



Tournament Rules

These rules cover all Herne-branded tournaments. Please read carefully before competing or refereeing at any Herne event as these rules do differ in some cases to other UK-based and international tournaments.

When you Arrive

When you arrive at a Herne's event, you will be expected to:

- Visit the tournament organiser desk and 'check in' for your tournament. This was previously done at the table during kit check, but to ensure all fencers are in the building prior to a tournament, we want to do this ahead of time.
- Afterwards, head to sword checking to ensure your swords meet our standards / requirements. Parameters for swords can be found on our webpage alongside these tournament rules.

Tournament Structure

Tournaments will fought across Pools, followed by Eliminations

- Pools -
 - During the Pool stage, everyone will fight each other fencer in their pool.
 - Wins at the Pool stage will count for one point. Loses count for zero points.
 - Wins are the main ranking criteria, with net score (points for minus points against) as the secondary criteria.
- Eliminations -
 - Eliminations will follow the Pool stages and will be single-elimination (if you lose, you will not continue in the tournament).
 - Number of elimination rounds will depend on the number of competitors and this will be advertised ahead of time.
 - Once four fencers remain, there will be a semi-final round. Following this, the two losing fencers will fight for the bronze medal, and two winning fencers will fight for gold and silver.



Match Summary

Each match will be run and scored as follows:

- Each match lasts for either three minutes or until a fencer scores 10 points, whichever comes first.
- The round timer will not stop for regular discussion but will be stopped for protests and more in-depth judge discussion.
- “Last Exchange” will be called 10 seconds before the timer expires to ensure fencers are aware that their current or next exchange is the final one before the match finishes.
- Draws are not possible. If a match goes to time with both fencers ending with the same score, the match will continue with the first fencer to score points being declared the winner. Doubles resulting in no points will be replayed until there is a clear winner (which can include points from a 3-2 double, for clarity).
- Matches that have gone to time can end on a double for no score assuming that at the end of the exchange there is a winning fencer per the score.

The process for each match will play out as follows:

- Each fencer will start in their corner.
- The head referee will confirm to all that the exchange can begin by saying “fence”, “fight” or another similar word or phrase.
- Once a scoring action has been observed, the head referee will call “halt” and all fencing must immediately end with both fencers returning to their corners.
- Halt can be called for both scoring actions and for safety reasons. Only the head referee can call a halt for scoring actions, but anyone from fellow referees, table staff, or even bystanders can call “halt” if they spot a safety issue that must be addressed for the match to continue safely.
- The head referee will then consider the results of the exchange, awarding points to either fencer depending on their actions in the exchange, or no points depending on the outcome. They can also consider protests from each fencer if applicable.

UPDATE Last Exchange:

- Last exchange will be called at 2:50 on the clock. Once this has been called, the exchange in progress is the final exchange of the match, regardless of if the last exchange finishes at 2:55 or 3:30.
- If last exchange is not called (in error) and the clock runs down, the next exchange will be considered the last exchange of the match.



- Last exchange can not end on a “No Exchange” due to referee mistakes, equipment fault, or unclear exchange. If this occurs, the exchange must be replayed. A double hit is not a “No Exchange” (3:3, 2:2, 1:1) and thus ends the match at the current score.

Protests

Fencers are encouraged to be honest and demonstrate sportsmanship in all their matches. After all exchanges, fencers are able to protest in their favour or concede a hit against themselves for the benefit of their opponent.

The process for raising a protest is as follows:

- After the head referee has given their verdict on the previous exchange, fencers may raise their hand to indicate that they would like to speak to the referee.
- The head referee will walk over to the fencer's corner and allow them time to make their case, whether that is to protest in their favour about the previous exchange, or to concede a hit to their opponent. They may also use this time to clarify any rules questions or similar.
- In the event of a point concession, the head referee will likely accept this and amend the score without further discussion and the match will continue.
- Similarly, for any ‘protests’ that are made to ask a question or clarify a rule, following this the match will continue as normal.

Challenging the referee's verdict:

- For protests where the fencer is arguing their own case for scoring, the head referee will announce to the table that there is a “protest” before going to speak to other referees and fencers.
- Once finished with discussion, the head referee will announce their decision based on conversations with all parties.
- As a general rule, if no new information about the exchange has been gained from conversations with either the side referee or opposing fencer, it is likely that the protest will not be accepted.
- During the Pool stages of each tournament, fencers will be allowed 3 protests in their favour per match. When making this kind of protest, the table staff will record the number of such protests per fencer, and after this limit is reached, no more protests of this kind will be available.
- ***UPDATE***: For our next event in February 2026, we will be trialling continuing this limit throughout eliminations. As such, all fights will have a limit of three protests in



- the fencer's own favour. Protesting to give points to your opponent or reject points given to yourself are unlimited.

Notes on protests:

- Only the fencer is allowed to protest - their corner coach (limited to one per fencer) is not allowed to protest on their fencer's behalf, but can encourage them to protest themselves.
- 'On piste' fighters will be penalised for the conduct of their corner person. If a corner is attempting to influence a refereeing decision, being vocal about calls or showing disrespect, the fencer will receive the appropriate card for this behaviour.
 - Supporting and coaching between hits is still allowed, and corners may speak on behalf of a fencer if the fencer asks them to (especially at Herne's Cup where the experience level is lower). However, the corner will be treated as an extension of the fencer regarding conduct on piste.
 - Corner coaches protesting loudly on their fencer's behalf will result in a yellow card for the fencer. Any subsequent examples of corner coach protests will result in red cards. This cannot result in a black card.

Appeals:

- If a fencer believes that their head referee has made an incorrect interpretation of the tournament rules that has resulted in them losing out on points, they have the right to appeal to a tournament organiser.
- If after discussions with their head referee the fencer is certain that rules have been misinterpreted, they can ask the head referee to contact a member of the organising committee to make a ruling.
- Once the organiser has been called, they will speak to the fencer about their complaint and then speak to the head referee to confirm the interpretation.
- If the head referee is found to be in the wrong, then the exchange can be judged per the rules as written in this document.
- If the fencer is found to be incorrect, they will lose the right to protest for the remainder of the match regardless of how many protests they have left in their favour.
- If a fencer wishes to appeal on behalf of their opponent and is found to be incorrect, no penalty will be given.
- We expect this rule to be used sparingly as all head referees should be well acquainted with the rules in this document.



- This rule is only to be used for an incorrect interpretation of the tournament rules - you cannot appeal if you just think your head referee has called the exchange incorrectly (e.g. an issue with tempo, hit quality etc.).

Scoring during an exchange

All strikes must be made with control - a controlled and clear strike is more likely to score.

A quality strike is defined as:

- A cut made with the edge of the blade.
- A thrust made with the tip of the blade.
- A pommel strike made cleanly with the base of the pommel.
- Hits that are flat or mechanically insufficient to cause damage to an opponent (e.g. cutting with the strong of the blade, making little contact, or incidentally hitting an opponent whilst making a different action) will not be scored.
- Draw cuts will score assuming that sufficient pressure is put into them. A missed thrust that scrapes along the target without sufficient positive pressure will not score.
- Any cut that is blocked by the off arm that would go through to the head will be counted as the higher scoring target.

Illegal targets are as follows:

- Back of the head
- Spine
- Groin (note – this does not include a horizontal cut to the legs that hits the cup)
- Back of the knee
- Foot

Hitting these targets will result in a warning, as will showing these targets to your opponent (mainly the back of the head), even if accidental.

You cannot score by hitting an illegal target. Any exchange where an illegal target is hit will be called as 'No Exchange', with any penalties given as written below.

UPDATE Under no circumstances can you score from hitting a banned target, even if the hit made is significantly pulled or represented.



Grappling

The following rules for grappling apply to all weapons:

- Once a grapple situation begins, fencers will have 5 seconds to make headway towards a scoring action before the exchange is ended. Head referees will count back from 5 out loud once the grapple begins to give notice of the time limit to begin progress towards a scoring action. If nothing occurs then “halt” will be called.
- At the end of the count (so once the head referee has shouted “1”) if a score appears imminent then head referees can allow the exchange to continue at their discretion. If the grapple does not appear to be going either way, it will be halted.
- Grapples will be halted for safety reasons if approaching the edge of the piste regardless of timing.
- If fencers attempt to grasp the tip of a blade, it must be stationary. If it is moving, this will be considered a strike to the hand. If a fencer is attempting to control the tip of
- the opposing blade and the opponent pulls away, that is considered a draw cut to the hand.
- Disarms in all weapons score 3 points. A fencer dropping their weapon due to their opponent's actions counts as a disarm. A fencer dropping their weapon without their opponent's influence (for example, because they have landed a successful thrust and
- the flex has pinged the blade out of their hand) does not count as a disarm. This is considered a lack of control, however, so will receive a penalty.
- A DISARM OR GRAPPLE CANNOT BE SCORED AS AN AFTERBLOW. Actions with the blade always take precedents.
- Throws, joint locks and kicks are NOT allowed.

Stepping out of the piste

The following policies are in place for stepping out of the piste during an exchange:

- “Stepping out of the piste” is defined as both feet having left the piste. Having one foot in and one foot out of the piste is considered ‘in bounds’.
- Ringouts do not score under any circumstances.
- Stepping out of the piste during the course of fencing (for example whilst circling your opponent or when retreating) will be considered a minor penalty as defined later in this document.
- Forcing your opponent out of the piste physically will be considered a major penalty.



- If a grapple ends up progressing out of the piste, both fencers will be given a minor penalty for leaving the ring.
- If you hit your opponent as they leave the piste with both feet, you will score points as normal and they will receive a minor penalty for stepping out.
- If you hit your opponent when you are fully out of the piste, your hit will not score.

As a general principle, it is the responsibility of all fencers to keep within the bounds of your piste when fencing. If you are being forced back into your corner by an aggressive opponent, you cannot use stepping out of the ring to force a reset without penalty.

Longsword

The scoring for all Longsword tournaments is as follows:

- 3 points for a cut, slice or thrust made to the head (including the bib of the mask).
- 3 points for a thrust to the torso (from the shoulder inwards, and the hips upwards).
- 2 points for other valid hits (cut or thrust to a limb, or cut to the torso).
- One-handed strikes score one fewer point than their full score as above. This is with the exception of during a grapple where one-handed strikes score normally.
- Pommel strikes score 2 points. These must be made with the pommel of the longsword to the mesh of the mask. POMMEL STRIKES CAN BE DEMONSTRATED, but must be of sufficient quality and not blocked by an arm or weapons, and will be scored at the head referee's discretion.

Sabre

The scoring for all Sabre tournaments is as follows:

- 3 points for a cut, slice or thrust made to the head (including the bib of the mask).
- 3 points for a thrust to the torso (from the shoulder inwards, and the hips upwards).
- 2 points for other valid hits (cut or thrust to a limb, or cut to the torso).
- Cuts made with the back edge of the blade (defined as the top half of the back edge) are scored at -1 point. For example, a back edge cut to the hand would score 1 point.
- No pommel strikes are allowed.



Rapier & Dagger

The scoring for all Rapier & Dagger tournaments is as follows:

- Thrusts made to the torso or head score 3 points.
- Every other thrust or cut to other targets scores 1 point.
- Dagger thrusts to the torso or head score 1 point. Cuts or thrusts to other targets will not score.

Sword & Buckler

The scoring for all Sword & Buckler tournaments is as follows:

- 3 points for a cut, slice or thrust made to the head (including the bib of the mask).
- 3 points for a thrust to the torso (from the shoulder inwards, and the hips upwards).
- 2 points for other valid hits (cut or thrust to a limb, or cut to the torso).
- Hits with the buckler will not score and will result in a penalty.

Afterblows / Doubles

Following a scoring hit with any weapon, there is a period of time following the hit for the opposing fencer to make an afterblow:

- Afterblows must be made within one “tempo” of the original scoring attack.
- A tempo is defined by an ‘action’ or “fencing move” in between actions:
 - After a hit, any replying scoring action that happens in ONE fencing moment is considered an in time afterblow.
 - An afterblow that occurs directly after the initial strike will be considered in tempo. Likewise, an attack that has already begun or is primed to begin following the initial hit will be considered in tempo.
 - An afterblow that begins significantly after the initial hit, requires a large move of the arm or blade to make, requires more than one step, or any other non-direct action in order to make the blow sufficiently scoring, will not be considered in tempo.



- For example, a missed parry that is immediately followed by a flicking cut along the same line to the mask will be considered in tempo.
- Equally, a fencer hit, then taking more than one step to prepare their attack, or bring them their arm back to start a new action before making a strike, will be considered out of tempo.

UPDATE Clarification on Afterblow Timing:

If you are hit and have not yet started your afterblow action, you do still have an opportunity to afterblow assuming you begin your action after the hit without hesitation. Any hesitation, attempts to feint, or anything else which is not a direct attempt to afterblow will be considered out of time.

- The timing for an afterblow is defined as one direct action with one step allowed to make a hit.
- Any pausing or hesitation before your action means your afterblow is out of time.
- Taking more than one step or lunge means your afterblow is out of time.
- Feinting and then hitting are multiple actions meaning your afterblow is out of time.
- If your afterblow attempt is parried or voided, any more attacks you make are out of time.
- A step can be a lunge, passing step or fencing step, as long as it is only one single foot movement.

All double hits will be weighted against each other. For example:

- A strike to the head for red fencer (3 points) versus a strike to the hand for blue fencer (2 points) will result in 1 point being scored for red ($3 - 2 = 1$ point).

While doubles will score, advancement to eliminations is based on net score, and therefore clean hits are significantly more advantageous.

Penalties

We expect all fencers to act with both control and sportsmanship in mind. Where events occur where these two are not followed, a penalty will result for the offending fencer.

All matches will work on a card system, with each penalty being awarded a colour card depending on the frequency and severity of the penalty.



For all minor penalties, the following series of cards will be given for each penalty:

- The first infraction is a white card - this constitutes an initial warning.

UPDATE In HEMA Scorecard, there is no option for “white”. Instead, HEMA Scorecard refers to this as a card with “No Colour”.

- The second instance is a yellow card - this is the step prior to point penalties and should be a signal to fencers to immediately stop whatever action has caused the penalty to occur.
- The third instance is a red card - when a fencer receives a red card the opposing fencer will be awarded with 1 additional point. A match can be capped at 10 due to a red card penalty.
- No minor penalty can result in a black card. Successive red cards will continue to be given and points will be awarded to the opposing fencer in all instances.

For major penalties, the following series of cards will be given for each penalty:

- The first instance of a major penalty will begin with a yellow card.
- The following infraction will result in a red card and an additional point for the opposing fencer.
- The third instance of a major penalty will result in a black card and the offending fencer will be issued a match loss. Any subsequent black card results in a disqualification from the current tournament and any other tournaments that the fencer may be taking part in during the weekend.

For extreme penalties, the following series of cards will be given for each penalty:

- The first instance of an extreme infraction will be awarded a red card if considered accidental, or a black card immediately if considered intentional and particularly egregious.
- The second instance of an extreme penalty will always result in a black card.

As a general principle, therefore:

- A white card is considered a minor warning.
- Please note: there are no “unofficial warnings” at any Herne’s events. A white card should be considered an unofficial warning. A white or “No Colour” card is not to be seen as a punishment, rather it is a different name for an unofficial warning that can be logged on HEMA Scorecard.
- A yellow card is a more serious warning to ensure the fencer knows that consequences will occur if actions continue.



- A red card is a serious warning where the fencer will actively be disadvantaged in their fight due to their actions.
- A black card results in a match loss in the first instance, and a complete disqualification thereafter.

UPDATE Penalties and Scoring

- If you receive a penalty (and associated card) during an exchange, your scoring action is considered void, unless the carded offence is hitting the floor.
- Hitting the floor is seen as the most minor penalty in our system and has no negative effects on either fencer, so a fencer can score in the exchange if they hit the floor.
- If your opponent receives a penalty during an exchange, you are still able to score assuming that you do not also receive a penalty. For example, if you and your opponent double hit as they leave the piste (which is a penalty), you will score and they will not. Conversely, if your opponent exposes a banned target and you hit that target, even accidentally, you will both receive a penalty and neither action will score.
- Red cards carry a point penalty of +1 to your opponent

Some further points on penalties:

- For future matches, any fencer with up to a red card has their limit reset to yellow. Any further infractions will continue to red and beyond.
- Any fencer with a black card will be disqualified as described above upon further infraction of the same type in future matches.
- Verbal abuse is unacceptable in all forms and will immediately result in a black card.

Please see the list below for examples of each type of penalty:

- Minor penalties:
 - Exposing the back of the head.
 - Fencing Without control (e.g. striking the floor, accidentally striking the back of the head if exposed / hitting an illegal target unintentionally, letting go of the sword etc.).
 - Leaving the piste (stepping out of bounds to intentionally avoid an action).
 - Arriving late to your piste or not being ready when called for your match (within reason).



- Major penalties:
 - Carrying on fencing after the judge calls halt.
 - Excessive force (striking too hard, forcing your opponent out of the piste).
- Extreme penalties:
 - Throws and kicks.
 - Deliberately striking illegal targets.
 - Deliberately removing equipment after kit check.
 - Unsporting conduct, verbal abuse of opponent or officials, and displays of disrespect for opponents or officials.

In principle, we feel that hard guidelines on penalties which are relatively strict will result in a better tournament for all involved. The above list of penalties is not a catch-all, and therefore it is expected that head referees will make a judgement call both on whether an action constitutes a penalty and how severe said penalty should be.

Other Tournament Rules

This section is dedicated to other tournament rules that do not fall into other categories.

Camera mount and tripods:

- **Herne's will no longer allow tripods owned by individuals at its events.**
- Camera tripods continue to pose a trip hazard and encroach on referee space. People are also being mindful of filming, and in an attempt to not spoil the footage, are stepping into places that are unsafe.
- At Herne's Cup: The Open in July 2025, we will supply two tabletop phone tripods at every table for fencers or corners to use for their fights.
- If Herne's staff see a tripod, it will be removed (with any device attached) and taken to sword check to be reclaimed, probably with a frown.