

Fencing Overview

Fencing is one of the four sports which has been featured at every modern Olympic Games. Currently, three types of weapon are used in Olympic fencing:

- **Foil** — a light thrusting weapon; the valid target is restricted to the torso, the chest, shoulders, and back; double touches are not allowed. This weapon follows the rule of "right of way"
- **Épée** — a heavy thrusting weapon; the valid target area covers the entire body; double touches are allowed. There is no "right of way"
- **Sabre** — a light cutting and thrusting weapon; the valid target area is the saddle line, which is from one side of your hip to the other and up, this also includes the head. The target area does not include the hands. This weapon follows "right of way"

The word fence was originally a shortening of the Middle English *defens*, which came from an Italian word, *defensio*, in origin a Latin word. The origins of fencing date back to Egypt and ancient Greece around 1200 BC. Carvings found depict bouts being fought using protected tips on swords, masks, and judges.

Olympic fencing (or simply "fencing") refers to the fencing seen in most competitions, including the Olympic Games and the World Cup. Competitions are conducted according to rules laid down by the *Fédération Internationale d'Escrime* (FIE), the international governing body. These rules evolved from a set of conventions developed in Europe between mid 17th and early 20th century with the specific purpose of regulating competitive activity.

Foil

The foil is a light and flexible weapon, originally developed in the mid 17th century as a training weapon for the small sword, a light one-handed sword designed almost exclusively for thrusting.

Épée

The sporting weapon known today, was invented in the second half of the 19th century by a group of French students, who felt that the conventions of foil were too restrictive, and the weapon itself too light; they wanted an experience closer to that of an actual duel. At the point of its conception, the épée was, essentially, an exact copy of a small sword but without the needle-sharp point. Like the foil, the épée is a thrusting weapon: to score a valid hit, the fencer must fix the point of his weapon on his opponent's target. However, the target area covers the entire body, and there are no rules regarding who can hit when (unlike in foil and sabre, where there are priority rules). In the event of both fencers making a touch within 40 milliseconds of each other, both are awarded a point (a double hit), except when the score is equal and the point would mean the win for both, such as in modern pentathlon's one-hit épée, where neither fencer receives a point.

Sabre

Sabre is the 'cutting' weapon: points may be scored with edges and surfaces of the blade, as well as the point. There is some debate as to whether the modern fencing sabre is descended from the cavalry sabres of Turkic origin, which became popular in Central and Western Europe around the time of Napoleonic Wars, or one of Europe's indigenous edged duelling weapons, such as the cutting rapier. In practice, it is likely to be a hybrid of the two. Most of the conventions and vocabulary of modern sabre fencing were developed by late 19th and early 20th century masters from Italy and Hungary, perhaps most notable among them being Italo Santelli (1866–1945).