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# DO RULES SPOIL FENCING? A HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT FENCING CONVENTIONS



*ANTON KOHUTOVIČ, March 2025*

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolution of fencing conventions from the 15th century to contemporary HEMA practice. It explores how rules concerning target areas, permitted techniques, and the evaluation of exchanges have developed in response to needs for safety, pedagogy, and clarity of fencing action. Through analysis of historical sources—from Fechtschule regulations to later fencing manuals—it documents the rational foundations behind these conventions. Special attention is given to the issue of simultaneous hits (“doubles”) and various historical approaches to resolving them, including limited counterstrikes (“afterblows”) and systems that assign responsibility based on tactical context and initiative. The aim of the article is to highlight the internal logic of historical rules and their relevance for understanding and formulating effective conventions in modern HEMA—conventions that should promote technical skill, tactical awareness, and controlled bout flow, thereby reflecting the principles of effective and safe fencing.

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*This article originally started as a social media status update. However, the situation got slightly out of hand when I began gathering relevant citations. Even in this expanded form, I obviously haven't managed to address all the points and questions that trouble me regarding the rules.*

*If readers draw upon other sources not mentioned here<sup>1</sup>, I will gladly add them later, but initially, I didn't want to hinder access to the core matter with unnecessary length. I haven't focused on explaining and defining basic terms in the text, as this information should be publicly and relatively easily searchable today.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>A compilation with sources, Conventions Safari by Emerson Hurley, 2024, also served as an initial aid: [Conventions Safari](#)

<sup>2</sup><https://longsword.academy/en/longsword/terms/>

## INTRODUCTION

Every fencer or coach has their own ideal vision of visually appealing fencing performance. However, the perception of movement aesthetics is significantly influenced by one's environment and individual preferences based on past experiences. Since no contemporary fencer has authentic contact with, for instance, 15th-century fencing, no one can confidently claim with certainty what training bouts, *Fechtschulen* matches, or actual duels looked like. Given the current state of our discipline, imposing aesthetic criteria on fencing could do more harm than good.

While the athletic excellence of a sprinter covering 100 meters under 10 seconds is objectively measurable, contemporary historical fencing lacks a clearly definable criterion for excellence. Historically, the duel might have been such a measure, but today, it is undeniably positive that none of us are compelled to undergo this test. Many claim that attempting to identify the best fencer in sporting tournaments is equivalent to historical duels, but this is a stubborn misconception. Even historical "*ernst*" duels were not about finding the most skillful fencer.<sup>3</sup> Modern competitive interpretations attempting to simulate historical duels artificially merge two fundamentally opposing aspects of fencing.

The terms "*schimpf*" and "*ernst*" in historical context represent two complementary aspects of fencing: playful or sportive versus serious, combative. The potentially fatal consequences of a duel with sharp weapons required careful consideration in the case of a pre-planned duel, based on which the opponents weighed whether the potential gain was worth the risk taken. The participating parties considered the opponent's sanity, their understanding of the extent of the risk, and their willingness to respect certain formal or informal ethical norms.

The art of fencing was intended to thoroughly prepare a person for a real encounter with an armed opponent. To teach them to rely on proven methods that, with high probability, should lead to a safe conclusion<sup>4</sup> of the duel. In a real duel, there was never an absolute guarantee of success based solely on technical superiority – on the contrary, historical sources warn against the danger of excessive self-confidence stemming from fencing training.<sup>5</sup>

So, does universally valid advice exist showing fencers how to act advantageously in specific situations? Is the outcome of a duel then not primarily determined more by chance? Perhaps not everyone will agree, but such recommendations, based on experience and certain statistical observations, genuinely do exist. Over time, they crystallized from advice in the form of verses into fencing schools. Later, they were incorporated into the general theory of fencing and subsequently manifested in the rules of conventional fencing, which aimed to didactically prepare the student properly, whether for a duel to first blood or for military application<sup>6</sup>.

Alongside structured conventional fencing, a freer, unconventional current has always coexisted, represented today, for example, by sport épée. Although fencing theory applies equally here, adherence to classical rules becomes secondary to the ability to effectively hit the opponent within the defined competitive framework. That is, feel free to fence against the principles if you can hit your opponent in time.

Conventional fencing, unlike objectively evaluated sports disciplines, possesses a certain degree of interpretive freedom, which some might label subjective. When judging competitively according to

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<sup>3</sup>Legal disputes, accusations of incest, murder of a family member, etc. . .

<sup>4</sup>Conclusion is a more general term because winning is not so easily defined. Killing the opponent was truly a rare goal of a duel.

<sup>5</sup>Aldo Nadi: On Fencing, 1943

<sup>6</sup>Military manuals for fencing with sabre, stick, or bayonet were also governed by similar rules.

conventional rules, the final arbiter is therefore the fencing referee and the fencing federation, which establishes and interprets the rules with all their nuances and current trends. Although some aspects of evaluation – for instance, assessing the validity of a hit – are relatively objective, evaluating the rationality of the attack, defense, and counter-attack can initially seem artificial. At its core, however, it stems from historical experiences and, since the 20th century, also from modern analyses of the human brain's reactions to various stimuli. Without understanding these connections, fencing that does not adhere to sound fencing principles might still seem "pretty" to laypersons. Conversely, something perfectly effective may not always be aesthetically appealing to an inexperienced observer. This contradiction lies at the root of many arguments and mockeries that flood the HEMA-related groups on various platforms.

Resistance to fencing theory, which is the result of a centuries-long tradition, within the HEMA community – standing by definition on the legacy of the past – can be considered almost absurd. Fortunately, these are marginal counter-currents, whose proponents perhaps only overlook out of inattention that all fencing disciplines<sup>7</sup>, however different the weapons they use, share one common foundation. This error leads to an unjustifiably critical stance of HEMA "purists" towards other fencing disciplines, whether it be modern sport fencing, kendo, or other, equally professional spheres.

## HISTORICAL REFERENCES

We know longsword fencing in its historical context mainly through historical fencing books (*Fechtbücher*), which indeed provide us with a relatively accurate picture of techniques from the perspective of their execution. However, how this skill was used, trained, and possibly competed with (if at all), is something we no longer find recorded. We sense hints that certain rules and regulations always existed, but the *Fechtbücher* themselves do not deal with them. Most surviving rules from older periods are merely in the form of prohibitions – detailing what is forbidden, or for what a fencer would incur a fine or other penalty. From this, it can be deduced that such actions were also part of the fencers' repertoire.

## LIMITATIONS ON TARGET AREAS

The development of fencing conventions included various restrictions, with one of the earliest being the limitation or outright prohibition of thrusting attacks. This approach, including the use of weapons with blunted or broken tips<sup>8</sup>, appeared and disappeared in various regions up until the early 20th century.<sup>9</sup> For example, the extensive work of Joachim Meyer (16th century) systematically replaces thrusts with other, safer strikes in longsword fencing, even in situations where his predecessors would have used a thrust without hesitation.

Another key element of regulation was the definition of valid and invalid target areas. Historical records show that certain targets were considered dishonorable or inadmissible. In the famous duel between Konrad and Heinrich in 1444, a hit to the palm was considered dishonorable, leading to the immediate stoppage of the bout.

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<sup>7</sup>Assuming sane rules.

<sup>8</sup>Duel in Rothenburg, 1444,

<https://talhoffer.wordpress.com/2012/12/03/1444-two-fencing-masters-in-rothenburg>

<sup>9</sup>Also in our region of Austria-Hungary. Gustav von Arlow: *A kardvívás* [Sabre Fencing], 1902

A more detailed list of prohibited techniques within the so-called *Fechtschulen* (fencing schools or tournaments) is provided by August Vischer in his work *Tractatus Duo Iuris Duellici* (1617)<sup>10</sup>. He explicitly named attacks with the point (thrust), pommel, strikes to the groin, attacks to the eyes, pressing/grappling elements, or even throwing stones as inadmissible. Interestingly, some of these techniques, such as the thrust, pommel strike, or elements of wrestling, were part of standard training in the *Kunst des Fechtens* tradition.

The scoring of hits was also governed by rules. The Strasbourg fencing regulations<sup>11</sup> from 1470 already introduced the principle that a higher placed hit has a higher value. This trend was confirmed by the Prague regulations<sup>12</sup> a century later, which additionally emphasized the need to complete all three agreed-upon rounds of the match, even if blood appeared after the first hit:

*They should also go through all three rounds and not end the duel after the first hit when blood appears, so that one of them does not flee for the money. The other could succeed in the second round with a "higher hit," because a higher hit is always more valid than a lower one. They should go through all three rounds without any secret agreements.*

In addition to target areas and scoring of blows, the *Fechtschulen* regulations also addressed general conduct and equipment, reflecting the customs of 16th-century fencing:

- The custom of using overly long gloves (up to the elbows), which could unfairly advantage a fencer, was criticized and banned. Instead, gloves covering only the fist were required.
- When meeting, fencers were expected not to clash furiously but to engage in combat "cleanly and deliberately," in accordance with tradition and the art of fencing, not like "peasants."

Similar regulated matches with a three-round format<sup>13</sup> existed in French regions, known as "*jeu de prix*" (game for the prize)<sup>14</sup> or "*passer en défense*"<sup>15</sup> (defending after completing training). These events resembled German *Fechtschulen* and shared similar rules, including the frequent prohibition of thrusts and clearly defined target zones. Paris regulations from 1538:

*In this game for the prize, blows are permitted from the waist up, and from the elbows higher, up to the top of the head, where the hit is most valuable. The highest hit is also the most beautiful and deserves the most valuable jewel.*

— PRUNET: Ordonnance royal, 1538

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<sup>10</sup>P. 497: "However, everyone should know what shall be forbidden at this Fencing School, such as thrust, pommel, point, running-in, arm-breaks, groin-thrust, eye-gouge, stone-throwing, and all dishonest plays, which many know well how to use, which I cannot all recount, nor have I learned them, also let no one strike me over or under the poles. Protection and shelter shall be kept for everyone just like the other, likewise I wish to request, where two of you bear hatred and envy towards each other, that they do not fight it out at this School, but where it has force and power."

<sup>11</sup>Dupuis, Olivier: A fifteenth-century fencing tournament in Strasbourg *Acta Periodica Duellatorum*, vol. 3, 2015, pp. 67-79

<sup>12</sup>TUČEK, Jaroslav. *Pražští šermíři a mistři šermu* [Prague Fencers and Fencing Masters]. Praha: Girgal, 1927, pp. 79-94

<sup>13</sup>In German exchange, round - *Gang*, in French and also adopted into English - *Venue*.

<sup>14</sup>They literally called fencing playing (*jouer*), meaning all fighting took place in a friendly atmosphere. "Also, if anyone during practice [fencing, "en jouant"] hits his companion so roughly that he causes him a rose (bloody wound?) or bleeding, in such case he shall forfeit a fine of two Tours sous."

<sup>15</sup>The defense took place after the end of, probably 6 weeks of, instruction, where the Defender was challenged by various Attackers. The Attacker after the defense had three rounds, without defense, but whoever passed the test in the "round" had days (?) and others only one. [TN: Original Slovak unclear/repeated here]



Analogous rules applied in the Brotherhood of St. Michael of Lille. The target area was almost identical to modern sabre: hits were valid from the waist up and on the arms from the wrist (marked by three strings) upwards. Head protection was mandatory, and injuring an opponent incurred fines, with the highest for bleeding on the head, and lower for injuring the arms.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the prevailing trend of limiting targets, different opinions emerged. Antonio Manciolino in his work *Opera nova* (1531) considered the hands and even the legs as legitimate and important targets:

*Hitting the enemy's hand counts as a valid blow. [...] It is the most significant injury because one must strike the part of the enemy that most threatens you — and that is the hand.*

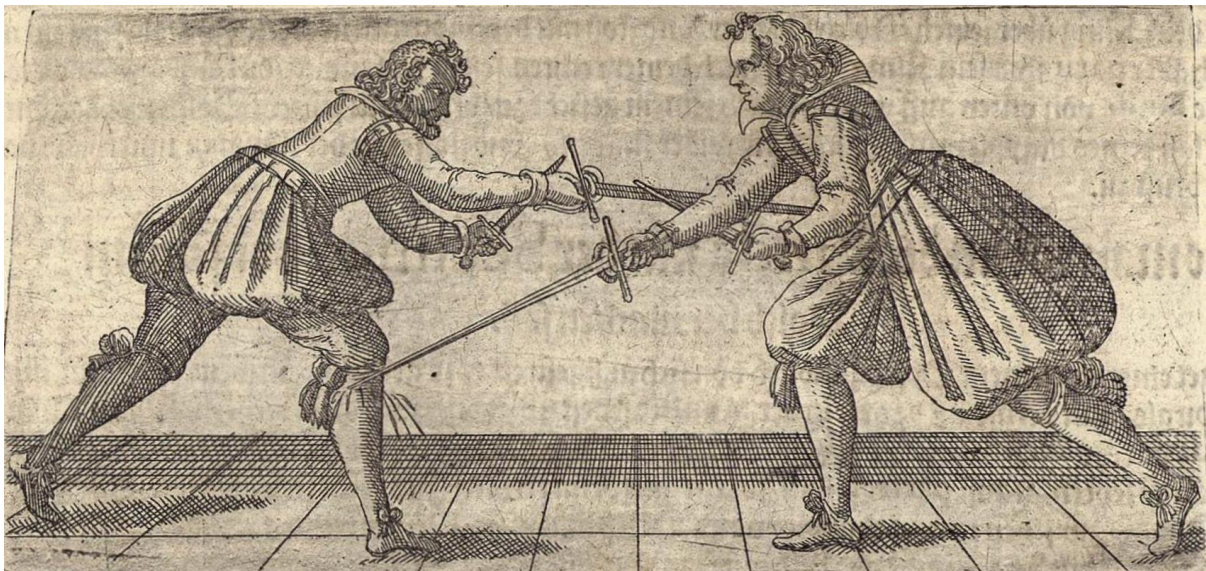
*A hit to the head, due to the exceptional nature of this limb, counts for three points, and a hit to the leg for two, given the difficulty of executing such a low attack.*

— MANCIOLINO: *Opera nova*, 1531

Hitting the legs with a cut is also discouraged in the 17th century by Henning, with reasoning based on the characteristics of a rapier cut's effect. Of course, this preference is not valid for all weapons of that period.

*It is best to cut at the head and body, but not at the legs, because by doing so one exposes oneself completely open up high and thus to extreme danger, but also because one achieves little or nothing by it, especially if the opponent is equipped with large cavalry boots.*

— HENNING: *Kurtze jedoch gründliche Unterrichtung vom Hieb-fechten*, 1658



These examples show that conventions regarding target areas were diverse even in early fencing works, evolved over time and space, and often depended on the context (*tournament/schimpf* vs. *duel/ernst*), type of weapon, and local traditions. Today, longsword fencing predominantly targets the entire body except for dangerous zones like the back of the neck, groin, and feet. In Olympic fencing, foil targets the torso, sabre targets the upper half of the body including arms to the wrists, and épée targets the entire body.

## RETALIATION, CONTRAPASSO, OR AFTERBLOW

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<sup>16</sup>see Appendix: *Règlement de la Confrarie de St-Michel* [Rules of the Brotherhood of St. Michael]

In the first decade of the 21st century, the term "after-blow" spread within the HEMA community. Matt Galas introduced this term, drawing on historical sources from Franco-Belgian fencing guilds. The rules he described permitted a fencer to execute a retaliatory strike after being hit themselves, but this retaliation had to occur within no more than one<sup>17</sup> step or *tempo*.

*Item: In order to maintain order in the game and to prevent those who are accustomed to pursuing their opponents, even though they have already been hit previously, it has been decided that after receiving a hit, only a single step will be allowed; and if the person concerned does not deliver the said hit within this first step (for example, if he takes two steps), this hit will not be recognized or valid.*

— La confrerie d'armes de saint michel ou des escrimeurs lillois, 1589<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of this rule was to maintain discipline and prevent regulated fencing from devolving into a chaotic brawl. A similar goal is expressed in an earlier Italian text, the so-called *Anonymus Bolognese*, which describes the principle of "retaliation" (*retribution*) in the context of *giucare*—that is, play or fencing with blunted weapons:

*The art of fencing with blunt weapons is called giucare. A fencer must not take more than one step towards the opponent after being hit in order to hit them back. The reason is this: if they could take arbitrarily many steps, it would no longer be fencing, but rather real combat. It often happens that a fencer, after being hit, in anger takes more steps, throws themselves at the opponent, and tries to hit them anywhere, just to return the blow. The judges then lose track of what actually happened, because such behavior is closer to furious fighting than controlled fencing.*

Besides Anonymus, the aforementioned Manciolino also comments similarly on retaliation. In the context of his text, it is clear that fencers were at least partially armored during fencing, and thus retaliation was perhaps possible thanks to body protection. He admires the strength of a fencer who is still able to respond after being hit themselves.

In later Flemish sources, the concept of "afterblow" also appears in the context of the game "king of the hill," where it provides an advantage to the current king, while this option is not available to other competitors. From a historical perspective, the rule can therefore be seen more as a specific game mechanic than a universal element of fencing practice. Similar priority for the defender, the fencer currently undergoing public defense, is also mentioned in the regulations of the Châtelet in Paris. Here, however, retaliation is not mentioned, but rather any mutual hit. It is natural that the defender is granted a stronger position, as they fight against many challengers. Granting the right to a simultaneous hit or afterblow increases the chance that fencers will not change like on a conveyor belt. For others, the opposite rule applied: whoever did not acknowledge a hit and withdraw was penalized with a fine.

*But let the blows not be double; If they are double, they have no value For the attacker, that is true,  
But they serve the Defender well, For him they count as a hit, there is no doubt*

— PRUNET: Ordonnance royal, 1538

Despite this, in the contemporary HEMA community, it is often overvalued, with some extreme interpretations allowing the "afterblow" to outscore an opponent who hit first, or purposefully nullifying all hits, thereby fundamentally changing the character of competitive fencing.

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<sup>17</sup>Only exceptionally in multiple ones [steps/tempos].

<sup>18</sup>Scrive-Bertin in Bulletin de la Commission Historique du Département du Nord

Furthermore, from a technical standpoint, the extent to which the "afterblow" rule reflects real combat dynamics is questionable. It is not always realistic for a fencer, after being hit, to effectively cover the subsequent "afterblow" or escape its reach. Current protective equipment also significantly reduces the stopping power of hits, creating an artificial environment where the fencer is not motivated to avoid being hit, but instead relies on the possibility of immediate retaliation. This phenomenon contributes to situations where three or more mutual hits can occur during a single exchange, completely disrupting the readability of the exchange from the judges' perspective, not to mention the potential increased risk of injury.

We should not forget the not entirely negligible possibility that in a sharp duel, after being hit, the struck person might not be able or willing to continue. Executing an afterblow after being hit with a blunt sword on protective gear is not a sign of real resilience, unlike a hit "*im Ernst*" (in earnest), where retaliation might indicate an ineffectively delivered first blow. A precisely executed first hit has the potential to physically incapacitate the opponent from completing an already prepared attack. History is indeed full of counterexamples, but di Grassi also expresses that this eventuality should not be ruled out:

*Likewise if he prepares to thrust in several tempos, you hit him in a single shorter tempo. This manner of defense is very useful and perhaps the best of all, because there is no man who would throw himself headlong onto a weapon, or who, feeling he is hit, would not immediately withdraw and hold back the already prepared blow. And although there are some who, when they feel the hit, recklessly rush forward, this happens only in a few – usually only after anger overcomes them. But at the moment they are hit, they all retreat and are frightened, and moreover, they weaken with every drop of blood that flows from them....*

— DI GRASSI: Ragione di adoprare sicuramente l'Arme, 1570

The potential to land one's own blow, or afterblow, after being hit on the hands is also questioned in modern times, but still within a living dueling tradition. Gustav Arlow writes about this in the chapter on stop-hits, although from a sporting perspective, priority in stop-hits is given to the action that was already initiated.

*The stop-thrust belongs to the most beautiful, yet most demanding methods of defense against attacks using feints. Its principle lies in hitting the opponent precisely at the moment they begin to execute the attack, thereby preventing its further continuation. In a real situation with a sharp weapon, it is questionable whether the hit opponent would even be able to continue with their original intention. In the context of sport fencing, however, only such a hit where the attacker cannot reach the defender's weapon – neither at the moment of the hit nor in the subsequent tempo – is considered a valid stop thrust.*

— Arlow: A Kardvivas, 1902

The commonly used "afterblow" rules do not align with my view of fencing. If I were to expand our rules with an alternative principle that would encourage the fencer's attention even after a successful hit, I would choose a slightly different approach. According to the new rule, the attacker who achieved a valid hit would have the opportunity, after successfully covering the opponent's "afterblow," to execute one more valid attack. In such a case, the fencer could score two points instead of the standard one, thereby rewarding their ability for quick reaction and quality defense. Simultaneously, this would eliminate the possibility of abusing the "afterblow" rule and the excessive emphasis on "afterblow" hits themselves. Although this principle initially seemed like my own innovation, a very similar concept appears in the sabre rules of the already mentioned Arlow.



## THE EMERGENCE OF PRIORITY

*There is also another kind of duel called the duel of honor, when a master is challenged by another, in such a way that, to preserve his reputation, he is forced to accept the challenge and demonstrate his art before respected persons and connoisseurs of the art. In such a case, it is customary to choose witnesses beforehand – "padrini" [godfathers/seconds], as well as the place, time, and weapons, and also judges with knowledge of the art. The custom is such that only the first attack and the response in one tempo are permitted – and exclusively by thrust, not edge; because the entire exercise lies in the skill of drawing the sword, approaching the opponent with advantage, and thrusting from the waist up. The padrini (witnesses) have the duty to separate the combatants when they exceed the basic distance, whether they have attacked or not, to prevent the transition into wrestling (prezie), where the value of the art, which is the subject of the test here, can no longer be recognized.*

— GAIANI: *Arte di maneggiar la spada a piedi et a cavallo*, 1619

From the 17th century onwards, written rules for fencing matches appear more frequently. The effort for safety grew concurrently as blades gradually narrowed. Even the blunted point of a rapier could cause extremely serious injury, which could not be adequately treated at that time. Target areas were gradually reduced. Simultaneous hits were not rare, but they were never desirable either. On the contrary, all authors refer to them as an offense against the spirit of fencing. Stop-hits and attacks into preparation posed significant risks, and therefore the principle became established that the fault for a simultaneous hit lies with the one who could have reacted to the opponent's attack and did not prevent the double hit.

The first explicit priority rules sought to determine fault for such a simultaneous hit. Sir William Hope formulated the principle in 1692 that the fault falls on the one who attacked themselves instead of defending against the opponent's attack:

*To prevent contretemps in Fencing-exercises, if both Parties Thrust together, the Thrust should always be adjudged to him who was the first Attacker, although his Adversary should have Thrust home at the same time with him, without offering either to Parade or Bear off his Adversary's Thrust; and this is but just, because it can hardly be supposed that any Man would be so foolish, as designedly to run the hazard of his Life, when his design was only to Wound his Adversary, and not to shew his Skill.*

— HOPE: *The Fencing Master's Advice to his Scholar*, 1692

Hope also emphasized the need for immediate recovery after a lunge so that the fencer does not remain vulnerable. We find similar logic of priority for the attacker a century later in the Italian environment with Bremond (c. 1790). He specified that stop-hits (*colpo d'arresto*) or time-hits (*colpo di tempo*) are valid only if executed cleanly, without the author of the hit being hit themselves. In the case of a mutual hit (*colpo d'incontro*), the one who attacked first was right.

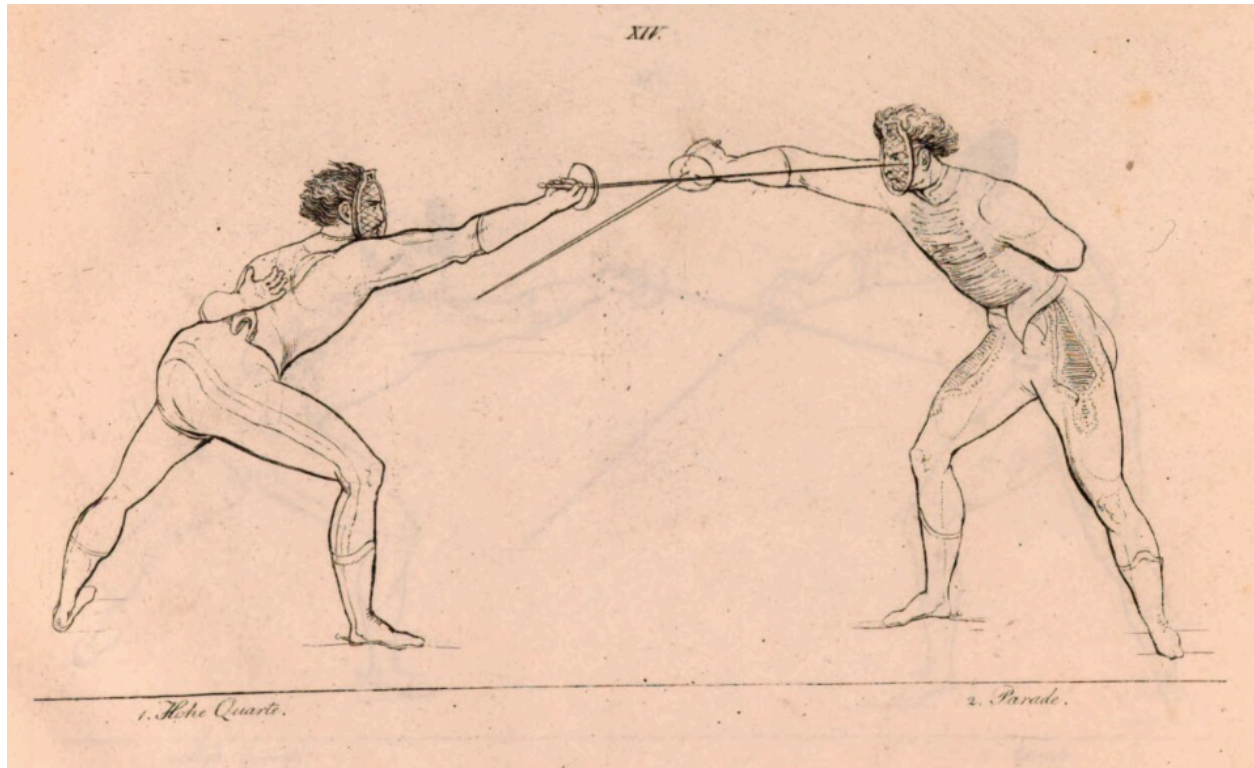
*On the stop-hit (colpo d'arresto)<sup>19</sup> The counter-attack hit is executed during the opponent's forward movement, however small, if they expose any part of the body, and against any of their blows. When using this hit, one must strike the opponent without being hit oneself, because otherwise it would be a mutual hit (colpo d'incontro), in which the one who attacked first would be right.*

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<sup>19</sup>Time-thrust

*On the time-hit (colpo di tempo)<sup>20</sup> The time-hit is considered the most difficult hit in the art of fencing.....The time-hit must be executed with determination, and if the opponent hits you even minimally, your response will not be valid and the opponent will be in the right. This hit is similar to the mutual hit, in which the attacker always has the advantage.*

— BREMOND: Trattato sulla scherma, c. 1790, p 56<sup>21</sup>



#### MODERN AIDS AND SAFETY

A fundamental turning point in the understanding and rules of fencing was brought about by the introduction of fencing masks in the mid-18th century. As Capitaine de Bast noted (1836), before masks, rules focused primarily on preventing serious facial injuries. Therefore, a system of alternating attacks and ripostes was often applied, and techniques like remise (renewal of attack), *coup d'arrêt* (stop-hit), or *coup de temps* (time-hit) were considered inadmissible or "irregular."

*Until masks began to be used in fencing, it was common practice for fencers to alternate attacks and ripostes – the intention of this conventional restriction was to prevent accidents that could arise in case of freer combat. At that time, concepts like opposition (control of the opponent's blade) were not known either, so if both lunged forward simultaneously, serious facial injuries could occur. Therefore, techniques like reprise de main, remise, coup d'arrêt, and coup de temps were considered inadmissible and 'irregular' at that time. But since masks were introduced, and*

<sup>20</sup>Stop-hit, *predbod* [stop-thrust]

<sup>21</sup><https://books.google.sk/books?id=W1aXVg6yx2YC>

*with them the knowledge of opposition, fencing has fundamentally changed.*<sup>22</sup>

— DE BAST: Manuel d'Escrime, 1836, p. 152

*Since the mid-18th century, when masks were adopted, fencing began to progress again, and bouts became a truer image of real combat. Before their introduction, bouts were subject to rules that, while ensuring precision, simultaneously hindered natural speed and prevented some actions. A fencer could only riposte when his opponent had recovered, doubling of attacks was rarely used, and time-thrusts were executed only with the greatest caution.*

— POSSELLIER: La théorie de l'escrime, 1845<sup>23</sup>

Possellier confirms that masks allowed fencing to become a "truer image of real combat," unleashed speed, and enabled actions that were previously hindered by safety concerns. At the same time, however, he warned against undesirable consequences – the abuse of time-hits and repeated attacks, which began to be used more with impunity. Fencing gained intensity but, according to some, lost elegance and caution.

#### REPRISE DE MAIN (REMISE) DURING A DELAYED RIPOSTE

One problematic aspect of fencing was the question of whether it was possible to attack again if the opponent hesitated with their riposte. Some fencers considered it unfair if their opponent hit them with a repeated lunge before they executed their own response. De Bast, however, argues that the fault lies precisely with the one who unnecessarily delayed their riposte:

*Many fencers are surprised that such an attack hit them, and believe that since they parried, the opponent now has a duty to wait for their riposte. This opinion is, however, just as erroneous as the objections to the so-called coup d'arrêt and coup de temps, which I have already addressed above. If a fencer receives a hit during a 'reprise de main,' they can only blame themselves – if they had not hesitated with the response, the opponent would not have had this opportunity.*

— DE BAST: Manuel d'Escrime, 1836, p. 152

Possellier adds an important nuance to this topic, warning against abusing the delayed riposte:

*The redoublement must be executed only if the parried attack is not accompanied by a riposte. Every redoublement executed at the same time as a riposte is a fault, even if the riposte misses the target, because the attacker cannot assume such a situation, and if the riposte had hit, a double hit would have occurred.*

— POSSELLIER: La théorie de l'escrime, 1845, pp. 253-255

This approach emphasizes the need for a time limit for the validity of the riposte. Possellier suggests that the riposte should lose its priority if the remise hits at least one second earlier. This principle allows for a clear distinction between a legitimate renewal and a delayed riposte, which could otherwise lead to unclear and unfair exchanges. From today's perspective, 1 second is an extremely long time, and all such hits would be out of tempo even in many "afterblow" tournaments.

#### PRIORITY OF THE POINT-IN-LINE

Later, we find a new type of priority in manuals, based on a static weapon position rather than an attack in motion. Alberto Marchionni describes and discusses this phenomenon in his rules as follows:

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<sup>22</sup>The principle of opposition is known from the first KdF writings and was of course also present in the entire rapier doctrine. Therefore, this note is slightly puzzling.

<sup>23</sup>[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/\\_/4k4UAAAAQAAI?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/_/4k4UAAAAQAAI?hl=en&gbpv=1)

§ 6. *The rule holds that whoever takes the initiative of the attack, if the opponent's blade is in a straight line or aimed at his chest, must first ensure its deflection.*

§ 7. *Example 1: Two fencers are on guard (within distance), with one having their weapon pointed at the other's chest. If the first decides to attack with a feint by disengagement (cavazione), keeping their hand low, and his opponent, without waiting for further movement from the attacker, immediately lands a blow upon the first sign of movement (i.e., on the feint), in such a case, it can very easily happen that both fencers hit each other simultaneously. It must be said that the opinions of some fencing schools do not agree on determining to whom the fault should be attributed. However, I do not belong to those who would want the simultaneous hit attributed to the one who landed the direct blow, arguing that he had the duty to defend himself. But the first fundamental rule in fencing is that before attacking, it is necessary to deflect the opponent's blade!*

*Can one speak of an exception here? If we admitted this and the second fencer, finding himself in the described situation, found himself hit because he threw himself onto the opponent's weapon, can he reasonably be blamed for it? If so, then that was precisely what the first attacker should have done, and therefore it seems to me that the fault in this case falls on him, and not on the second.*

§ 8. *I do not contradict the principle that it is necessary to parry attacks coming from the opponent; on the contrary, the rule is that if someone is attacked, they should defend themselves. But at the same time, it must be remembered that this principle has exceptions, as I will show in the following paragraph.*

§ 9. *Here is the case in which the opponent is obliged to defend himself – and that is when someone attacks according to the prescribed rules, i.e., first deflects the opponent's blade from the line. By this step, he creates an obligation for the other to defend himself. If he wants to land a counter-blow at the same time, he must do so without being hit. If, however, he were hit, the fault would be on his side.*

— MARCHIONNI: Trattato di scherma, 1847, p. 368<sup>\*24</sup>

Marchionni also discusses the issue of riposte and renewal, pointing out frequent situations that can lead to contentious double hits. He argues that after executing a parry for a riposte, the fencer must not let their blade leave the engagement, because this would expose them to a direct hit without any further defensive measure:

*It happens that after executing a parry for a riposte, a fencer withdraws their blade from the opponent's and thereby exposes themselves so much that the opponent can immediately execute a direct hit without any further defensive measure. In such a case, the fencer who executes the remise is not obliged to parry, as they merely exploited their opponent's mistake. However, the condition is that they must not be hit themselves. If this were to happen, then they would bear the fault, since the remise belongs among actions in tempo and must be executed precisely at the moment the opponent withdraws the blade during the riposte.*

This approach is similar to the strict logic of Bremond, who emphasized the importance of tempo and immediate response to the opponent's error. At the same time, however, Marchionni offers a clear rule: if the remise is executed correctly without a reciprocal hit, it is legitimate. If, however, a simultaneous hit occurs, the fault falls on the fencer who made a mistake in the timing of the remise. Although he prescribes how a correct foil riposte should *not* look, even with an incorrect one, the fault lies with the poorly timed renewal.

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<sup>24</sup><https://books.google.sk/books?id=lxXYJwg93vMC&hl=sk&pg=PT124>

## NEAR-MODERN PRIORITY RULES

Ferdinando Masiello, in his work *La scherma italiana di spada e di sciabola* (1887), and Gustav von Arlow, in *A kardvívás* (1902), offer systematic solutions for evaluating double hits in fencing. Both authors recognize that a simultaneous hit results from a deviation from proper fencing principles<sup>25</sup>, and they introduce rules aimed at reducing avoidable double hits. Masiello, following in the footsteps of Possellier, establishes the principle of temporal priority, according to which a riposte must be executed immediately after the parry<sup>26</sup>. According to Masiello, responsibility for a double hit is assigned as follows:

- If a fencer delivers a stop-hit (*arresto*) or a hand attack regardless of the opponent's action, the fault lies with them.
- If they attempt to deflect the opponent's blade but proceed with their attack without having actually diverted it, the fault is theirs.
- If they attempt a stop-hit against an opponent who continues to feint without any clear intent to strike, both fencers are at fault.
- If they launch a riposte without first having found the opponent's blade during the parry, they bear the responsibility.
- If they fail to remove the opponent's blade from the line before their own attack, both fencers share the fault.
- If both fencers lunge simultaneously after a long pause awaiting an attack, responsibility is shared.

Fifteen years later, the Hungarian fencing master Gustav Ritter von Arlow built upon this principle of attack priority. In his manual *A kardvívás*, he likewise addresses the problem of the double hit and stresses that such an outcome is undesirable and results from the error of at least one participant. Arlow introduces the term *utánvágás* (literally "cut following a hit," i.e., afterblow) for an additional cut landed after the fencer has already been struck. In a sport bout (*assaut*), such a late hit, according to Arlow, should not be counted—it arrives too late. He does, however, caution that in a real duel, even such a blow could cause injury. Arlow thus appeals to the fencer's sense of responsibility: even in training, one must not remain undefended after being hit under the assumption that "a double hit doesn't count." On the contrary, a skilled fencer will always ensure their defense even after their own successful strike<sup>27</sup>, to avoid the so-called *ambo* (Latin for "both"). His system for evaluating simultaneous hits in sport fencing closely follows Masiello's principles and brings fencing closer to its modern understanding.

### **A) The attacker is considered at fault for the *ambo*, if:**

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<sup>25</sup>Arlow: "However, it can happen that in a bout both fencers simultaneously validly cut or thrust; then a mutual hit occurs, designated as 'ambo'. It need not be repeated how contrary this is to the spirit of fencing and how unskilled; the responsible party cannot be sufficiently criticized for it. In a match, the culprit is punished by having the hit counted against them. A true ambo occurs only if there is no greater time difference between the two hits than one tempo and both hits could have been valid if executed separately. If one of the cuts or thrusts did not occur in the same tempo or at least in the following one, we can only describe it as temporally separated hits. In such cases, only the first hit is counted. Causing an ambo can be the fault of the attacker, the defender, or both, so the hit can be counted against one or both."

<sup>26</sup>"Dichiariamo dunque che la risposta non è più valida, se il raddoppiamento ha toccato almeno un secondo prima di essa; tempo morale necessario perché il parante se ne avveda e possa sospendere il compimento della sua risposta." [We declare therefore that the riposte is no longer valid if the redoublement has touched at least one second before it; a moral time necessary for the parrying fencer to notice it and be able to suspend the completion of his riposte.]

<sup>27</sup>„fontos az is, hogy az utánvágás a támadás után mindig védve legyen.“ [It is also important that the after-cut after the attack is always defended.]



1. The attacker runs into the opponent's extended point.
2. The attacker launches an attack, the opponent dodges and counters, and the attacker continues regardless.
3. During their attack, the opponent performs a stop-cut or stop-thrust; the attacker interrupts the action to parry but then completes the attack regardless.
4. While feinting, the attacker contacts the opponent's blade, prompting an immediate riposte, but continues with the attack anyway.
5. The attacker, after feinting, receives a stop-cut or thrust and then lands their own hit, with more than one tempo separating the two actions.
6. The attacker initiates with an invitation, bind, or another provoking action, but fails to parry and is hit.

**B) The defender is considered at fault for the *ambo*, if:**

1. They cut or thrust into the opponent's simple attack.
2. They attempt to stop the attacker with a stop-cut or thrust in tempo, but the attacker continues uninterrupted and scores with no more than a one-tempo delay.
3. After a successful parry, they fail to immediately riposte, allowing the opponent to execute a *remise* and score.
4. Instead of parrying, they attempt an evasion combined with a stop-hit in tempo but are also struck.

**C) Both fencers are considered equally at fault for the *ambo***

1. The attacker performs excessive, unjustified feints, while the defender retreats and responds with a late attack.
2. Both fencers attack and hit simultaneously.

The approaches taken by Masiello and Arlow represent advanced historical attempts to resolve the problem of double hits. Across 19th-century fencing literature, these rules are more or less widely accepted and formed the foundation of modern conventional fencing rules based on the right-of-way system, where responsibility—and therefore the point—is clearly assigned, though sometimes asymmetrically, in the case of simultaneous hits.

The question that remains, then, is how modern HEMA—especially in the discipline of longsword fencing, where varied approaches to scoring are frequently used—reckons with this rich and complex historical context in the development of priority rules.

## MODERN RULES FOR THE LONGSWORD

A common claim heard in current discussions is that “a good fencer can prevail under any ruleset.” However, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that rules serve only as a formal framework without a significant impact on the development of fencing technique and tactics. My position is the opposite: well-designed rules actively support the growth of technically and tactically proficient fencers.

A widely accepted principle is that tournaments consist of multiple bouts, and each bout is made up of several exchanges. Attempts to construct single-exchange bouts that aim to imitate real duels have proven clearly unsuitable for fencing as a sport. When assessing the validity of a hit, it is the referee who stops the exchange

upon recognizing the first valid hit—or allows for a minimal reaction window, limited at most to a single fencing tempo, meaning one indivisible action.

One of the main contentious issues in ruleset design is how to evaluate situations in which both fencers land hits within the same exchange: *double*, *incontro*, *ambo*, *Mitstoß*. Scenarios in which only one side is hit are generally uncontroversial—the only meaningful questions are whether the hit was valid and whether any disciplinary or fair-play violations occurred. Doubles, or mutual hits, have been a central topic of HEMA discussion since the emergence of competitive formats. Back when the core of the HEMA community's work lay in reconstructing historical techniques, the problem of doubles was largely overlooked. In the context of research without sparring or competition, the question itself was almost irrelevant.

Yet reality—be it tournament bouts or friendly sparring—soon made it impossible to ignore. The first rationalization often heard was that doubles stemmed from a lack of training or a misunderstanding of the historical masters. In truth, the answer lies elsewhere. No fencing system or tradition is immune to doubles, and when the other party is a non-cooperative opponent, I would argue that they are inevitable to some extent. What we can influence, however, is how often they happen, how we address them, and how we learn from them.

Historical sources make it clear that this problem is not new—fencers have been concerned with it since at least the 16th century. In the context of a duel, a double was extremely undesirable for both parties. In sport, it is a situation we can learn from without fatal consequences. The key question remains how to analyze such exchanges and what adjustments we can make to minimize their occurrence.

## PRECONDITIONS FOR A DUEL

Before entering a duel, several key preconditions or factors must be considered. Evaluating them helps a participant assess the risk-to-gain ratio—whether in terms of restoring one's honor or resolving a conflict.

1. **Cause or pretext (*Casus Belli*):** There must be a sufficiently serious reason for at least one party to willingly accept the risks involved in initiating or accepting physical confrontation in the form of a duel. Without a compelling cause, the duel loses meaning and becomes nothing more than senseless violence.
2. **Opponent's sanity and rationality:** Both parties should be of sound mind, capable of rational judgment, and aware of the consequences of their actions. It is essential to assess whether one's opponent understands the seriousness of the situation. A duel with someone showing signs of instability, extreme emotional volatility, or irrationality introduces unpredictable and often unacceptable levels of risk.
3. **Mutual respect or instinct for self-preservation:** Ideally, both duelists should have a genuine interest in surviving the encounter with minimal harm. A basic assumption (though not always honored in practice) is that the goal is not mutual destruction at any cost. While deliberately trading one's own safety—e.g., taking a non-fatal hit to land a more damaging one—can be a tactic, in the context of a regulated duel of honor, I view this as undesirable.
4. **Fair play:** A basic level of trust must exist that the opponent will respect the agreed-upon or generally accepted rules and customs of the duel. If there is reasonable suspicion of deception, dishonesty, or a disregard for the conditions of the fight, the risk increases dramatically, and the concept of a fair duel is undermined.

## FOUNDATIONS FOR RULE DESIGN

The creation of effective and meaningful rules for fencing matches or tournaments should be based on several core principles. These principles ensure that rules not only regulate the bout but also support the development of skilled fencers and uphold the spirit of the discipline. Key foundations include:

- **Safety and assessment:** Rules must provide a framework that ensures safety while allowing for the objective evaluation of each fencer's technical, tactical, and athletic performance.
- **Combat relevance and habits:** Although competitive fencing rules are not intended to simulate real combat directly, they should help fencers identify and develop habits and techniques that could, in principle, be applicable in realistic combat scenarios. Rules should support heuristics that reduce exposure to risk, even though no strategy guarantees success or eliminates the possibility of mutual hits.
- **Accountability for mistakes:** Fencers make errors. Rules should clearly establish which party bears greater responsibility in problematic situations (especially double hits). They should reward safe and technically correct behavior, while penalizing actions that would be dangerous or undesirable in a real duel.
- **Link to training:** Rules alone have limited effectiveness if not supported by a training system that teaches fencers how to operate within the rules and achieve the goals the rules are designed to encourage.
- **Protection against rules exploitation:** Rules should be designed to limit the exploitation of tactics that may comply with the letter but violate the spirit of the rules or contradict sound fencing principles—so-called “gaming the system.”
- **Assumed seriousness of hits:** Rules should implicitly reflect the assumption that in a real context, any valid hit could have serious consequences. This encourages respect for the opponent's actions and reinforces the importance of defense, even when fighting with blunted weapons and protective gear.

There are three further expectations of rules I haven't included in the list above: spectator appeal, support for historically informed fencing, and simplicity for both fencers and judges. I don't consider any of these to be primary criteria, though simplicity, at least, must be factored in to some extent.

Rules must be simple enough that trained fencers and judges can understand and apply them in practice—specifically, to recognize the situations the rules describe. It is not necessary for every participant to grasp the full rationale or historical evolution<sup>28</sup> behind each rule formulation, just as most athletes today are unfamiliar with the origins of tennis scoring (15, 30, 40) or the development of the offside rule in football.

What's important to remember is that rules should not be simplified to the point where they dictate the entire character of the discipline. If two inexperienced fencers meet and exchange actions that result in hits on both

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<sup>28</sup>But it is exceedingly useful at least in our times, until longsword fencing is a sport established for decades with simple rules.

sides, chances are neither will be able to explain what happened or why<sup>29</sup>. To them, it will likely be: “We both attacked and somehow hit each other.”<sup>30</sup> At most, they may notice who landed the hit first. This inability to analyze the situation makes it hard for them to learn from it. The only feedback they receive is whether they managed to land a clean or significantly earlier hit. Any additional context the referee can provide when describing the exchange helps them identify the cause of the double hit more quickly and learn how to avoid it in the future.

For this reason, the demand for simplicity is only justified to the extent that it does not prevent fencers from applying more sophisticated tactics. Exchange evaluation should not place technically simplistic, impulsive actions on the same level as thoughtful, tactically sound solutions—doing so erases the difference between them.

As for spectator appeal (and appeal to fencers), it can help expand the reach of the discipline, but it must not take precedence over fencing principles. Some may argue that aesthetic criteria have historically played a role in match evaluation. I don’t believe, however, that fencing—particularly longsword fencing—is today such a unified or mature discipline that it could support figure-skating-style competitions. From personal experience, I know how subjective such judging can be, and I would consider it suitable only at the club or local level.

*In classification fencing, aside from hit outcomes, what is assessed is primarily the fencer’s effective skill, then the beauty and correctness of movement, mental concept, and precise adherence to fencing rules. Fencers are scored on a scale from 1 to 10, or 1 to 20. The average score determines ranking. Whoever receives the highest score is the best.*

— BARTUNEK: *Ratgeber für den Offizier*, 1904

On the other hand, support for historical techniques is, in my view, not a valid requirement—and no modern rule set for historical fencing should hinge on fidelity to a particular historical tradition. If a given historical school is genuinely effective, its techniques will naturally make their way into fencers’ repertoires.

## ERRORS AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DOUBLE HIT

Every fencing exchange involves mistakes, which may lead to a hit on one or both sides. In the case of a mutual hit (*double*), the goal of analysis is to identify the errors made by both fencers and determine which of them was the primary cause of the situation—that is, who bears the greater responsibility. While the exact formulations may vary across rulesets, the fundamental principles for assessing fault remain largely the same. The following is a summary of common mistakes that often lead to double hits. In most cases, one fencer’s error is more serious than the other’s:

1. I run into the opponent’s extended and clearly presented point while launching my own attack.
2. I ignore an ongoing threat to an open line and decide to strike anyway, without adjusting to the situation.
3. I prepare a multi-hit combo (two or more attacks) without regard for my opponent’s reaction, or I fail my attack and don’t defend myself from the counter.

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<sup>29</sup>“Two unskillful men fencing, do often hurt one another dangerously by chance medley, for they know not what they do, neither how it comes to pass, the reasons or causes are these. Sometimes two false times meet together, which make one true time; sometimes a true time & a false time meet together, these also make a true time, & sometimes two true times meet together, & make a true time between them. All these happen because the true time & true place is unknown unto them both.” George Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*

<sup>30</sup>These are those unnecessary comments in our referee group, with the curt statement “double”.

4. I attempt to suppress the opponent's blade with a cut or bind, but the attempt fails—and instead of recovering, I continue my attack in panic.
5. My opponent removes my blade from the centerline, and instead of defending or resetting, I launch my own attack regardless.

This list is not exhaustive, nor does it cover technical mistakes that are important in training but should play only a secondary role in competitive evaluation.

#### ERROR 1: THE LINE

Running into a static, extended point is a clear example of tactical failure—or of a lack of basic fencing competence.

*Discussion<sup>31</sup>: While the principle is clear in theory, its application is more complicated in practice. Rarely is the defender's line held completely static throughout the attacker's action. Often, the defender responds actively—by extending the arm or lunging forward from their line—transforming the situation into an attack vs. counterattack. In such cases, the attacker is not simply “running onto a line,” and the outcome must be judged according to the rules governing attack vs. counterattack (e.g., right-of-way or tempo), rather than by a simple assertion of fault. The key is to distinguish whether the defender was holding a passive threat, or whether they actively launched into the attacker's action.*

#### ERROR 2: IGNORING AN INCOMING ATTACK

The essence of fencing is often captured in the maxim: “Hit and don't get hit.” Failure to respond to an obvious threat, and instead exposing oneself willingly, is a serious breach of fencing logic.

Even a suboptimal attack becomes a committed action—especially if it closes distance or presents a credible threat. If the defender is aware of the attack and chooses not to act against it, they have made a conscious decision to risk being hit. Criticizing the attacker's imperfect technique does not absolve the defender of their obligation to respond. On the contrary, it is precisely those technical flaws that offer opportunities for effective defense—via parry, controlled opposition, or stop-hit.

*Discussion 1: Some students of the KdF (Kunst des Fechtens) tradition might object that their system emphasizes counterattacks and attacks into the attack more than parry-riposte sequences. However, Zettel and its glosses were written for fencers already proficient in fencing fundamentals<sup>32</sup>, including parry and riposte. Counterattacks are an advanced tactical theme and the possibility of a double is not an acceptable outcome.*

*Discussion 2: Another argument might be that if the defender is able to respond during my attack into an opening, I failed to prepare the attack well enough. This is a fair expectation—and one that is often encoded in unconventional rulesets<sup>33</sup>, which penalize both fencers for a double, but less so the one in the lead (i.e., the one with more clean points).*

#### SPECIAL NOTE ON COMPOUND ATTACKS

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<sup>31</sup>Authors like Masiello and Gustav Ristow [TN: likely meant Arlow, not Ristow], contrary to the majority convention, attributed fault to both.

<sup>32</sup>“And these hidden and veiled words Master Sigmund ain Ringeck, fencing master of the noble prince and lord Albrecht, Count Palatine by Rhine and Duke of Bavaria, glossed and explained as is further set forth in this booklet, so that every fencer may understand them well and master them, provided he already knows how to fence beforehand.”, MS Dresd.C.487

<sup>33</sup>Corresponding e.g. to today's épée.



A common misconception is that a double hit during a feint-based attack is always the attacker's fault. This is not true. Feints are part of attack preparation. If the defender strikes during the initial feint phase—before the final attack is launched—that is a valid stop-hit, and the attacker is at fault. But if the defender ignores the final committed action and attempts a simultaneous strike instead of defending, the responsibility is theirs.

This principle of timing a stop-hit correctly against a feint is clearly expressed by Francesco Antonio Mattei:

*I recognize, therefore, that against all feints, the opponent can defend with certainty using tempo, which—as a perfect action—is rightly praised by all. But one must take care to use it at the very first movement of the feint—assuming the fencer steps into distance at that moment. In such a case, as I have said, they should strike with a direct thrust and simultaneously pull their torso out of reach. Otherwise, if they attempt to strike on the second motion of the feint, they will either miss—or if they hit, the result will be a double.*

— MATTEI: *Della scherma napoletana*, 1669

### ERROR 3: REMISE AND CONTINUATION

Offensive combinations belong primarily in drills—and should probably stay there. Combos have no place in free fencing if executed “with eyes closed,” without observing the opponent's reaction, or without planning a second or third intention. If every strike in a sequence is meant to land on its own (i.e., first intention<sup>34</sup>), such behavior could fairly be described as suicidal.<sup>35</sup>

*Discussion: If we draw from KdF material, we find the idea that Nach (after) defeats Vor (before). Authors recommend that if the first attack fails, the fencer should follow up—only if the initial attack forced the opponent into a reactive, disoriented defense. Preferred follow-ups are actions like Zwerchau, which simultaneously threaten and cover lines.<sup>36</sup>*

*The same texts also note<sup>37</sup> that after a successful parry, one should immediately riposte, ideally maintaining the point within half an arm's length from the opponent's chest or face—so they cannot renew their attack first.*

*At first glance, there appears to be a contradiction between renewing one's attack and immediately riposting. But there is no mention of simultaneous hits. Instead, emphasis is placed on timing, control, and discipline. These are not sport rules, but practical advice for hitting without being hit.*

Do KdF sources express a preference between remising and riposting or securing a counterattack? Not explicitly. But fencing logic certainly does. It aligns with the understanding later formalized in priority-based systems: a clean, well-timed riposte is a valid, automatic reaction—just like a covered counterattack. Thus, a fencer cannot assume their opponent won't respond. Any attack must account for this possibility; if it doesn't, it is flawed.

If the defender hesitates in their riposte—due to a well-prepared attack, intimidation, or their own mistake—the attacker may justifiably continue, ideally with opposition.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>I fear that in today's HEMA tournament community, even the first intention, or a clear plan of what is actually planned, is often lacking. The prevailing style is, I'll start something, and we'll see what happens.

<sup>35</sup>"Suicidal behavior" is an overused term and often its users don't even have a clear idea what they mean by it, or they label everything that leads to hits on both sides with it.

<sup>36</sup>Or attacks with the pommel, meaning the opponent remained standing and we are currently already at short distance. MS 3227a, f. 21r

<sup>37</sup>MS 3227a, f. 24v, 32v

<sup>38</sup>Upper and lower *Zwerchau*, *oben abnehmen* [taking off above] along the blade, etc.

#### ERROR 4: FAILED BLADE ATTACK

Many fencing traditions consider blade attacks inherently suboptimal—since you're not threatening the body. That said, blade actions such as binds<sup>39</sup> or beats<sup>40</sup> can be necessary to create a safe opening. A well-executed blade attack may offer momentary control or time to act. However, if the blade attack fails and the opponent regains initiative, continuing one's attack without adjusting to the new threat is a critical mistake.

#### ERROR 5: DISPLACED BLADE

If the opponent has removed or neutralized my blade, they are fully entitled to exploit that advantage. Attacking into this moment—when I've been bound, displaced, or otherwise disarmed—is a misunderstanding of the danger I'm in.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF FAULT

In evaluating simultaneous hits, a core principle should apply: **if one party has the opportunity to prevent a double, they are morally obligated to do so.**

Within the safe environment of the salle or gym, clad in modern protection, our survival instincts grow dull. Fencing may not faithfully simulate a duel, but it must not ignore its essential values. Provoking a double is easy—and in sport, it carries no real consequence beyond what the rules impose. Yet those rules are meant to support fencing as a tactical, technical, and athletic pursuit—and to keep it from drifting too far from its original purpose.

**This principle of responsibility for doubles is today known as priority, or right-of-way.**

*The rules on double hits must be formulated in a way that respects the natural boundaries of combat. Anyone who has served as a second in a sabre duel knows that even a weaker fencer may suddenly produce effective, well-timed parries under the stress of a real confrontation—because the awareness of genuine danger forces instinctive reactions.*

— BARTUNEK: *Ratgeber für den Offizier*, 1904

## HIERARCHY OF EVALUATION

From the attacker's perspective, exchanges can be ranked in the following order of value:

1. I land a hit, prevent the afterblow, and strike again.
2. I land a hit and am not hit in return. From a dueling perspective, this is equivalent in value to point 1, but in terms of fencing art, the first is a level above.
3. I land a hit but am struck in return with an afterblow.
4. I land a hit while being hit simultaneously. According to the principles of fault in doubles, my opponent is considered responsible.
5. Both of us strike simultaneously, with equal fault.
6. Both of us strike, but I am responsible for the double.
7. I am hit, but I manage to land an afterblow in return.

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<sup>39</sup>*Prise de fer* [Taking of the iron/blade]

<sup>40</sup>*Battement, battuta* [Beat]

8. I am hit without striking back.
9. I am hit, strike an afterblow, and my opponent parries it and hits me again.

	Situation (fencer A PoW)	RoW (+ AB bonus)	First Touch	Afterblow (nullify)	Afterblow (wighter)
1	A hits, defends against AB, hits again	2:0	1:0	1:0	1:0
2	A hits cleanly	1:0	1:0	1:0	1:0
3	A hits first, receives an afterblow	1:0	1:0	0:0	0:1*
4	Double hit, caused by B	1:0	1:1	0:0	0:1*
5	Double hit, no priority / mutual error	0:0	1:1	0:0	0:1*
6	Double hit, caused by A	0:1	1:1	0:0	0:1
7	A is hit first, delivers afterblow	0:1	0:1	0:0	0:1
8	A is hit cleanly	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1
9	A is hit, attempts AB, which is parried; gets hit again	0:2	0:1	0:1	0:1

*Note: The score values in the final column are illustrative only and would depend on the specific ruleset used (e.g., different weightings for head vs. hand strikes). Question marks at 2:0 and 0:2 indicate a proposed bonus system by the author.*

This ranking does not fully account for rulesets that assign different values to different target areas. Choosing an appropriate scoring method is often more a matter of judgment than strict logic. In my view, the first two columns represent systems well-suited for training and fostering a healthy fencing mindset. The third column is still acceptable; the last, however, is outright harmful.

For feedback purposes, fencers might perceive all entries within a color band as equal—fostering the illusion that all situations within that band have the same tactical value. Rulesets based on right-of-way are best suited for beginners and intermediate fencers, as they benefit most from the clear logic of “who has the right to strike.” Experienced fencers already internalize this logic and don’t require it to be made explicit. In contrast, rules with afterblow allowances may confuse less experienced fencers—especially if they haven’t yet developed an intuitive grasp of sound fencing principles.

## GAMING THE RULES

No ruleset is immune to exploitation. The goal of careful rulecrafting and precise definitions should be to minimize this risk—though in a competitive environment where fencer quality and training intensity increase every year, that is easier said than done. But what is “gaming the rules”? It’s behavior that formally complies with written rules while contradicting the spirit or underlying principles of fencing.

A classic example is the use of one-handed strikes to extend reach. While effective in competition, such strikes would be risky in a real duel—where losing grip on your weapon might be fatal. Likewise, a throw might

seriously injure your opponent, but it's rarely included in one's actual dueling repertoire. For this reason, discussion around deprioritizing one-handed strikes is legitimate—and some rulesets already do so.

Another example of potential abuse—often raised in relation to right-of-way rules—is the “suicidal attack.” However, in HEMA tournaments, I have not observed this as a widespread issue. At least in strikes to the upper body, these do not seem prevalent. I've noticed a few questionable exchanges involving lower targets<sup>41</sup>, which is why I support discussion on deprioritizing—or even removing—low-line targets from scoring zones. As for suicidal attacks in general, my public request for video evidence yielded very little material suggesting systematic abuse.

Where I do see a risk is in attacks that only appear to meet the criteria for right-of-way but are actually false commitments—*feigned all-in* attacks, intended to bait a counterattack. Protection against such behavior depends heavily on the referee, who must judge whether the attacker truly committed or merely simulated the action. This places a high burden on the referee, who must be deeply familiar with fencing principles and ideally also a high-level fencer.

“First-touch” rules are much simpler—but can also be gamed, often through late counterattacks or counter-tempo actions. As Possellier noted, this problem emerged especially after the introduction of fencing masks. Modern sport fencing has tried to mitigate it by shortening the so-called lockout time—the window in which hits on both sides are registered. In foil, this is currently 40 ms—a window so short that in real combat it would almost always be simultaneous. If the interval were longer, such as 200 ms (as seen in some rulesets), it would be far easier to exploit. Our own tests showed that if a fencer commits to “doubling” and has one full tempo to execute it, it is nearly impossible to avoid a double. In fact, the cleaner fencer may end up the only one struck—precisely because they didn't anticipate being punished for their good fencing.

*We can assure you that such a desperate man has, more than once, succeeded—landing a counterblow and striking his opponent alone, because the opponent, lacking sufficient caution, tried to defend too late...*

— KAHN: *Anfangsgründe der Fechtkunst*, 1739

In a sport setting, “first-touch” rules are useful for encouraging solid preparation—but can also lead to bad habits if taught first.

*Even if someone were to find themselves in a real duel with foils, such simultaneous hits would be particularly dangerous. And even if someone objects that they would behave differently in such a situation—well, habits are powerful, and they may end up acting on instinct despite themselves.*

— KAHN: *Anfangsgründe der Fechtkunst*, 1739

A major weakness of first-touch systems is the lack of a reliable objective mechanism for measuring timing differences—so that double-hit criteria are not uniformly enforced across all rings.

Much has been written about abuse of afterblow rules, and since I'm personally not a supporter of such systems, I'll leave their defense to others. The key question remains whether their originally noble and historically valid purpose has been reduced in today's tournament scene to little more than a way to mask one's own mistakes. We also cannot deny that fencers are sometimes swept up in chaotic exchanges with

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<sup>41</sup>“You will inspire greater respect (fear) in the opponent if you direct blows aimed from the center of the body upwards than from the center downwards. The reason is that the eyes – and thus the heart – of less determined fencers are more easily unsettled or intimidated by blows coming into the higher lines.” Manciolino

multiple hits and doubles, which are hard to judge fairly. This phenomenon still deserves technical debate and further research based on robust tournament data.

*One often finds that even those with some training let themselves be overtaken by anger or rashness—and instead of defending, they strike at the same time as their opponent... Even though someone who hits simultaneously with no defense gains little from it, they are still content if they manage to land a hit. How dangerous this decision is, anyone can easily imagine—and thus understand how two people might wound, or even fell, each other simultaneously.*

*...those who are weaker and unable to prevail through skill often resort to Mitstoß—and thereby learn something that leads more to their own ruin than to their benefit.*

*"In these simultaneous hits, whether inside or outside, one cannot overlook the fact that many fencers take particular pleasure in striking the opponent even as they themselves are struck—believing that this way, their opponent has gained no real advantage.*

— KAHN: *Anfangsgründe der Fechtkunst*, 1739

## VALIDITY

The discussion about the validity of hits falls outside the main focus of this article, so I will address it only briefly. In order to fairly award a point in a sporting bout, we must be able to evaluate whether a hit occurred, and whether that hit would have had injury-causing potential. Under current judging practice, which relies entirely on visual observation, it is not possible to consistently and reliably assess the likely effectiveness of a hit.

For this reason, I favor a presumption-of-quality approach. If a fencer's movement clearly shows intent and is executed in space with attributes consistent with a real cut or thrust, then the absolute force is not the decisive factor. A valid cut, then, is one with sufficient chamber and blade contact along a meaningful length. A thrust is considered valid if it has a clear forward trajectory, or causes either blade bend or a recoil from the mask.

Cuts are rarely observed under tournament conditions—typically only as a last-ditch effort to salvage a failed attack, and are seldom credited as valid.

One historically emphasized condition for the validity of a cut is correct edge alignment<sup>42</sup>. In practice, however, enforcing or even reliably identifying edge alignment during bouts is extremely difficult. Even a few degrees off can significantly reduce effectiveness. While it is crucial to insist on correct edge use in training, I currently advocate ignoring this criterion in competition—because a hit is a failure either way, regardless of whether it landed with the edge or the flat.

Should technology in the future allow for consistent and reliable evaluation of hit quality, it would undoubtedly be a step forward.

## TRAINING FRAMEWORK

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<sup>42</sup>"Great care must be taken that blows fall either with the edge or the back of the blade, but never with the flat. A hit with the flat is – both in real combat and in sport fencing – worthless. A well-bred fencer never intentionally uses the flat of the blade." [TN: Source not cited in footnote, possibly Bartunek or another similar manual].



Conventional rules say nothing about a fencer's technical repertoire. In my opinion, they don't even depend on the weapon used—be it longsword, smallsword, rapier, or dueling sabre. The underlying principles remain constant, even if some techniques are easier or faster to execute with particular weapons.

Rules for competition should function as a framework that allows the coach to constructively guide the didactic process—not as boundaries that every attempt at pedagogical creativity must crash against. Ideally, training exercises should go beyond the rules of priority. Why? Because a hit isn't always valid, it doesn't always count, and the referee isn't always in the right position—fencing is a sport, not a microscope. That's why defense after a hit still matters. If not for the referee, then at least for your next second of life in a hypothetical duel—or simply the satisfaction of training fencing as a complete art.

Likewise, one should not underestimate preparation before the attack. An attack without preparation rarely represents true fencing skill—especially when the opponent easily counters a tempo earlier. And while in training that might just be another double, *im Ernst* it's the end.

If your fencing system emphasizes counters, prepare for extra work—counterattacks must be earned, and they must avoid being hit in the process.

If your focus is on defense and riposte, train for rapid responses—ideally before the opponent even realizes their attack is over. Don't forget about feints either. Even the fastest riposte is too late against a perfectly executed deception.

If your specialty is attack renewals, frame them with second intention: apply pressure, force a reaction, manipulate expectations. But don't try to play the game of “one more tempo” — it's pointless. A tenth of a second won't save you. And the result will be, yes, another double. As we've seen, historical treatises had little love for doubles—not just because they ruin the aesthetic of an exchange, but because historical masters didn't view mutual death as a draw.

*The tournament was held with 690-gram old-fashioned sabres. The rules were very loosely defined. Only the result of the hits was considered—that is, the number of hits; doubles were counted as hits for both fencers, and it was agreed that flat strikes should not count. That was basically it. This stands in stark contrast to the Italian school, which distinguishes between sport fencing and dueling fencing, and which uses precise “assault” rules to evaluate doubles—allowing the match to unfold in a realistic manner. Every sport has its own precise rules. While the Italian school uses a dozen rules to evaluate doubles, the old method knows only two. Of course, in the Italian school, if both attacks land in natural tempo (tempo communi), the hit is counted for both. ... As expected, the tournament ended in complete fiasco and general disappointment. ... Only 32 participants registered. Although the jury included some respected gentlemen, they were by no means fencing authorities and—due to their lack of knowledge—were not competent to fulfill their judging role. Where else have you seen a jury position themselves on only one side of the stage, as happened here? From such a place, they could see nothing at all.*

*The course of the tournament painted a very particular picture. Instead of structured assault exchanges, the fencing stage presented wild scenes more akin to bullfights, where the rule was: “cut, cut, and cut again.” Eight of ten exchanges were doubles.*

— BARTUNEK: *Ratgeber für den Offizier*, 1904

...when an opponent performs a thrust while stepping forward with the front foot, there is nothing stopping the other from attacking at the same time. The result is that both launch their strikes, their points move toward a hit, and neither blade defends against the other—so both

fencers are struck.

— MARCELLI: *Regole della scherma*, 1686

## CONCLUSION

In writing this article, I've tried to consider historical treatises, the views of fencers across centuries, and my own experiences within the HEMA community. The fencing conventions developed over time teach us to respect rules—but also to recognize their limits. Amid the flurry of motions that may appear chaotic, there is an underlying system and hierarchy built on respect for one's own health and that of the opponent.

Over the centuries, rules evolved with the aim of balancing safety and realism. Some rules that were once relevant are now mere historical curiosities. Others continue to resonate and shape our present-day fencing. Modern debates about afterblow and right-of-way show just how vividly we still engage with these historical concepts—and that, more than anything, affirms the vitality of the HEMA movement. No trendy ruleset or “new” weapons will bury this discipline as long as its core continues to be shaped by rational dialogue.

HEMA's position between modern sport and martial tradition is the root of many internal tensions—especially regarding the direction this discipline should take. One of the great challenges ahead is to find a balance in competitive rules that fosters technical and tactical excellence without losing touch with the historical heart of the art.

Every fencing coach carries responsibility not only for their students, but for the integrity of the discipline itself. Methodological mistakes can affect its development for years—far more than any flawed interpretation of a secret e.g. *Kurtzhauw*.

The beauty of fencing, which captured and held me, lies in this continual process of exploration, discovering connections, questioning assumptions, and reevaluating everything in cycles. That is why fencing will never be “just a sport”—it will always be a path of personal growth.

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## APPENDIX

### REGULATION OF THE CONFRATERNITY OF ST. MICHAEL, ORDAINED IN THE OPEN HALL, THE 20<sup>TH</sup> OF FEBRUARY 1589 (HOSPITAL ARCHIVES).

To all those who shall see or hear these present letters, the Mayor, Aldermen [Eschevins], and Council of the city of Lille make known that, following the request presented to us on behalf of the sovereign Constable, Master Player [Maître Joueux], standard-bearer, and confrere of the Confraternity of Monseigneur Saint Michael of this city, lately established in the said city by virtue of His Majesty's letters patent, we have, for the maintenance, regulation, and conduct of this confraternity and for good order, reason, and justice, ordained and constituted the points and articles which follow:

1. **Firstly.** We ordain that the said Confraternity shall be regulated and conducted by the sovereign Constable and two secondary Constables who, should the case arise, shall be elected, namely: the said sovereign Constable by us and our successors in law, and the said secondary Constables by the sovereign Constable and the confreres of The Thirty [Trentaine]; and which secondary Constables shall be held to continue in the said office for the space of two years, of whom, each year, only one shall be discharged.
2. **Item,** that all shall be held to obey the commands of the said sovereign Constable and, in his absence, the secondary Constables, Master Player, and standard-bearer, in what they shall have ordained for the maintenance of the said confraternity; punishment of the same, decision and determination of quarrels [noises], disputes, and questions which might arise among the said confreres, and in all other things concerning the affairs of the said confraternity; even having the power to expel the delinquent and incorrigibly disobedient from the said confraternity, conformably and according to the practice in the three ancient confraternities established in this said city; saving appeal, if it seems good to them, before us.
3. **Item,** that the said quarrels, disputes, and questions shall be supremely and without figure of process settled and decided by the said Constable, Master Player, standard-bearer, or any of them, and some confreres, if they wish to do so; and in the case that, for the excesses and misdeeds of any of the said confreres, punishment were ordained and enjoined upon them by the above-named or any of them, the aforesaid delinquents shall be held to promptly obey without power [pooir] to refuse or commit rebellion therein; and where it should be ordained to hold prison, the said delinquent shall be held to go there and remain until otherwise decided; without nevertheless, for this, paying entry or exit fee for prison, unless he be conducted there by force or rigor, according as is done and practiced in the said three ancient confraternities.
4. **Item,** that the said secondary Constables, being chosen in the manner hereinabove declared at length, shall have the management and administration of the goods of the said confraternity, as much for receiving and collecting them as for paying the ordinary and extraordinary expenses that shall be necessary, and for which we have authorized them and give them, by these presents, pertinent power.
5. **Item,** that the said secondary Constables, thus elected by the sovereign Constable, Master Player, standard-bearer, and confreres, shall not be able [polront] to refuse the said charge; but [ains] shall be held to undertake it, on peril of being constrained thereto, as much by imprisonment of their

persons, expulsion from the said confraternity, as is said, as otherwise, at the arbitration of the aforesaid sovereign Constable and confreres.

6. **Item**, that the said secondary Constables shall be held to annually render good and loyal [léal] account of the management they shall have had of the goods of the said confraternity; and this, before the aforesaid sovereign Constable, Master Player, standard-bearer, and confreres of the said confraternity; who shall be held for these ends to be summoned by the servant of the said confraternity, to be present if it seems good to them at the hearing of the said account, and insofar as there might be any surplus [boni], they shall be held to furnish it promptly, upon the rendering of the said account, to him or those who shall then be ordered by the above-named.
7. **Item**, that if, by the state of the said account, it should appear that the expenditure, justly and reasonably made, exceeds the revenue, in that case, all the aforesaid confreres and each of them shall be held to contribute, each by equal portion, in such sort that the aforesaid secondary Constables may be promptly reimbursed for the said excess and without any contradiction; on peril that against the refusers or delayers, rigorous execution shall proceed, the aforesaid Lords of the Magistracy authorizing, to make the said execution, the Servant of the said confraternity or others whom they shall find more suitable.
8. **Item**, that all those who desire to be admitted into the said confraternity shall be held to take the oath pertinent in such case and pay upon their entry the sum of 12 Parisian livres for the advancement of the costs and expenses of the said confraternity.
9. **Item**, that all confreres who are presently received into the said confraternity and who shall in the future be received therein, shall not be able to renounce it for any cause whatsoever; but if they commit reprehensible acts, they may [poldront] be expelled by the said Constable, Master Player, standard-bearer, and confreres without power thereafter to be again admitted and received therein.
10. **Item**. The said confreres shall be held to accompany the sovereign Constable, on the day of the Procession of this city, in going to and returning from the said procession, under penalty of 40 Parisian sols or 4 livres fine, applicable to the profit of the said confraternity, at the arbitration of the said sovereign Constable and confreres, saving their excuses and legitimate cause; for which they may commission a man, to the appeasement of the said Constable and confreres.
11. **Item**. Likewise, the said confreres shall be held to accompany the sovereign Constable, on the day of Mgr St. Michael, to the Mass, under peril of 40 Parisian sols fine, applicable like the preceding ones; together also at the dinner, at the ordinary hour, under peril that the defaulters shall also be held to pay half the share of those having dined, unless [n'est que] they have a legitimate excuse and have obtained leave from the said sovereign Constable.
12. **Item**. That each confrere shall be held to have valiant [vailliables] and sufficient arms as the said sovereign and secondary Constables, Master Player, and standard-bearer shall order them; and this, within three months of their reception, in order [adfin] to be able to practice therein and be rendered more prompt and adroit to make use of them, in case of alarm and any other occurrence.
13. **Item**. That every Sunday, a group of ten [dixaine] among the said confreres of The Thirty shall be held to present themselves and be found, each in his turn, one after the other, in the hall, both before and after vespers, save those having played; to wit, from the first Sunday of Lent [Caresme] until All Saints' Day, by twelve o'clock noon, and from All Saints' Day until Lent, by one o'clock in the

afternoon, under penalty of two sols fine; unless they have, upon legitimate excuse, obtained leave from the leader of the ten [dixainier], in which case he shall only be due to pay 18 deniers for the pledge [nantissement]; together with having arms all of one length, clean, and sufficiently armed at the tip [boul] with leather or sufficient fitting [garniment souffisant] to make use of them in their turn.

14. **Item.** That each confrere shall be held [answerable] to him who shall be commissioned his leader of ten; and that each leader of ten in his turn shall command his group of ten to come and **practice** [tirer] arms and one of them to give a prize worth 10 sols, giving notice eight days beforehand; so that there may be means to exercise therein to be rendered more prompt and adroit to better defend one's prize; and in case the said confrere should default, he shall be taxed with a fine of 10 sols; remaining nevertheless obliged to give his said prize on the first day of his group's turn under penalty of a like fine, saving legitimate excuse accepted by his said leader of ten; and then the said leader of ten shall have recourse to another of the said group. But if the said leader of ten had forgotten to make the said announcement, he himself shall be taxed with the said fine of 10 sols applicable to the profit of the confraternity. The summons to give the prize is presently made by the servant of the said confraternity.
15. **Item.** That all the aforesaid confreres of the said group of ten shall be held to pledge [namptir], in order to **fence** [tirer], in hope of winning the said prize, 18 deniers; whereof half shall belong to the said confraternity and the other half to the Master Player; and all confreres, both strangers and others, may [pourront], if it seems good to them, also pledge for the said prize as above, before the lot be cast or drawn; and the other two groups of ten, completing The Thirty, may also pledge after the said lot is drawn, whenever it seems good to them.
16. **Item.** If any strangers residing in this city and qualified should win the prize, he shall be held to give, at the first or second feast following, a similar prize, whereof the pledges shall be divided as above.
17. **Item.** That all confreres shall be held to be present at all summonses and to keep secret all that which, in the assemblies of the said confraternity, shall be said, proposed, decided, without power to reveal it, under peril of fine, to the profit of the said confraternity, or arbitrary punishment [pugnation].
18. **Item.** That whenever any confrere of the said Thirty ends his life by death, the heirs [hoirs] of the same shall be held to pay to the profit of the said confraternity 60 sols for mortmain [morte-main]; and also [sy] the other confreres of the said Thirty shall be held to gratuitously accompany the body of their confrere to his burial and be present at the service, under peril of 10 sols fine applicable to the said confraternity.
19. **Item.** That none shall be received into the said confraternity unless he has previously practiced **wielding** [tirer] arms under a regular master; just as none shall be received to learn under a master of this city, unless he has previously paid, to the profit of the said confraternity, twenty sols and had his name registered in the register of the said confraternity, under peril of paying quadruple, namely: 20 sols by the said master and 60 sols by the apprentice.
20. **Item.** That apprentices not having passed defenses (?) shall not be able to **fence** [tirer] more than twice, and those who shall have passed and satisfied the master, three times.
21. **Item.** All and every apprentice shall be held at their commencement to bring to the hall a sword of the same length as the others, armed at the tip [boul] with leather or sufficient fitting [garement



souffisant], such as they shall wish to use and **fence** [tirer] with, and have it repaired at their expense, every time the case shall arise, without, for this, being able to buy themselves out from the master, under peril of 20 sols fine to the profit of the said confraternity.

22. **Item.** That all apprentices shall be held to the exercise of the said arms, without power to depart; unless he has learned everything, under peril of being held to pay the master, as if he had learned everything; and also that the said master shall be held and obliged to keep daily school, namely: from mid-March until St. Remy's day, at 6 o'clock in the morning until 7 o'clock, and from St. Remy's day until the said mid-March, at three o'clock in the afternoon until four, so that the said apprentices do not miss out; under peril of arbitrary punishment, unless by legitimate excuse; moreover, he must endeavor to render the said confreres of The Thirty adroit in all arms, as much as shall be possible for him, without taking any salary therefor, save the salary agreed with them for the apprenticeship of each arm.
23. **Item.** That none shall be able to enter the hall, where teaching occurs, unless he be at least an apprentice, under penalty of one sol fine to the profit of the said master.
24. **Item.** Whoever enters the hall where teaching occurs, without greeting the day, shall pay to the profit of the said master 1 sol.
25. **Item.** That none being drunk or overcome by drink, shall be able [pourra] to take arms to **fence** [tirer] under peril of 1 sol fine to the profit of the said master; and if he had taken them in such state, and continued to **fence** [tirer] with them after the prohibition made to him by the master, he shall be punished arbitrarily.
26. **Item.** Whoever passes between the arms, save the confreres, shall forfeit a fine of one sol to the profit of the said master.
27. **Item.** Whoever passes over the arms shall forfeit a fine of 1 sol to the profit of the said master.
28. **Item.** Whoever **fences** [tire] or makes a salute [saleve] or lowering [mise bas] without leave of the said master shall forfeit 1 sol fine to his profit.
29. **Item.** Whoever spits on his hands while **fencing** [tirant] arms or rubs his hand against walls or on the ground shall forfeit a fine of one sol to the profit of the said master.
30. **Item.** Whoever **fences** [tire] without gloves or with long attire shall forfeit to the profit of the said master a fine of one sol.
31. **Item.** Whoever makes a salute or lowering with gloves shall forfeit 1 sol fine to the profit of the said master.
32. **Item.** That none shall be able [pourra] to deny when he has felt himself touched, under penalty of one sol fine to the profit of the said master.
33. **Item.** That none shall be able [pourra] to run or flee while **fencing** [tirant] arms or commit other dishonor to the play, under penalty of 1 sol fine to the profit of the said master.
34. **Item.** Whoever **fences** [tire] without hat or cap, without leave of the said master, shall forfeit a fine of 1 sol to his profit.

35. **Item.** Whoever, while **fencing** [tirant], lets fall his sword or dagger, staffs, or other arms shall forfeit a fine of one sol to the profit of the said master.
36. **Item.** Whoever **fences** [tire] for a prize without a belt, who changes his sword or dagger after having **fenced** [tiré] once, without leave of the said master, loses prize and jewels [joyaulx].
37. **Item.** Whoever shall **fence** [tirera] arms shall not be able [pourra] to have a knife or dagger upon him, under peril of 2 sols fine applicable, half to the profit of the said confraternity and the other half to the profit of the said master.
38. **Item.** Whoever causes trouble in the hall, who swears, blasphemes, who derides or mocks, nicknames or insults another, who names the devil, shall forfeit a fine of 3 sols, to be shared [partir] as above; and, beyond this, shall be punished arbitrarily according to the exigency of the case.
39. **Item.** That none may take down or reach the prize but the master, under penalty of 5 sols to be shared as above.
40. **Item.** That none shall be able [pourra] to keep school or sustain the play unless he has passed before a master and has a letter, under peril of 12 livres, to be shared as above.
41. **Item.** That none may throw his sword or arms to the ground, out of anger, under peril of 3 sols to be shared as above.
42. **Item.** Whoever, while **fencing** [tirant], injures his companion to the face or head, drawing blood, shall forfeit a fine of 10 [sols?], to be shared as above.
43. **Item.** Whoever causes a scrape [roze] to the face or a lump [bourseau] on the head, shall forfeit a fine of 10 sols, to be shared as above.
44. **Item.** Whoever injures drawing blood, not to the face or head, shall forfeit a fine of 5 sols, to be shared as above.
45. **Item.** Whoever causes a scrape also, not to the face, shall forfeit a fine of 2 sols, to be shared as above.
46. **And, furthermore,** that for the affairs of the said confraternity, a register shall be kept by the clerk already commissioned and having taken the pertinent oath; in which shall be promptly registered all confreres, acts, punishments, fines, forfeitures, and other business of the said confraternity, without power to put it off until the morrow; and this, in return for a salary of 4 Parisian livres per year, and to be henceforth exempt from all ordinary costs of the said confraternity; also an extract from the said register, signed by the said clerk, shall be held as authentic; who shall likewise be held and obliged to be present, every Sunday, in the hall of the said confraternity, at the hour specified above, to make the said registration, under peril of arbitrary punishment.

Reserving to us and our successors in law, the interpretation and clarification of the points and articles recounted above, should the case arise; together with the revocation, amplification, moderation, and limitation thereof. In witness whereof, we have caused the seal for causes to be set to these presents.

Thus was it done, advised, and ordained in the open Hall, the 20th day of February 1589.

## **ARTICLES TO BE OBSERVED IN THE GOOD KINGDOM ["Bon Royaume" competition] OF THE TWO-HANDED SWORD BY THE CONFRERES OF ST. MICHAEL.**

He who aims [prétend] to become king of the said confraternity shall have three attempts [vennes] and shall be held to touch the defender above the belt [chainture] and the wrist being attached [attaché] with at least three laces [esguillettes], making the touch apparent by indication or mark, to which the defender shall also be obliged.

That all entries [entrées?] and blows given with the pommel and crossguard shall be of no value; but [ains] only those touched with the blade [feuille].

That he who wounds the defender drawing blood shall lose the attempt [venne] and shall be put to the ordinary fine.

If the defender were so wounded that he could not sustain [defend], he shall be sustained [defended for] by him having previously sustained.

And if the defender should wound his party [opponent] drawing blood, while defending himself, he shall likewise be held to pay the fine, as above.

If the defender should let fall or drop his sword to the ground, the assailant who should strike a blow shall have the right to touch at the seam of the gorget [gorgerain] towards the shoulder of the said defender's attire, unless the said assailant had given a touch of greater value before the defender had let fall his sword; having, in such case, the said assailant the right and faculty to hold to the finer touch.

If the defender should fall to the ground, the assailant shall have the right to a free touch [touche franche] at the fold [ply] beneath the hat cord [cordon du chapeau]; unless the said defender, having fallen, finding means to return a valid touch [rendre touche vaillable] to his party, and then the said touch shall be reputed a double hit [coup fourré].

If the assailant should let fall his sword, he shall lose the commenced attempt [venne] and one after; and if he himself should fall to the ground, he shall lose all right to **fence** [tirer les armes].

Those who shall not appear to answer to their names each time their group of ten [dixaine] is called again, whether they are due to **fence** [tirer] or not, shall be taxed VIII sols fine.

And those who shall not appear, in time and hour, to **fence** [tirer] in their turn, according to the drawn lot [lothierte??], shall be taxed XXX Parisian sols fine and shall not be admitted to **fence** [tirer].

Furthermore, making defense [prohibiting] all confreres, of whatever quality or condition they may be, from murmuring against what the deputies for disputes shall have judged and ordained; under penalty of grievous punishment at the discretion of the superiors of the said confraternity.

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## **PRACTICE WHICH IS HELD FOR PLEDGING [NAMPTIR] AT ALL THE KINGDOMS [competitions] WHICH IS DONE, EVERY YEAR, THE 2nd FEAST DAY OR TUESDAY OF PENTECOST.**

Order must be given to the carpenter to place the barriers [bailles] and benches [bancqs], which for this purpose have been made, for the Tuesday morning of Pentecost; making an enclosure [parqué] before the town house [maison de ville].

Item, it is necessary, from the preceding week, to give order to summon all confreres to appear precisely at one hour past noon, on the Monday of Pentecost, under penalty of 10 patars fine; unless they be excused by the grand Constable or the lesser ones beforehand. Which fines shall be paid VIII to XV days after, under peril of being doubled, and thereafter of execution.

Then lot is cast for each group of ten [dixaine] apart, and being thus cast, each leader of ten [dixainier] gives his lot to be cast among them for the priority of the said leaders of ten, and those not **fencing** [tirant] against the king are fined XX Parisian sols.

The next day in the morning, from four o'clock, there must be found in the said enclosure the servant of the confraternity, the drummers, after however the said drummers, from III o'clock, have made the assembly call in the city; the Satan and other lesser officers of the said confraternity to hold everything ready and in order for **fencing** [tirer].

Then at five o'clock precisely the roll call is made of the first three groups of ten, both those **fencing** [tirants] and not **fencing** [non tirants], and at VII o'clock of the two other groups of ten; under penalty for those who shall not appear of III Parisian sols fine to be paid as is said.

In **fencing** [tirant] which kingdom, the points of the charter [carte] of the kingdom shall be exactly observed, all according to the interpretation of the superiors, without power in any fashion to murmur, and whereof it would be good [hon?] to have an oath sworn for this.

Upon which charter of the said kingdom, small interpretations have been made which follow:

Touching what is said that one must touch above the belt [ceinture], whence doubt arose [sourdoit], whether he being touched on the belt was vanquished or not, it has been resolved that this would be understood as the seam [cousture] of the doublet [pourpoint], whether there be a belt or not; the said belt remaining in the same situation as it was found when the blow was given, and furthermore it is judged whether the said blow is passing the belt or not.

It is good also to warn that they have no poignard or knife [cousteau].

It must also be exactly observed that the touch must be apparent [paraitre], without consideration being given to having felt it well, because often one touches oneself with the guard of one's sword or the guard of that of one's adversary, which is of no value.

Regarding the IV (?) article, by which it is said: "wound the defender drawing blood", this is understood [to mean] beyond the wrist and not on the hands.

Regarding the IV (?) article, great doubt arose touching what happens if the king be wounded or sick, unable to play [jouer - fight], whether the preceding [defender] having sustained [defended], must sustain for the said king or indeed for his own profit; and what moved [meult - raised] this question was that the king of the confraternity, named Marlier, the eve of the kingdom to be sustained by him, was wounded and had his little finger broken; cause for which it was questioned who should sustain the kingdom. Upon which it was resolved, in conformity with the said article and in clarification thereof, that the Regent, as his predecessor, would have to sustain in place of the said king, making oath to sustain him with all his strength as for himself; notwithstanding his own interest and particular pain [peine - trouble/difficulty?] that he himself might [poldroit] be king if he played for the conquest [conquer?].

And if the said regent should come to be defeated [deffranquy], he shall have his attempts [vennes] according to his order from the cast lot in case his turn has not yet passed, and, in case it has passed, he shall **fence** [tirera] first of all against his vanquisher, and this, for his own account [particulier].

As also consequently the successor kings during the said kingdom, should they be wounded, the preceding ones shall sustain in their place forcibly and without murmuring, without being able to excuse themselves therefrom, save by a wound they might have received and whereof they shall show evidence, in which case the one preceding him shall be taken.

Yes, all those who pledged [namptisseurs] shall be expressly held to **fence** [tirer], unless they should show evidence of a notable wound.

Regarding the VI (?) article touching the explanation of the seam of the gorget [gorgerant] towards the shoulder, this is understood as the seam of the collar [collet] either of the cassock [casacque] or doublet [pourpoint] immediately on the shoulder.

It is also practiced, to avoid murmurs, to have the kings of the said kingdom swear an oath not to favor anyone, together with [an oath] not to murmur, but [ains] to defer to the ordinance and judgment of their superiors; together observe strictly that no one shouts [crie??] in the enclosure [parcqué].

And to further incite **fencing** [tirer], 20 patars have been set by the king to be paid by those who shall not **fence** [tireront point], over and above the sol which is paid by each confrere; which twenty patars and the said sol the said confreres shall be held to pay within a month after, under peril of execution; and no one is exempt from the said sol, from the said 20 patars, not even the sick or those unable to **fence** [tirer]; because this is not a fine, but [ains] an advance [advanche] for the king, reducing so much the costs that he must make.

Item, to keep order in the play [jeu] and to obviate those who run after their opponents, notwithstanding that they had previously been touched, it has been resolved that one has but one step, after having received the blow; and if the said blow is not returned [rend] on the first step, but [ains] two steps are made, that blow shall not be reputed good nor valid.

Which king being determined [tiré - decided/drawn?], everyone shall go to prepare themselves, to be equipped with sword and sash [escharpe] and be found precisely at ten o'clock in the hall, and from there go to Mass, attend it in order, and from there also return in order unto the lodging where the feast is held; under peril of 40 sols fine or other arbitrary penalty; at which feast ordinarily come the confreres who wish to accompany the king; and, in case someone wishes to invite a stranger, leave is first requested of the grand Constable and VI (6) Parisian livres are paid for the said stranger, and for the rest, after the present [gift?] is made, the confreres are taxed at the discretion of the sovereign Constable.

While **fencing** [tirant] the said good kingdom, a prize of IIII (4) to VI (6) livres is also given by the confraternity, which is **fenced** [se tire] for with the sword or poignard.

This note follows in a different hand from that of the main documents: Since the Confraternity (has been) augmented to the number of one hundred including the officers, it has been resolved that, for **fencing** [tirer] the said kingdom, by right there should only be 40 confreres obliged to **fence** [tirer] against the king, under penalty of 20 patars fine, who shall be chosen by cast lot; and, furthermore, those shall also be obliged to **fence** [tirer] who shall not have appeared at the summons, the eve of the said kingdom, also under penalty of 20 patars fine, all to the profit of the king.