

A Brief Overview of Fencing

ORIGINS

Fencing began as a form of combat and is known to have been practised well before the birth of Christ. Relief carvings in the temple of Madinet-Habu near Luxor, Egypt, dating from approximately 1190 BC depict fencers competing. As a sport, fencing began in either the 14th or 15th century and both Italy and Germany lay claim to the origins of the sport. In 1570 Henri Saint-Didier of France gave names to fencing's major movements and most of that nomenclature remains. From the 16th to the 18th century, sword fights and duels were common. Combatants in these duels used a variety of weapons, including singlesticks, quarterstaves, and backswords, and the bouts were often bloody and occasionally fatal.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

Fencing was first contested during the 1896 Olympics and is one of the few sports to have been contested at every Olympic Games. Fencing was one of the few sports that admitted professionals prior to the 1980s. Today, men compete in both team and individual events at the Olympics using three types of swords – the foil, the épée and the sabre. Women's fencing first appeared in the Olympics in 1924.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Fencing rules are simple: Hit your opponent without being hit. Usually, you must score five points in order to win a bout. In modern fencing, competition is divided among three swordforms, the foil, the epee, and the sabre.

THE FOIL



The Foil is a light, swift weapon. Points may be scored only with the tip of the foil, not the edges. In foil, the trunk of the body is the target area.

THE EPEE



The Epee (pronounced ep-pay) descended from the original duel weapon. Slightly heavier than the foil, the epee is also a thrusting-only weapon form. In target area, epee is the entire body – from the tips of your toes to the top of your head.

THE SABRE



The Sabre used in today's bouts comes from the days of the mounted cavalry. It was a weapon designed to attack the upper portion of an opponent who was riding a horse. Thus, the sabre is used as a slashing and thrusting weapon. Sabre's target is everything from the waist up, head included.

SOME FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO FENCE(D)

Otto Von Bismarck
Danny Kaye
Neil Diamond
Sir Richard Burton
Aldo Nadi
Bruce Dickinson

Grace Kelly
Winston Churchill
Rene Descartes
T.H. White
Erza Pound
Robert Montgomery

Basil Rathbone
Cornel Wilde
Douglas Fairbanks Jr.
Harry Hamlin
Jose Ferrer
Bo Derek

SIX COOL THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT FENCING

1. Fencing is one of only four sports to be included in every modern Olympic Games, since the first in 1896. Fencing was also a sport in the original Olympic Games in ancient Greece. Albertson Van Zo Post of the New York Fencers Club led our early Olympic efforts by winning 5 Olympic medals in the 1904 St. Louis Olympics including 2 gold medals (1 team, 1 individual). Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Games, was a fencer.
2. The tip of the fencing weapon is the second fastest moving object in sports; the first is the marksman's bullet.
3. Fencing is conducted on a 14m x 2m "strip" or "piste" to replicate combat in confined quarters such as a castle hallway. The end of the fencing strip represents the line drawn in the earth by duelists' seconds: to retreat behind this line during the duel indicated cowardice and loss of honor. Foil is the only weapon that has always had "strip" rules. For many years, epee and saber fencers could move about with no restrictions.
4. The 750 gram weight test used to ensure a touch is scored with sufficient force is based on the amount of tension required to break the skin. In a duel, honor was done when blood was first drawn -- even if from a minor wound such as a blister.
5. The target area in sabre, originally a cavalry weapon, is from the waist up because it is contrary to the rules of chivalry to injure an opponent's horse. The rules in sabre changed for one season in 1903 to forbid hits with the point. And from 1908 - 1915 saber fencers were awarded 2 points for a riposte.
6. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, was a fencing master working at a YMCA when he decided to shoot a ball into a basket. The strip - at 46ft - fits neatly across the 50 ft width of a regulation basketball court.