (foam) padded fencing pants, adequate for HEMA or sufficiently safe hips and thigh protection (like a thick leather “skirt” or apron)	mandatory	optional
Knee protection, adequate for HEMA	mandatory	optional
Shin protection, adequate for HEMA	mandatory	optional

Attention! When we say “adequate for HEMA” we mean that the gear in question has the physical characteristics to perform at the necessary levels of safety required for steel sparring in competition. Gear makers and vendors that are specialized for the HEMA community get **an automatic presumption that their gear meets the safety levels required for steel sparring** (if it is designed and marketed as such). But gear from other established businesses may also meet the safety levels required for steel sparring, despite said businesses not being specialized on HEMA products (motorcycle or hockey protectors etc.). **In any case, both the HEMA specialized vendors gear items and the non-HEMA specialized vendors gear items will be examined by the organizers and approved for competition or not, on a case by case basis, without appeal.**

Attention! Home-made or custom gear, produced by the participant or by an artisan specifically for the participant - as a one-off, non-series item, can NOT be used, unless specifically examined and approved by the organizers. Such items are **automatically presumed to be inadequate for steel sparring, due to their lack of testing in the community. Be advised that you might not be able to use it or participate if you have no replacement from a more tested producer.**

Credits

Adina Mihaita - 7 Swords Historical Fencing School
Andrei Chirlesan - Iron Will Hema Academy

Inspiration from HEMAC Hemathlon, Polish-Slovakian system of judging, Borislav Krustev and Angel Chernaev