A Fencing Parent's Primer

How to survive and thrive as a fencing parent in Canada

This guide contains tips and advice on everything that you need to know as a parent of a fencer. Over 25 years of experience gained from raising 3 fencers from novices to champions to an Olympian.

By B, J, &A Goldie

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Forward by Brita Goldie

As someone new to fencing, or just new to learning about fencing, it is a sport that can seem complex and overwhelming. This guide is a clear and easy introduction to helping you understand how to support your child in fencing and helping you understand the many small details that make up this sport. As someone who started fencing at the age of 12 in a family that was new to the sport, I was lucky to have parents that learned about the sport and learned how to support me on my journey from beginner fencing to national champion. This guide is a summary of over 25 years of experience guiding 3 children through the sport and shares key insights into the sport that will help you support your child. I remember my first tournament, at a small town in southern Alberta, and the nervousness I felt. Having a parent that supported me but also knew enough about the sport to help me get ready and understand the rules was key to success. Granted, success was finishing last (I finished dead last at every tournament my first year). My dad, Brad, not only started fencing himself but later became the president of the Canadian Fencing Federation so he definitely has the knowledge and expertise to guide all parents on their journey into fencing. This guide is a great way to know how to support your child and understand fencing, but between the lines is the adventure of my family and the love of my parents. Hopefully as you move with your child into fencing, you are just as lucky as we have been in experiencing the connection and love created by this sport.

Introduction

Raising 3 children, and 1 parent, from novices to champions to one Olympian in fencing's three different specialities has created a wealth of knowledge that begs to be shared. The information we present should be considered as advice which, in no way, guarantees success. The advice is meant to help answer many of the questions that new parents and guardians run across as they encounter the world of fencing. The prices noted are suggestions that are dated to 2020 and are in Canadian dollars (C$).

Terminology

Fencing, like many other sports, has many terms and jargon that are thrown around by the experts and often confuse the novice. The terminology that we will be using is specific to the equipment and environment of fencing and will not cross into the realms of coaching.

- **Sport Governance** - There are 4 levels of organization that you will run into as you move through the fencing landscape.
    - Club - The first level every parent encounters. Your coaches should have national certification from the **C**oaches **A**ssociation of **C**anada (*CAC*). The CAC certifies coaches through the **N**ational **C**oaching **C**ertification **P**rogram (*NCCP*). Fencing has four NCCP levels in Canada.
    - **P**rovincial **S**port **O**rganization (*PSO*) - The next level beyond the club level. This is your province's local governing body and they are responsible for developing, running, and maintaining fencing in your province.
    - **N**ational **S**porting **O**rganization (*NSO*) - The next level above the PSO. In Canada, this is the Canadian Fencing Federation (CFF). As you can imagine, they are responsible for developing, running, and maintaining fencing in Canada. They are also responsible for representing Canada in the international realm.
    - **Z**onal **S**porting **O**rganization (ZGO) – Canada belongs to the Americas zone and we are governed by the Confederation Panamericana de Esgrima (CPE).
    - **I**nternational **S**porting **O**rganization (*ISO*) - Fencing's highest governing body is the Federation International d'Escrime (FIE).
    - The flow of fencing governance is club-PSO-CFF-CPE-FIE.

- **Multi-sport Governance**
    - **P**rovincial **G**overning **O**rganization (PGO) – each province has a separate government organization. In Alberta the PGO is Alberta Sport Connection.
    - **N**ational **G**overning **O**rganization (*NGO*) – Sport Canada is Canada's NGO.
    - **C**anadian **C**entre for **E**thics in **S**port (*CCES*) – better known for its role in monitoring and policing anti-doping in Canada, CCES has a broad mission to work towards accountability, integrity, respect, leadership, stewardship, excellence, and quality across all sports in Canada.
    - **W**orld **A**nti-**D**oping **A**gency (WADA) – the international body responsible for monitoring and policing anti-doping.

  - The Olympic Games has its only family of organizations that work alongside the various ISO's and NGO's. Canada's representation in the Olympic family is managed by the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC). The COC reports to the zonal organization Pan American Sports Organziation (PASO). PASO reports to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The flow is COC-PASO-IOC.
- **Tournaments and multi-sport games–** There are several acronyms in describing fencing tournaments that you will run across. Here are a few beginning from the bottom:
  - Sanctioned event **–** these fencing events are governed by the PSO, CFF, or FIE and bound to their policies, procedures, and rules.
  - Directoire Technique – The DT is the group that is running the tournament. The USFA call this group the Bout Committee.
  - **A**lberta **W**inter **G**ames **-** AWG
  - **C**anada **W**inter **G**ames, **C**anada **S**ummer **G**ames **-** CWG, CSG
  - **R**egional **Y**outh **C**ircuit – RYC's are run by the United States Fencing Association (USFA)
  - **N**orth **A**merican **C**ups – NAC's are run by the USFA and are a big step up in size, organization, and skill compared to local and Canadian tournaments.
  - **Pan Am Championships–** Pan American Championships are run by the zonal fencing body. Generally, these are the most important championships for those trying to qualify for the Olympic Games.
  - **Pan Am Games –** the quadrennial multi-sport games run by the zonal governing body.
  - **O**lympic **G**ames **-** OG.
  - The games are designed so that each level builds towards the next (AWG-CWG-Pan Am Games-Olympic Games)

The most important phrase to remember

The title of this section seems ominous and it may be the most important thing you need to understand when communicating about fencing to a non-fencing audience. The key phrase is "SPORTING EQUIPMENT." Today's society is extremely sensitive to words such as weapons and blades. Fencers, and those who know about fencing, use these colloquial terms to describe their gear but our foils, epees and sabres have long left the realm of blades and weapons. They are now just the equipment of our sport just like baseball bats are equipment of baseball.

As with all communication, you must be aware of your audience when you are describing your sport and/or the contents of your baggage. Never forget, the answer to "what is in your bags?" is always SPORTING EQUIPMENT.

Budgeting

This topic will be reviewed in much more detail later in this document but there are several key issues that you should be aware of in general.

Exchange rates, Shipping costs, and CBSA Tariffs

Anybody that has purchased anything from a non-Canadian distributor will be very familiar with the exchange rate between Canadian Dollars and the target country's currency. Most Canadian's are well aware of the swings between the Canadian and American dollar exchanges so factor in your exchange rate before making a choice between Canadian and non-Canadian suppliers. All prices in this guide are quoted in Canadian dollars (C$).

Shipping costs can add up if you are constantly purchasing items separately. Many distributors offer discounts on their shipping costs for large dollar purchases and many offer free 'UPS' ground shipping. We have found that the US Postal Service and Canada Post offer the cheapest shipping rates after free delivery. A tip is to group up with other athletes who need to make a purchase. Many clubs/coaches have deals with distributors and they may offer significant discounts on your purchase.

One factor that many people forget to consider is that the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) will review all imports into Canada and they may issue tariffs on your newly purchased equipment. Check with the shipper when purchasing equipment as they may be able to estimate the excise duty.

Lastly, consider using local vendors when making your purchases. Local vendors offer the useful ability of trying on your fencing gear before you make the purchase. They also usually have better return policies and/or servicing of defective equipment. It is easy to go online and find a price that appears to be much cheaper than your local supplier only to find that the exchange rate, shipping costs, and excise duties made your local suppliers cost much more reasonable.

Line Item versus Project

Most parents are happy and supportive when their child finds a sport that they enjoy. They are generally impressed at how low fencing's initial front-end expenditure is and begin to purchase gear as one-off purchases. We call this kind of purchase a line item. The first local tournament will see some additional costs but they are just more line items. Proud parents witness their athlete's first podium visits and now begin to think about future glories. Trips to Canada Cups, RYC's, NAC's, and National Championships now look very real in your athlete's future. Suddenly you realise that these line items are beginning to really add up. Let's rewind this scenario and begin again by treating fencing like a financial project.

Parents often ask us about their athlete making a national team and we often begin the conversation by asking them how much they are willing to spend. No, you cannot bribe your way onto a national team. The question is meant to focus the family into treating fencing like a financial project with a specific outcome. Would you be surprised to learn that putting a 14 year old on the Cadet National team will take you 3 years and $30,000+.

If we take a typical path to the Cadet National team and we try to find the cheapest path then we will spend approximately:

- $3500 - 3 years of club fees
- $2250 – private lessons

- $695 – 3 years of PSO, HP fees, and NSO fees
- $2500 – 3 years of purchasing gear
- $2250 – 3 years of tournament fees
- $20,000 – 3 years of travel to tournaments
- $1200 – physiotherapy
- TOTAL - $32,395 or roughly $11,000/year

And that is just for the Cadet Team. These costs escalate as the ratio of domestic to international trips change as the athlete excels and tries for the Junior and Senior National teams.

We are not trying to scare you away from fencing as every other activity that your child excels at will approach these costs. Now that you are aware of the scale, let us look at the lessons from this project based funding model.

The first thing to note is that 62% of your costs will be spent on travel. Everything from wear and tear on your car to flying to those out-of-province tournaments really add up the expenses. All good project managers understand that these big percentage categories are where the biggest savings can be realized. For our project, this is the category that you should focus on sharpening as every 1% reduction in these costs equals $200.

The second thing to note is to not skimp on the essentials such as shoes. Your athlete's main contact with the ground is equal (on the high end) to saving 1% in the travel budget. Never sharpen your budget on small percentage, but large impact, categories.

Here is a pro tip for those with more than 1 child - be cognisant that your other children will be well aware of this large financial project focused on their sibling. You will not have to equalize expenditures on your other children but they will be expecting some form of compensation and may act out in ways that you cannot imagine. Prepare to find ways to soothe the wounds or face the consequences.

Find ways to involve your athlete in the financial discussion. Learning to develop, manage, and execute a budget is a life skill that will pay out many times over in the future. It will also help the athlete appreciate the commitment that the family is making for them.

Long range planning

Now that we have established our budget for our fencing project it is time to consider the long term. Where is the athlete planning to go with fencing? Fun, school, national team, Olympics? Most athletes will eventually age out of Secondary School and then the world becomes bigger and more complicated. It is a good idea to start looking at long term goals every year as you continue to revisit your fencing project. Planning for a NCAA career (see our section Amateur Status, Fencing at University, and the NCAA) begins as early as grade 9.

I was at a function when an American friend of mine told me that he was taking his girls out of school and going to train and compete in Europe for 4 months. The girls were 16 and 14 at the time. He explained his rational in that he would spend $15,000/year for 3 years. The girls would be

homeschooled when away, get a great exposure to Europe, get great training, and become better fencers. If he did this for 3 years then his girls would excel in fencing and be awarded full scholarships to a University of their choice. That was going to save him $40,000 per year per girl for four years. I am not saying that this will work for everybody but his girls went on to university with full-ride scholarships and eventually became Olympic medalists.

The point of the story is to focus on today but always be planning for the future. Choosing a post-secondary school, or an apprenticeship, does not have to be a last moment decision.

Our Three Main Categories

Modern Olympic-style fencing, by definition, is a combat sport requiring 2 participants. At some point in a fencer's life they will want to test their skills against another person in a competitive format. There are numerous competitive levels available with each step being a quantum jump in the skills required and the associated administration/funding needed. This guide will focus on the first 3 competitive levels and tips/advice will be referenced by their associated numbers.

[1] Local events

This is an athlete's first venture away from their club's environment. The athlete will run into fencers from other clubs and be exposed to third party administration. This category is for locally run tournaments where the athlete sleeps in their own bed at home.

[2] Regional events

The next level is where an athlete must travel outside of their own town/city. The level of competition might be higher, the level of administration is higher, and the athlete will not be sleeping in their own bed at home.

[3] National team pathway

This last level is where an athlete's skill has them considering trying to make a National team. The level of competition is significantly higher, the level of administration is significant, and the athlete may be travelling long distances from home. Typical tournaments at this level would be Canada Cups, Nationals, US Regional Youth Circuits, North American Cups, and Cadet/Junior World Cups.

Equipment

Raising three children that fence three different weapons has created a small club worth of fencing gear in our house. The following section passes on 25+ years of experience when it comes to buying and maintaining a fencer's needs.

The first thing parents ask regarding equipment is where to start. You will see pieces of clothing carrying 350N, 800N, or 1600N markings. This indicates the level of force in Newtons the equipment is designed to withstand. While all pieces of equipment are important, let's start with a simple order.

Shoes

Sport shoes are a multi-billion dollar business for a good reason. Price, weight, style, feel, grip, color, fabric, and brand are very personal choices and there is no single recommendation that fits everyone. Your athlete will do thousands of miles of footwork in their fencing life therefore spend your money wisely. A little more money, combined with good knowledge, will have your athlete's body thanking you for years. You can spend from $20 to $2000 for a pair of shoes so here are some general tips from years of fencing.

Style

Look for shoes that fit into the court-shoe category. Avoid shoes with those heel flanges you find on running/jogging shoes as they will attempt to snap rotate your foot back onto its sole. Look for shoes with a rolled-heel. Your knees will thank you later.

Weight

There is a constant game between weight and padding. Obviously, lighter shoes are better but there is a tradeoff with the amount of padding in the shoe. The lead foot's heel takes a tremendous pounding therefore more padding will save on injuries. One choice is to go with a lighter shoe and add padded heel cups or insoles. Your comfort and fit will dictate your choice.

Sole material

All fencing shoes must have non-marking soles but the real consideration is on the durability of the sole. Fencing on a gymnasium floor is one thing, fencing on an aluminum strip (or a cheese grater as the fencers call them) is a completely different choice. The lead-foot points forward and wears heavily in the heel region while the trailing-foot points sideways and generally wears in the big toe area. Asymmetric fencing shoes have been developed to handle this fencing uniqueness. Stiff, durable soles may be a liability when it comes to your footwork.

Grip

Grip and sole material are tied together. You never want slippery soles. The tradeoff is between grip and wear. Generally, shoes with great grip are made from softer materials thus wearing out quickly. Sole materials such as rubber will stiffen over years thus increasing their slipperiness.

Socks

Usually the last thing a fencing parent thinks about is socks. Any sock is ok for training unless you pair it with fencing pants (breeches). At competition, fencers must wear breeches therefore they also must wear socks that cover the entire lower leg and end just above the knee. The socks must be able to remain up at all times.

[1][2][3] Fencing socks range from $15-$40 per pair. Soccer socks are a good, inexpensive alternative.

Fencing Glove

3 Weapon Glove Sabre Cuff Combined Sabre Glove

This is generally the most inexpensive piece of clothing your fencer will use but it is the one that will get the most wear and tear. Many clubs have a club-supply of used gloves that see a lot of communal use and sweat. Always choose a washable glove and wash it regularly. The glove must cover the hand and at least one half of the athlete's forearm.

[1] Typical gloves cost around $15 and will last for several years. If your athlete is fencing sabre then choose a 3-weapon (3-W) glove and a separate sabre cuff (also called a manchette). The sabre cuff will add an extra $25 to the total but it will allow you to wash the glove regularly while maintaining the electrical integrity of the cuff.

[2] A typical 3-W glove will still be useful but your epee fencer may begin to look towards a glove with a bit more padding on the back of the hand. These gloves start around $25 and up. Your sabre fencer may wish to carry a combined sabre glove/cuff that start around $65.

[3] Tournament requirements now dictate sturdier gloves providing at least 800 Newtons of puncture resistance. Expect 3-W gloves to start at $55 and Sabre gloves/cuffs to start around $85.

Fencing Mask

Epee Foil Sabre

We suggest this piece of equipment as your next purchase simply for hygiene. As with gloves, many clubs provide equipment for all of their beginners to use. While the mask is an expensive piece of gear, it is the second most direct contact between your athlete's body and the sweat/hygiene of others. Used masks should always have an expert conduct a safety test before purchasing the item. Ask your coach for help.

There are many brands of mask and each one has a slightly different fit and feel. Try on before you buy is always sound advice. Make sure that those who require eye-glasses try the mask on while wearing the glasses.

[1] Masks in this level will resist a 350 Newton punch test, start as low as $60, but typically will cost $125+. Foil masks must include a conductive bib and they start around $100. Sabre masks are completely conductive and they start around $100.

[2] The good news is that your level [1] masks will continue to serve you well at this level.

[3] More good news is that those level [1] masks will still be acceptable at many competitions. The bad news is that the jump to 1600N FIE quality masks come with a significant price jump. Epee fencers can expect to pay as little as $160, Foil fencers as low as $175, and Sabre fencers will shell out a minimum of $200 for a mask.

Jacket

The next item we suggest that your athlete invest in is the jacket. Jackets come in left handed, right handed, and back zipper. Make sure you choose the correct zipper choice as the protective zipper cover

will create a snagging/safety hazard if configured incorrectly. Back zippers are a good club choice as it fits both left and right handed fencers. Back zippers do require a friend to help zip you in and out of the jacket. We recommend that you choose an appropriate left or right handed jacket.

[1] Jackets come in both double woven cotton and ballistic nylon. Make sure the jackets are at least 350N. Cotton jackets will suffer a bit of shrinkage after washing so be careful when choosing your sizing. 350N jackets can begin around $50 but expect to pay around $100.

[2] As with masks, the good news is that your level [1] jackets will continue to serve you well at this level.

[3] More good news is that those level [1] jackets will still be acceptable at many competitions. The bad news is that the jump to 800N FIE quality jackets come with a significant price jump. Expect to pay a minimum of $400 for these woven Kevlar 800N jackets.

Underarm (Sous plastron) Protector

This is an essential piece of safety equipment that is required at all sanctioned events. It goes under the jacket, above any chest plates, and must cover the weapon arm's armpit. They are colloquially called half-jackets.

[1][2] These 350N underarm protectors begin around $20 and are made from either double woven cotton or ballistic nylon.

[3] Your level [1] underarm protector will suffice for many tournaments at this level. The big step up is to the 800N FIE certified underarm protector so expect to pay $100 plus for this equipment.

Chest protector

My old coach used to say that your blade was your best chest protector but he was old school. Chest protectors (plates) are mandatory for women in competition and must sit below the underarm protector. Even if your girl has not started her physical development, she must wear a chest protector. Chest protectors for men are optional but, if being worn, must be below the underarm protector.

[1][2][3] As of the writing of this document, all chest protectors must have a soft covering (usually foam) on the outside to prevent fencing tips skipping off of the hard surface. Chest protectors can last a long time and start around $30.

Pants (breeches)

Fencing pants give fencing its distinctive look. Fencing pants, also known as breeches, cover the mid torso down to just below the knee. Fit is a defining factor when choosing pants. Make sure the pants are not too baggy while ensuring that the overall length is not too restrictive on a fencing lunge. Look for pants that come with suspenders or purchase clip-on suspenders.

[1][2] Pants come in double woven cotton and ballistic nylon. Ensure that any pants have a minimum 350N standard. Expect to pay around $50 and up.

[3] Your level [1] pants should be usable for many of the tournaments that you will encounter. As with all of the other gear, the big step up in quality and price comes with the FIE required 800N pants. These pants are made from woven Kevlar and will set you back at least $300+.

Lamé

Pronounced la-mei, this is the distinctive conductive fencing over-jackets used in foil and sabre. Good news epeeists, you don't need to buy one of these.

Lamé's come in stainless-steel, copper, and aluminum varieties. Copper (typical) and aluminum (extremely rare) conductive jackets are usually less expensive but they often suffer from oxidization thus reducing their life span. Stainless steel lamés do not suffer the oxidization process and are usually more expensive. Note that once a lamé becomes non-conductive in any spot then it becomes scrap material.

Lamés, like jackets, come in left, right, and back zipper cuts. Make sure you choose the correct zipper orientation for your handedness. Lamés also come in a female cut to accommodate the body type. Always try on your lame over your competitive gear setup. Nothing is worse than finding out your new lame is too tight because you forgot to put on your chest and underarm protectors.

[1][2][3] Foil lames start around $75 for copper and $175 for stainless steel. Sabre lames start around $125 for copper and $275 for stainless steel.

Sporting Equipment (Foils, Epees, Sabres)

This guide will be using the colloquial references for fencing's sporting equipment (see the introductory section on terminology for further reference.) and should not be taken out of context or misused.

Modern Olympic style fencing recognizes three weapons and each one is unique in its own way. All weapons come in one of two styles – dry and electric. A dry blade is one that is not equipped with any device required for electronic scoring and is used by beginners for club practice. This guide will focus on

the pointers you need to know when purchasing an electric weapon. Let's begin by identifying a few key components that can be chosen for your weapon.

Handle

Orthopedic

Non-orthopedic ('french')

Fencing handles are the only place where the human body comes in contact with the weapon therefore fit and feel are extremely important to the athlete. Handles come in either the orthopedic grip or the non-orthopedic ('french') grip.

- Orthopedic grips (often called pistol grips) are designed to lock the hand in one place on the handle. Orthopedic grips come in a variety of sizes and numerous flavors such as Visconti, Belgian, Hungarian, Russian, Schermasport, Leon Paul, and on and on. The best advice is to try out different grips and choose the one that works for your athlete. Once you have settled on a handle and grip then stick to this variety for all of your weapons.
- Non-orthopedic grips are the traditional grips that have descended from the days of rapiers and small swords. This style of grip generally comes in only one variety today and is referred to as the 'french' grip. Its handle is primarily straight but may have some gentle contours to accommodate the hand. Sabre handles fit in this category as well.

Blade

Foil

Epee

Sabre

Fencing blades have several defining factors that affect a fencer's feel for the blade. Fencing blades come in different lengths, materials, and manufacturing methods. A fencer will break between 1-8 blades per year, depending on their training and activity, so understanding your blade is important.

Fencing blades come in one of 4 different sizes but generally only 2 stand out.

- The short blade is the #2 and it is 32 inches (81.28 cm) long. This blade length is used with children under the age of 14 and it is usually required for any competitive events in these younger categories.

- The longest blade is the #5 and is 35 inches (90 cm) long. This is the traditional length for most blades.

Fencing blades come in Standard Steel and Maraging Steel for foil and epee. Sabre blades come in standard and S2000 Maraging Steel types.

- Most standard steel blades are manufactured by forging carbon steel, quenching the blade and tempering it at 300-500 Celsius. This forging technique, and the steel used, defines a blades weight distribution, flexibility, and longevity. Not all blades are the same as sometimes good forges have bad batches and bad forges have good batches. Once again, try different brands (forges) and stick with the brand that fits your feel and style. Some common forges are Blaise Freres (BF- French), SM (Russian), Vniti (VN-Russian), and Leon Paul (LP- British). Leon Paul does have a cold forging process that claims to reduce the micro-fracturing developed through the traditional forging process thus increasing its blade's lifespan.
- Maraging steel blades are often known as FIE blades due to the fact that this type of steel blade is mandatory in FIE competitions. These blades are identified by a stamp on the blade itself showing the FIE brand logo and the date the blade was forged. Maraging steel is designed so that the critical defect size for fast fracturing is over 4 times greater than regular carbon steel. This means increased costs but potentially increased life spans for these blades.
- S2000 sabre blades are designed with steel that is much stiffer than the standard steel. All FIE competitions require S2000 maraging steel sabre blades.

Electrical connections

Two-pin

Bayonet

Three-pin

Foil and Sabre body wires come with either a two-pin or bayonet male electrical connector to the weapon itself. This corresponds to the two-pin or bayonet female connector on the weapon. Both connector-types are acceptable but the two-pin method is more prevalent. Make sure that you match the connector-types when purchasing your gear. Epee connectors only come in a standard 3-pin female-connector style.

Epee Points

One of the smallest components of your fencing gear can also cause you some of the greatest frustrations. Almost every aspect of your fencing gear is standardized while the epee tip comes in two unique, non-compatible flavors. 'German' tips, barrels,

and screws are not compatible with 'Leon Paul' tips, barrels, and screws. Make sure you understand what your epee is equipped with and buy replacement parts that match your type. Nothing is more frustrating than having to replace a tip screw in your epee only to find that it either won't screw in or it keeps popping out and getting lost.

Body and head wires

Two-pin Bayonet Three-pin

Foil and Sabre body wires come with either two-pin or bayonet male connectors. Ensure that your connector type matches that of your weapon. Foil and sabre head wires must be straight (no curly wires) and be either white or clear in color. Epee body wires come with a standard three-pin male connector. Keep your body and head wires separated from the rest of your gear in order to reduce oxidization of the electrical components.

Weapon specific recommendations

The number of fencing manufacturers is relatively static with resellers mixing and matching items regularly. Typical large, international online resellers (in alphabetical order) are Absolute Fencing Gear, Allstar, Blue Gauntlet, Leon Paul, Negrini, PBT Fencing, and Uhlmann. There are many local resellers and often clubs have arrangements with these suppliers to get discounts on bulk order deals. Always consider the total cost for your equipment by accounting for price, shipping, and import duties. On-line services vary whereas local suppliers are more amenable to personalized service, fitting, and return. Here are some weapon specific recommendations:

Foil

99.9% of foilists use an orthopedic grip.

[1] Your basic equipment needs are shoes, knee-length socks, 350N breeches, chest protector for women, 350N underarm protector, 350N jacket, 3-W glove, 800N Foil mask, Foil Lame, 2 regular steel foils, 2 body wires, and 2 head wires. If your athlete is under 14 then check to see if #2 (or shorter) blades are required. Some local tournaments may allow breeches to be replaced with pants that do not have any snagging-related attachments (outer pockets, etc). Purchasing this setup (excluding shoes) will start around $575. Many clubs provide much of this equipment on a rental basis thus reducing your initial exposure.

[2] Similar to [1] except the requirement for breeches is maintained. If your athlete is training and competing extensively then Maraging steel blades might be a consideration. You should now own the bulk of the fencing equipment required in your athlete's competitive life therefore you would have spent a minimum of $575 for their equipment. Broken blades will be replaced for $30-$40 per blade. You can save yourself some armory time by purchasing pre-wired replacement blades.

[3] Items from the previous levels will suffice for most competitions that you will encounter. Stepping up to international competitions will require shoes, knee-length socks (same color and style as your team-mates if fencing in team competitions), 800N FIE breeches, chest protector for women, 800N FIE underarm protector, 800N FIE jacket, 3-W glove, 1600N FIE Foil mask, Foil lame, 2 maraging steel FIE foil blades, 2 body wires, and 2 head wires. Moving up to FIE quality equipment will add at least another $1790 to your total invested. If you are venturing into the international arena then keep the FIE equipment separate and use your lower quality gear for training and low level competitions.

Epee

Epeeists vary greatly in their preference between orthopedic and 'french' grips.

[1] Your basic equipment needs are shoes, knee-length socks, 350N breeches, chest protector for women, 350N underarm protector, 350N jacket, 3-W glove, 800N Epee mask, 2 regular steel epees, and 2 body wires. If your athlete is under 14 then check to see if #2 (or shorter) blades are required. Some local tournaments may allow breeches to be replaced with pants that do not have any snagging-related attachments (outer pockets, etc). Purchasing this setup (excluding shoes) will start around $493. Many clubs provide much of this equipment on a rental basis thus reducing your initial exposure.

[2] Similar to [1] except the requirement for breeches is maintained. If your athlete is training and competing extensively then Maraging steel blades might be a consideration. You should have purchased the bulk of the fencing equipment required by this point in your athlete's competitive life therefore you would have spent a minimum of $493 for their equipment. Broken blades will be replaced for $55-$65 per blade. I recommend that you always purchase replacement blades with full length tangs as they will fit 'french' grip handles and can be cut down for orthopedic handles. You can save yourself some armory time by purchasing pre-wired replacement blades.

[3] Items from the previous levels will suffice for most competitions that you will encounter. Stepping up to international competitions will require shoes, knee-length socks (same color and style as your team-mates if fencing in team competitions), 800N FIE breeches, chest protector for women, 800N FIE underarm protector, 800N FIE jacket, 800N FIE 3-W glove, 1600N FIE Epee mask, 2 maraging steel FIE epee blades, and 2 body wires. Moving up to FIE quality equipment will add at least another $1672 to your total invested. If you are venturing into the international arena then keep the FIE equipment separate and use your lower quality gear for training and low level competitions.

Sabre

[1] Your basic equipment needs are shoes, knee-length socks, 350N breeches, chest protector for women, 350N underarm protector, 350N jacket, 3-W glove, sabre cuff, 800N Sabre mask, Sabre Lame, 2 regular steel sabres, 2 body wires, and 2 head wires. If your athlete is under 14 then check to see if #2

(or shorter) blades are required. Some local tournaments may allow breeches to be replaced with pants that do not have any snagging-related attachments (outer pockets, etc). Purchasing this setup (excluding shoes) will start around $718. Many clubs provide much of this equipment on a rental basis thus reducing your initial exposure.

[2] Similar to [1] except the requirement for breeches is maintained. If your athlete is training and competing extensively then S2000 maraging steel blades might be a consideration. You should have purchased the bulk of the fencing equipment required by this point in your athlete's competitive life therefore you would have spent a minimum of $718 for their equipment. Broken blades will be replaced for $25-$35 per blade.

[3] Items from the previous levels will suffice for most competitions that you will encounter. Stepping up to international competitions will require shoes, knee-length socks (same color and style as your team-mates if fencing in team competitions), 800N FIE breeches, chest protector for women, 800N FIE underarm protector, 800N FIE jacket, 800N Sabre glove, 1600N FIE Sabre mask, Sabre lame, 2 S2000 maraging steel sabre blades, 2 body wires, and 2 head wires. Moving up to FIE quality equipment will add at least another $1868 to your total invested. If you are venturing into the international arena then keep the FIE equipment separate and use your lower quality gear for training and low level competitions.

How to clean your gear

Socks, breeches, jackets, gloves all should be washed on your machine's gentle or hand wash cycle. Always use cold water to avoid shrinkage. Socks may be placed in a dryer but all other items should be hung up and air dried. Hanging items outdoors is a good idea as they air dry and the sun bleaches the whites.

Masks should be cleaned with Tea Tree oil or other skin friendly cleaning products such as wet wipes. Rumors about putting masks in the dishwasher abound but we recommend avoiding this cleaning method as the damage may be too great.

The lame's inner lining should only be wiped down with wet wipes. Hanging your lame up and away from the rest of your gear is a good method to increase its life span.

Medical

Medical doctors

One of our 14 year old club athletes went to see a doctor regarding a physical ailment. The doctor entered the examining room, asked the athlete to remove his shirt, took a brief look at him, and left the room. Upon re-entering the room, the doctor began to question the athlete regarding his relationship with his father.

After a few more awkward questions, the athlete asked the doctor about this line of questioning. The doctor said "I see you have a lot of small fingertip sized bruises on your torso and arm." The athlete

replied “Oh, I am a fencer.” The doctor continued “That doesn’t explain these bruises.” The fencer retorted “I didn’t say that I was a good fencer.”

This cautionary tale, in combination with the myriad of horror stories coming from other sports such as gymnastics and wrestling, lead us to two key lessons. First, find a good family doctor for your child, establish a lasting rapport with the doctor, and share your child’s plans for their sport. Second, learn from the horror stories regarding sexual abuse of athletes and remain in any examining room with your child.

Specialist medical professionals

While today’s doctors can diagnose and treat many medical issues, it is more likely that your child’s first exposure to sport’s medicine will come from a specialist such as a physiotherapist. Strained or damaged muscles and joint-related issues occur frequently across all sports therefore a good relationship with a sport’s physiotherapist is essential in a healthy athlete and improved recovery times. Nothing is more frustrating than being injured and put on a 2 month waiting list for a physiotherapist. A key lesson is to groom your relationships with your health care workers carefully.

Another specialist that can have a lasting impact on your child’s life is a nutritionist. Vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, diabetic, belief-based, low calorie, low carbohydrate and low fat are all examples of diets that may, or may not be, related to an athlete’s unique physiology. Unfortunately for many of us, we learn about nutrition from the most unreliable sources such as TV celebrities, friends, fad diets, and monthly magazines. Is it any wonder that children develop eating disorders that affect the rest of their lives when we deny them the education required to grow and maintain a healthy body. Good communication between your child’s doctor and a nutritionist will begin to direct your child’s nutrition and growth along a healthier path.

A lesser considered specialist, particularly for the novice athlete, is a sports psychologist. Parent’s often think that they can fulfill this role themselves but there is great benefit in having a trained third-party work with your child’s mental health, motivation, and mental training. Typically, most athletes first run into this professional once they make a National Team and it is a big shock to their system resulting in delayed implementation. As with the other medical professionals, early introduction can see great benefits in the future.

An athlete’s health on the road

The Boy Scout motto of “be prepared” is one that should be adopted when an athlete prepares to travel away from their home medical base. While we are not recommending that you travel with a full medical supply kit, there are many inexpensive emergency kits that you can augment with a few essential supplies to get you home. The concept is to keep you moving until you can reach your home medical base.

Typical emergency medical kits start around $15 and should contain items such as:

- Bandages – adhesive fabric 1”x3”, knuckle, and butterfly
- Joint support – tensor bandage, fabric adhesive tape

- Blister/burn – gels, moleskin
- Instruments – safety pins
- Medications – acetaminophen, antacid, antihistamines, diamode, diatame, ibuprofen
- Wound care – washup-up towelette, antiseptic wipe, alcohol swab, and antibiotic ointment
- Paperwork – a copy of your health care and insurance documents, a card stating any allergies written in any languages of countries that you are visiting

Remember to check with your medical professional when choosing any medication for your athlete. Any drug, supplement, and ointment should be carefully checked out (see our section on anti-doping).

Anti-doping

There is a point in every competitive athlete's life when their thoughts turn towards the bigger stage. Succeeding in those regional tournaments has you now thinking about making a National team and then suddenly the hidden world of anti-doping appears. Now your athlete begins to realize the burden that high-performance athletes must endure.

Anti-doping is enforced in all sports and controlled by 2 main governing bodies – the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and, in Canada, the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports (CCES). WADA has created, and maintains, a massively extensive database of prohibitive substances that every athlete must live by. You can find the list here: https://www.wada-ama.org/en/content/what-is-prohibited. This list is updated regularly and we highly recommend that any substance that is ingested or absorbed through your skin be checked for conformity.

Ideally, your medical professional will check the WADA list when prescribing medications but, in our experience, this rarely happens. The athlete must be rigorous and double check everything that goes in, and on, their body. This can be a daunting task but there is a good website that allows you to check something quickly online. The website is https://globaldro.com and we highly recommend it.

Here are some common, often misunderstood, questions and answers for athletes and their care providers.

- My doctor says that I must take this medication to aid in my recovery or is essential to my life. It is on the prohibited list. Should I take it?
    - If the medication that you require is essential then you may apply to the CCES for a special medical exemption. If you are granted a medical exemption then you must keep the supporting document with you at all times.
- I just purchased a license that allows me to compete in my sport's sanctioned events. Do I have to worry about the prohibited substance list?
    - The short answer is YES, you must abide by the prohibited list. Almost every sport is run by a set of bylaws and policies. Almost every sport will have an anti-doping policy and your purchase of a license binds you to that policy. The odds of your athlete being drug-tested at a low level competition are extremely low, but not zero.

- I joined the high-performance program and I had to sign an Athlete's Agreement. Do I have to worry about the Prohibited substance list?
    - YES, at all times. The fact that you have joined a HP program and signed an agreement means that you have directly and legally bound yourself to their conditions. Every athlete agreement will come with an anti-doping clause and your exposure to the CCES has greatly increased. You will be required to take the CCES's ongoing, online educational program. This also means that you may be randomly drug-tested anywhere and at any time.
- I was visiting friends and they offered me some local beverage (food) that helps with altitude sickness. Is it rude to not drink it?
    - STOP. Any herb, or supplement, must be checked against the prohibited substance list. Any comment that indicates some medicinal affect in the product should set off your alarm bells. It may be rude to not drink the beverage but ignorance of the anti-doping rules is no excuse to be polite. There have been cases where athletes have received multi-year bans for making this mistake.
- The kids at the gym told me about this great supplement that is helping their recovery for training. It is not on the prohibited substance list. Should I take it?
    - NO. Loud warning bells should be going off in your head. The anti-doping concept is much more than adherence to a list. It is an ethical decision and that is how WADA treats this situation. There have been many athletes that have retroactively lost their Olympic medals many years after they competed because their stored urine samples contained newly banned substances. Just because you did not get immediately caught, or the substance is not on the list yet, does not mean that you are not cheating.
- I have a nasty cold. Should I take an over-the-counter cold and flu medication?
    - STOP. Your first check should be with https://globaldro.com. It will make you aware of any issues with certain brands. For example, Tylenol Complete Cold, Cough & Flu is prohibited while in competition but not prohibited out of competition.
- My athlete just won a medal at a big competition. They have been told that they are being drug-tested. What do I do?
    - The first thing you should have done was ensure that your athlete was hydrating properly. Your athlete will now have a designated CCES person closely following them and monitoring any substance that they ingest. This is not the time to pop any pills, medications, or supplements. Once your athlete is ready, they will be escorted to the drug-testing room where they cannot leave until they provide a suitable urine sample. If the athlete is not of age then the parent, or guardian, may accompany them into the room but then they cannot leave either.
    - Once the athlete is ready to produce a urine sample, a CCES representative must personally witness the urine exiting the body and into the sample container while the parent/guardian must watch the observer. The urine samples will then be checked and, if suitable, the athlete will seal them into an 'A' and 'B' sample vial. If the sample is not suitable, you must wait until a suitable sample is produced. Once complete, the 'A'

sample will be sent for testing and the 'B' sample will be stored offsite. The athlete may now leave the testing room. This process can take anywhere from 20 minutes to several hours depending on the athlete.

This challenging life in an anti-doping world is where most high-performance athletes suffer. Many drugs and medical treatments that the general populace enjoys are denied to the athletes. The world is big and complicated so learning how to live with an anti-doping life style is best learned at a young age.

Parenting your developing athlete

Experts make expert decisions

One of my core beliefs is that experts should make expert decisions. A corollary to this statement is that you need to understand where your expertise resides. You would not want your buildings and bridges built by amateurs so you should not want your athlete built and maintained by amateurs.

This concept comes to bear when we talk about coaching. Your coach should have some national certification (NCCP) and years of practical experience. If you are not a certified coach then you should not be coaching your athlete. Your athlete knows that you are not a coach and you will lose their respect if you insist on coaching. Even if you are a certified coach, mixing parenting and coaching is a path fraught with danger. I was once told that the definition of an expert meant that they had to come from at least 2 buildings away from you. The familiarity of your relationship with your athlete will diminish your expertise more than you can imagine.

This concept extends to all areas including refereeing. I have witnessed some amazing comments from poorly informed parents watching their child's matches. I was watching a particularly intense sabre match between two USA competitors at a NAC when the parent of one of the children starting shouting at the referee over a call. The referee asked the parent to be quiet but this parent would not calm down. After a minute, one of the other spectators said to the parent "Sir, the referee was correct in his call." The parent shouted at this third party "you are wrong and who the hell do you think you are?" Another spectator said "he is correct and he thinks he is the USA's National Sabre coach. Who the hell are you?" Support your child but understand that you are not an expert in refereeing. Referees have sanctions that they can, and will, use to keep you under control. Also, if you have a typical child, your actions will only embarrass them and negatively affect their performance.

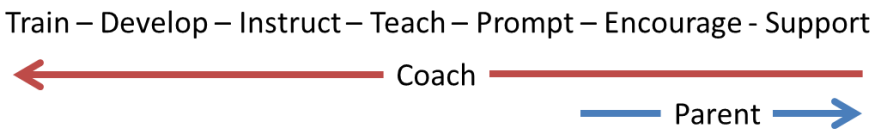
Cheerleading, parenting, and coaching

The first bit of advice for those parents who wish to coach their children is to put in the work and become a certified NCCP coach. The NCCP is broken down into 3 streams, 3 coaching contexts per stream, 5 coaching competencies (problem-solving, valuing, critical thinking, leading, and interacting) and 7 coaching outcomes. The knowledge gained through this program is invaluable.

The specific follow on to this piece of advice is that fencing concepts, language, and forms are extremely nuanced (over 1 million different combinations of actions) and take years of practice to master and

understand. Advice or instruction made in ignorance is just bad advice and your athlete's opponent will love you for it.

The following chart shows a rough breakdown of the required skills needed to create a well-rounded athlete and a suggested breakdown in duties.



As you can see, there is significant overlap between coaches and parents when it comes to encouragement and support. The warning sign that you are beginning to enter into the coach's domain is if you find yourself prompting your athlete during a match. Athletes can separate the crowd noise into cheering versus instruction quite easily but they need to focus on just one instructional voice. Let the coach do the prompting.

Finally, be the cheerleader that your athlete wants - within reason. I once bumped into the mother of a high level fencer hiding behind a building support column watching her daughter's match. I asked her what she was doing and she informed me that her daughter forbid her from watching her matches. If her daughter lost then she would blame the loss on her mother watching. Do not allow your athlete to request your absence from their matches. Allowing these kinds of superstitions and excuses to creep into your athlete's life will only see them suffer later on.

Cheering and crowd noise are items that all athletes must learn to deal with as they improve and move up the competitive scale. Learning how to block out the crowd is a skill that all athletes must learn at some level. Having said that, if your athlete does not want to hear your voice during a match then honor their wishes. Perhaps they will change over time or perhaps your voice can blend into the chant of a large crowd.

How to always ensure your athlete is a winner

The first question that I usually ask an athlete after they have been knocked out of a tournament and they have cooled down is "How many winners were their today?" The usual answer is, incorrectly, one. Then I ask them "how can we be winners as well?" Our culture is fixated on results therefore people define winning as the number that appears by your name at the end of the competition. By this definition there is only one winner and everyone else are losers.

I will 100% guarantee that no athlete standing on any step of the Olympic podium is attending their first competition. As innocuous as this statement is, it reminds us that our athletes are on a journey and focusing on any one result, particularly early results, delays us from moving along our desired path.

Your athlete's coach should be setting goals for each event and then reviewing the athlete's results compared to those goals. What did they do well? What did they need to improve? These are questions

that every athlete needs to ask themselves after every competition. The sooner they start focusing on answers to these questions then the sooner they will begin to see improvement in their results.

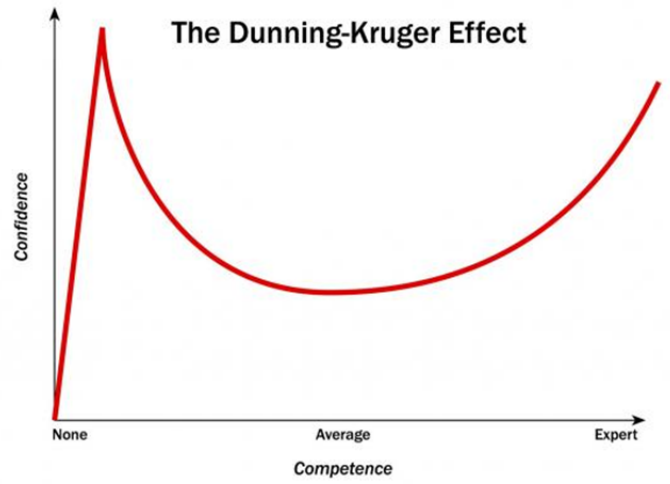
I want my athletes to redefine 'winning' so that they walk away better, or more knowledgeable, than when they entered. Knowing what your opponent did to you will help you train to overcome that ability next time. Help redefine your athlete's mindset so that learning equals winning.

Making use of the Dunning-Kruger effect

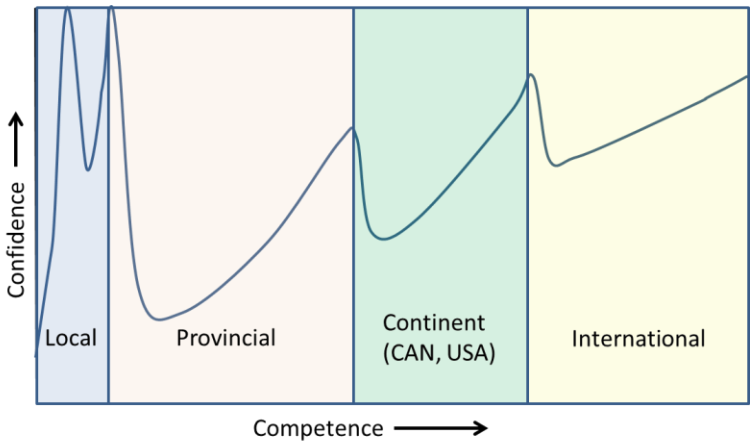
A seminal paper published in 1999 (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology) by David Dunning and Justin Kruger provided the researched foundations for what many professionals had already experienced. This work was later augmented by Ehrlinger, Johnson, Banner, Dunning and Kruger in 2008 and two key lines from the abstract in this paper summarize the effect:

"People are typically overly optimistic when evaluating the quality of their performance on social and intellectual tasks. In particular, poor performers grossly overestimate their performances because their incompetence deprives them of the skills needed to recognize their deficits."

The Dunning-Kruger effect has leaped across all disciplines and is typically summarized (note: this chart is not part of their work) in this widely used chart.



While knowing this effect is half the battle, the other half is in knowing how to compensate for its effects on your athlete. My experiences have led me to believe that the Dunning-Kruger effect re-occurs every time that an athlete changes their competitive category. An oversimplified, but more realistic, chart would look like this:



[1] Recognize that your beginning athlete will be overconfident. Begin by setting achievable goals. Work with your coach as they will be able to assess your athlete's probable targets. Prepare for tears and disappointment. Let the athlete cool down mentally by giving them distance after a loss. Recognize the sudden drop in confidence after competitions and focus on having fun while improving skillsets.

[2] Expect more of the same as in [1]. Begin to keep track of the athlete's results. This will be a good reminder of their competence increasing over time. One great tool that we used to have in the pre-digital days was a fencing passport. This document recorded the results for every tournament you entered. My oldest daughter was the youngest member of our club's prestigious epee squad and was suffering from a lack of confidence after a low result at a provincial event. The senior girls recognized this and produced their fencing passports for her review. To her amazement, their early results were as poor as hers but they were now National champions. Over time she realized that she was on the same path as her team mates, her confidence began to return, and she surpassed her teammate's national standings in time.

[3] More tears and disappointment. The big shock is how much more skill and speed can be found at this level. Tactics and techniques are eye openers and early exits from events can be very hard on the ego. The most difficult challenge now is for your athlete to replicate this new competitive level in their club during their daily training. Many people shy away from leadership but now is the time to help your athlete step forward. Reminding them of the new level that they just experienced may help them motivate their club mates to increase their training.

On the road – who to take and what to do

Raising an athlete is a challenge that gets more complicated, and expensive, once road trips enter the program. There is one key document that your athlete should always carry with them once they leave on a trip regardless of who is accompanying them (parents(s), guardians, coaches, chaperone, etc.). The document is an 'authorization' letter and the FIE has a good sample which may be found at https://static.fie.org/uploads/5/27542-autorisation%20mineurs%20ang.doc.

Authorization Sample

We, the undersigned:

……..

(father's surname, name, date and place of birth, passport number)

……..

(mother's surname, name, date and place of birth, passport number)

Authorise to represent and act in our name the following person, who:

- Is of legal age in ……(write the name of the country) to make the decisions mentioned below;
- Has accepted this authority;
- During the period of ……..to……..

Surname:……

Name:……

Date and place of birth:……

Nationality and passport number: ……

Address during competition:……

Phone number during competition:……

Authorising the above person to make decisions relative to the health of our child:

Surname:……..,

Name:……..

Date of birth:……..

FIE Licence Number:……

Nationality and passport number: ……

Father's Signature: Mother's Signature:

As strange as it may sound, it is worth having your athlete carry a blank copy of this letter with them even when they are traveling with both parents. There have been a few times when one parent has had to separate from the party (e.g. emergency trip back home) and the remaining parent has run into a contentious hospital administrator or border guard that requests proof of representation.

If you do not like the sample letter provided then ensure that your document carries very specific locations, dates, and identifying documents for whatever person is looking after your athlete. If your athlete is on a multi-leg trip then include details for each and every one of the stops. It may feel like overkill but I have personally sat in front of an immigration officer who was going to deny entry until they saw the detailed document. I also know chaperones that have been in a hospital with an athlete and the nurses were not going to talk to them without this document. You may not think that you are kidnapping a child but you are not a hospital administrator worried about freedom of information or a suspicious border guard.

Chaperoning an athlete

If you are chaperoning an athlete or group of athletes then you should request the following for each athlete:

- A suitable authorization document signed by both parents;
- A copy of the athlete's personal identification (birth certificate, passport, etc.);
- A copy of the athlete's health care card;
- A list of the athlete's medications required, dietary issues, and allergies.

It is worth keeping a notebook (paper or digital) to track unexpected expenses. Always notate and keep your receipts.

Traveling solo as an athlete

There are really just 2 categories to consider when travelling solo as a young athlete.

The first, and easiest, category to discuss is athletes who are below the age of Legal Majority (https://static.fie.org/uploads/20/102375-age%20of%20majority.pdf). The short answer is to never travel solo when you are not of Legal Majority in the province/country that you are visiting. Yes, there are work arounds for hotels, transportation, food, etc. but the possible negative outcomes are not worth the risks.

The second category is for those athletes that are above the age of Legal Majority but below the age of 25.

- You need to be aware that some hotels and all rental car companies will not do business with you.
- You must have a credit card under your name.
- You should always carry your health and emergency contact information on an easily accessible, water-proof card. You can also have this card in the language of any country that you are visiting.
- You should have sufficient amounts of local currency prior to entering the country.
- Before leaving your home, check the best options between the hotel and airport (taxi, Uber, bus, train, and limousine).
- If you have watched the movie Taken then be prepared. If you have not watched the movie Taken then watch it.
- While at the airport, never take a taxi from any place other than an officially designated taxi/travel stand. Buskers are not officially designated travel personnel.

Packing

Fencers have a lot of equipment therefore packing for a competition becomes an art form. We will address each category separately but an early choice of bag can make a huge difference in the long run.

The 'standard' bag. These bags are built to just hold the basic equipment. Typical costs are between $40-55.

The 'roll' bag. These bags come in various sizes but they are generally box shaped, have multiple partitions, multiple pockets, a sturdy frame, and rolling wheels on the bottom. These bags generally come in 2 types: wider/shorter and narrower/longer. This is the usual fencing bag that will carry everything you need plus more. These bags will cost around $160-175.

The 'deluxe' bag. This is the basic 'roll' bag plus it comes with an additional bag that can be detached from the top of the main rolling bag. These bags have a lot of space and the detachable bag is ideal for keeping your 'training gear' in a handy, lighter bag. These bags can be pricey starting around $300.

[1] Athlete's in this category are just starting out and generally do not have all the essential equipment for a competition. If you are not using a 'standard' bag then you can get away with 2 small bags and some blade covers. One bag should hold your body wires while the second bag (gym bag) can carry your clothing and mask. It cannot be stressed enough that sweaty gear should not spend much time in

contact with lame's or foil/sabre masks. A simple blade cover may be made with some elastic bands and some PVC plumbing pipe.

[2] Athlete's in this category are now on the road and generally staying away from home.

- The 'standard' bag works but a 'roll' bag is a blessing.
- The extra storage space in a 'roll' bag allows for non-fencing clothes and food.
- The simple, one-bag storage also keeps all of your gear in one self contained place.
- The rolling bag is also a blessing if you have to carry your gear any distance.
- The extra pockets allow you to store your body wires away from your sweaty gear.
- You should also arrange your bag so that your 'electrical' gear (lame's, mask) are not in contact with your sweaty clothing.
- You can store your small 'medical' travel kit in this bag.
- Try to stay with a soft bag (as opposed to a hard-shell 'golf' travel bag) as they are easier to toss into cars,taxis, and vans with other fencers' bags
- Get used to packing additional food for snacks or special dietary concerns.

[3] Athlete's in this category are now traveling long distances usually in airplanes.

- The first thing you need to be aware of is that your weight limit for airlines' checked baggage is 50lbs (see our Air travel/luggage tips section). This includes all of your checked bags so weigh your bags before you hit the airport.
- Your fencing bag will be classed 'oversized' so be aware where these bags need to be dropped off and where you pick up 'oversized' bags at your destination. Oversized bags are usually delivered last so plan accordingly.
- Be cautious with your language when dealing with airline personal. Your bag (checked and carry on) contains fencing sporting equipment –NOT WEAPONS AND BLADES.
- A pro-tip is to take your essential gear in carry-on luggage. Essential gear is gear that cannot be borrowed or purchased at your competition.
    - If you are traveling in North America then this carry-on bag should contain your mask, your labeled jacket (epee) or your labeled lame (foil, sabre), and shoes.
    - If you are traveling internationally then this bag should contain your mask, your labeled jacket (epee) or your labeled lame (foil, sabre), shoes , socks, underjacket, chest plate, jacket, breeches, and glove.
    - Be aware that some airlines have a carry-on weight limit of 8-10 pounds (see our Air travel/luggage tips section).
- Pack food, particularly if you have dietary restrictions.
- If your bag gets lost by the airlines while travelling internationally then you can request a toiletry packge.

Transportation – Planes, trains, and automobiles

Your travel to, and from, a fencing tournament can have a wide range of challenges so this guide will offer some helpful tips to get you around.

Ground transportation

The trip from your accommodation to the venue has many options. The easiest, and cheapest, option is to walk to the venue when possible. Next up is some form of vehicle such as private car, rental car, taxi, ride-share, or public transportation.

- **Private vehicle** - A handy number to use for budgeting when using your private vehicle is $0.50/kilometer. This cost factors in fuel, wear and tear, and insurance on your vehicle. Don't forget to include parking fees if required.
- **Rental vehicle** –
    - Factor in bag size and storage when choosing a car size. That $50/day compact car might look appealing but it will barely hold 2 people and their fencing bags.
    - Larger vehicles may not have the interior storage space expected.
    - Check with your insurance company and credit card providers for their rental car coverage. Rental companies will try to convince you to take their insurance (which might be required) so be prepared.
    - Be aware of any distance restrictions. Many, but not all, plans have unlimited mileage.
    - Check for pick-up and drop-off locations. Many companies now share the same vehicle parkades located near airports. You may incur extra costs for airport locations over intra-city locations.
    - Pro-tip: Time your trip from the airport to the rental parkade as a reference for your drop-off routine. Don't miss a flight because you forgot about the 30 minute travel from the car drop-off back to the airport.
    - Understand your vehicle's fuel tank size when considering whether to pre-pay for fuel. Ballpark tank sizes are: small cars – 50 litres, medium – 60 litres, large -70 litres, and SUV's – 80 litres. Multiplying the (remaining fuel percentage) by (the tank size) by (the local fuel costs per litre) will give you a rough idea of the deal. Sometimes the convenience and time saving of a pre-pay is worth the extra money spent. Many times it is not.
    - Always inspect the interior and exterior of the vehicle before leaving the lot. Note any damage to an agent and take pictures if they don't seem to care. Pro-tip: take a video with your phone as you walk around the car.
    - Pre-load any trips into your GPS before you leave the airport. Most phones come with GPS (e.g. Google maps) so avoid paying extra charges to rent a GPS.
    - Be aware of any Toll-ways on your routes. The rental company will just transfer the fees/fines to your account.
    - Consider any parking fees for venues and hotels. That $50/day car was a great deal. Too bad the parking at the hotel and venue added up to $50/day as well.

- Consider obtaining an International Driver's Permit. These IDP's are inexpensive to get, can be obtained from the CAA, and may be required to operate a vehicle in certain international countries.

- **Shuttles** -
  - Many hotels offer free airport shuttles. Understanding their schedules and rules can make your trip much easier.
  - Some companies offer shared-shuttle rides to designated hotels or locations. A transportation kiosk will help you with the costs and ticketing. Make sure you are aware of the pick-up and drop-off times due to the multiple stops.
  - Some larger competitions will organize shuttle rides from the airport to the hotel while others will organize hotel to venue shuttles.
- **Taxis** -
  - Always check to ensure that your arrival location will have taxis available. Some smaller airports have limited taxis so avoid a long wait and reserve ahead of time.
  - Always take a taxi from an official taxi stand.
  - Ask your hotel front desk to order a taxi for you. Pro-tip: you don't have to be staying at the hotel to get them to do this.

  - Double check that the taxi you ordered is for you by asking the driver if he knows your name and destination.
  - Ensure the taxi is legit. Look for a radio and ID badge
  - As a general rule, taxi's use meters and not flat rates. If the driver says his meter is broken then get a different taxi.
  - Ask your hotel front desk how much a taxi ride should cost to your location.
  - Use the GPS in your phone to track your ride.
  - Use Google translate if you are having trouble communicating with your driver.
  - Do not share a ride with a stranger.
- **Ride-sharing (Uber, Lyft, etc.)** -
  - Request your ride inside. Wait until the app shows when your driver is nearby before going outside to meet them.
  - Verify your ride. Make sure the license plate, make, and model of the car match your app. Also verify the driver photo with the app.
  - Have the driver confirm your name.
  - Use GPS to track your trip and sit in the back seat.
  - Uber drivers use Uber's GPS app for their trips and it is programmed to always drop you off at your destination on the right-hand side of the vehicle. If you want a different route then tell the driver. This can be a huge issue as a right-side drop-off may entail significant extra time, travel, and cost. Trust me on this one.
  - Share your trip with someone. Apps like Uber allow you to share your trip status with someone. It will send your driver's name, photo, license plate, and location to your contact.

    - Trust your intuition. If you feel that you are in an urgent situation then you can hit the Emergency button in the app and it will call 911 for you.
    - Tipping is optional and may be done through the company's app.
    - Maintain or improve your rating. You can screen drivers by their rating and they can screen you so be courteous, respectful, and clean.
- **Public transportation** -
    - Almost every city has relatively inexpensive public transportation.
    - Many cities have apps that inform you of the vehicles location, operating hours, and schedules.
    - Always purchase a ticket. The fine for hopping a ride without a fare is generally equal to 1 year of fares.
    - If you are going to use public transit over several days then check for discount volume packages.
    - Be aware that a fencing bag is a large object and can be challenging to fit onto subways, trains, and buses during peak hours. Plan accordingly.
    - Be aware of the time for the last ride of the night.
- **Specific tips by category** -
    - **[1]** Car-pooling can save costs but will constrain your arrival and departure plans.
    - **[2]** If you are renting a larger vehicle like an 11 passenger van then consider taking out extra insurance for the trip.
    - **[3]** Spend some time planning and consider all the options and costs.
        - A free airport shuttle to a hotel that is within walking distance of the venue (or even attached) will easily justify the venue hotel's potential extra costs.
        - Factor in items such as rental car costs, taxi/Uber costs, and parking fees when choosing your hotel.
        - That $70/night hotel that is just 3 miles away from the venue may look like a good deal until you consider that your rental car costs $100/day (with fuel included) and the parking at the venue costs $25/day. Compare the adjusted $195/day at this remote hotel to the venue's $150/night and you realize how much money you wasted.
        - Some big cities have excellent public transit. Use them to save a lot of money. Good public transit allows you to find inexpensive, non-local hotels. Just remember to factor in the transportation time into your schedule.
        - While I appreciate taxis, Uber is just so much more convenient when you need a ride.

Air travel

There will be tournaments where air travel is the most convenient method of transportation. Here are some tips and information to help make this trip easier.

Luggage Tips

- Some airlines allow one free checked bag per person while other airlines charge for every piece of checked luggage. Factor these costs into your choices when picking an airline.
- Your weight limit for your combined checked luggage is 50 pounds (22.68 kilograms). Fees for overweight luggage can be steep so weigh your bags before you get to the airport. Your bag length must but less than or equal to 157 cm (62 inches).
- If you are carrying liquids or gels in your checked bag then place them in a clear plastic bag. First, it will make any inspections much easier and second, nothing is worse that opening a fencing bag full of goo.
- Most airlines have a carry-on weight and size restriction. Weight restrictions vary from of 7-22 kilograms (15.4-50 pounds). Carry on size limits vary by airline so check before you get to the airport. Air Canada's size limit is 23cm x 40cm x 55cm and its weight limit is 10 kilograms (22 pounds).
- Put labels inside your bags.
- Your fencing bag is 'oversized' luggage and will be dropped off and picked up at a special oversized luggage area. Oversized luggage usually comes off the plane last so expect additional delays.
- Never forget, the answer to "what is in your bags?" is always SPORTING EQUIPMENT.

Planning tips

- Know the difference between "direct" and "nonstop" flights. Whenever possible go for the "nonstop" flight.
- Try to keep the number of flight changes as low as possible. Every extra leg adds the possibility of lost/delayed baggage and flight delays.
- Get to your gateway city as early as possible. Flight delays stack up quickly and the earlier you arrive at your gateway city then the better odds you have of leaving.
- Weather delays can really screw up a schedule. My experience is that Toronto (YYZ) and Chicago (ORD) suffer from the biggest weather problems.
- Allow for a suitable layover time between connecting flights. 2 hours is recommended. You might be able to sprint to make your next flight but your checked bag will not make it.
- NEVER arrive on the day of the competition and NEVER plan to leave on the day of the competition. I have had too many athletes try to save costs with this method only to miss registration due to a flight delay or have to withdraw from the competition in order to make their flight because the event went on longer than expected. Remember, you are going to a competition to compete.
- Pro-tip: get a NEXUS / Global Entry card. It is inexpensive and well worth the paperwork. I cannot count the number of flights that I have made because this card saved me on lineups.
- If you are shopping for a new credit card then consider cards with bonus travel programs and initial sign up bonuses.
- Pro-tip: make sure that you sign up for any airline loyalty programs and try to use one airline partnership as much as possible. Collecting air-miles will save money on flights as well as open

up additional loyalty benefits such as pre-boarding, luggage benefits, and access to airport lounges.

- Take advantage of the airline's lounge if possible. Find a friend that has access. Some lounges will allow you to pay a fee (usually $50 a day) on the spot. You can take advantage of the snacks, uncrowded bathrooms, and comfy chairs at most airline club lounges, plus you can get help from the club's dedicated ticket agents.
- BYO blanket (and disinfecting wipes, too). "I hate to say it, but tray tables are rarely cleaned, so wipe them off before you use them," says Sarah Scott, a former US Airways flight attendant. "And steer clear of the blankets and pillows. They're only washed when they look dirty."
- Call for help. If you've missed a connection, don't stand in line to rebook with a gate agent. Instead, use your cell phone to call the airline's customer-service number (tuck it in your wallet before leaving). You may speak to someone faster, giving you a better shot at a seat on the next flight.

Accommodations

Everyone needs a roof over their head. There are many options when looking for shelter such as hotels, bed and breakfasts, Airbnb, hostels, and resorts.

Hotels -

Hotels often offer the most facilities and come in different star levels from 1-5 with 5 being the highest level. I have stayed in every level and I seriously recommend restricting your levels to 3, 4, and 5. Most sites such as Expedia, Trivago, Hotels.com, etc. have ratings and reviews. Read them before booking.

Most hotels offer separate bedroom and bathroom, sometimes different room options throughout the hotel, living rooms (suites), restaurants and bars, WiFi access, Concierge, TVs with multiple channels, movies, room service, 24-hour receptions, well equipped rooms including toiletries, bathrobes, coffee machines and more, Pool and fitness facilities, Business and conference facilities.

Many tournament organizers may have made arrangements with a hotel, or a series of hotels, to provide hotel rooms at a discount rate. These 'designated' hotels, when you factor in ground transportation, often offer the best prices and proximity to the venue. Also, staying at the designated hotel helps the organizers with their overall costs as they often get a few 'comp' rooms.

Airbnb –

Airbnb is an online marketplace for arranging or offering lodging, primarily homestays, or tourism experiences. The company does not own any of the real estate listings, nor does it host events. It acts as a broker, receiving commissions from each booking. The rise of Airbnb's popularity has created issues with the hotel business and many city governments.

Airbnb's offer a wide range of property types such as single rooms, a suite of rooms, apartments, moored yachts, houseboats, entire houses, even a castle. Often you may find that Airbnb properties are less expensive than hotel rooms.

Saving money isn't the only reason to consider Airbnb. Here are some pros and cons.

Read the reviews: Many properties often look, or are described by the host, in flattering manners. The third-party property reviews will give you a much better feedback on what you should expect upon arrival. Be very careful about selecting properties that have no third-party reviews.

Personal Contact: Through Airbnb, you get to meet a local, who'll likely be happy to recommend upcoming events and his or her favorite bars and restaurants and maybe will even hang out with you, if you want.

Less Flexibility: Many Airbnb hosts require a minimum stay of two or three nights. Cancellation fees are at the host's discretion and can be steep. Check-in times must be negotiated, although many use lockboxes so that you can check yourself in.

No Business Center: Business travelers may require standard amenities which only a hotel can provide.

Stuff Happens: Airbnb has been around for a while now, and it has closed off as many opportunities for fraud and general craziness that it can identify and deal with. When you book an Airbnb you're not necessarily getting the flawless efficiency of a hotel chain, for better or worse.

Your rating: As with Uber, you will be rated on your stay as a guest. Try to leave the property in as good a shape as when you arrived. Poor ratings will begin to limit who will rent to you.

Bed and Breakfasts (B&B) –

Bed and Breakfasts were the original idea behind Airbnb (that is where the bnb in Airbnb came from). You are renting a room, or two, in someone's private dwelling and they are providing you breakfast as well. Many of these sites have migrated to Airbnb but you may also find them on their own. All of the pros and cons of an Airbnb apply.

Hostels –

A hostel is a form of low-cost, short-term shared sociable lodging where guests can rent a bed, usually a bunk bed in a dormitory, with shared use of a lounge and sometimes a kitchen. Rooms can be mixed or single-sex and have private or shared bathrooms. Private rooms may also be available.

If communal living is for you then hostels offer a very inexpensive accommodation. Remember that you might not be an ideal guest due to your large bag, early waking times, and smelly clothes. Always carry a small lock (if they offer lockers), a towel, your toiletries, flip flops, eyeshades, and earplugs. I have known a few fencers who have stayed at hostels with usually poor results. Security can often be an issue.

Resorts –

There are a few occasions when a fencing tournament is located in, or near, a large resort. As you can imagine, these properties offer large pools, sometimes even multiple, all-inclusive options which can include meals and drinks, WiFi access, 24-hour reception, gym facilities, classes such as Water Aerobics, excursion and activity options, and well equipped rooms with private bathrooms, television facilities and more.

It is worth looking at these properties as their prices may be comparable to other options.

Specific Accommodation tips -

- **[1]** Athletes should thank their parents for the room and board.
- **[2]** Stay as close to the venue as possible. You have most likely driven a private vehicle to the event and are staying at some distance to the venue. Drive the route from the hotel to the venue at least once before the event starts. Road closures and accidents can really disrupt your athlete's arrival, warm-up time, and even participation in an event.
- **[3]** Stay as close to the venue as possible. 'Designated' hotels often offer the best deals when you consider all costs. Being able to run back to your room quickly, whether it is for food or forgotten gear or medical issues, has advantages well beyond price. Also, issues with the designated hotel can often be assisted by the organizing committee.

Food

Vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, diabetic, belief-based, low calorie, low carbohydrate and low fat are all examples of diets that may, or may not be, related to an athlete's unique physiology. A nutritional specialist can have a lasting impact on your athlete's life whichever diet they are on. This guide will not be covering the pros or cons of any diet but we will offer some general advice around food.

[1][2][3] Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate! Dehydration is more common than over-hydration, but over-hydration to the point of hyponatremia (low blood sodium) is very dangerous and can escalate into seizures, coma and death. The symptoms (that become increasingly severe), include headache, vomiting, swollen hands and feet, undue fatigue, confusion (due to progressive swelling of water in the brain) and wheezing (due to water in the lungs).

A dehydrated athlete has a decreased volume of blood circulating through the body, and consequently:

- The amount of blood pumped with each heart beat decreases;
- Exercising muscles do not receive enough oxygen;
- Exhaustion sets in and the athlete's performance suffers;
- By-products of exercise are not flushed out of the body as regularly as they should be.

Research has shown that losing as little as 2% of total body weight can negatively affect athletic performance. For example, if a 150-pound athlete loses three pounds during a workout or competition,

their ability to perform at peak performance due to dehydration is reduced. Proper fluid replenishment is the key to preventing dehydration and reducing the risk of heat injury in athletes engaged in training and competition.

[1][2][3] Sweat contains more than just water; it has electrically charged particles that help keep water in the right balance inside and outside of cells.

Electrolyte	Average amount/ 2 lbs (1 liter,~1 quart) sweat	Food reference
Sodium	800 mg (range 200-1,600)	1 quart Gatorade = 440 mg Sodium
Potassium	200 mg (range 120-600)	1 med banana = 450 mg Potassium
Calcium	20 mg (range 6-40)	8 oz yogurt = 300 mg Calcium
Magnesium	10 mg (range 2-18)	2 Tbsp peanut butter = 50 mg Mg

You are likely to maintain better hydration if you have easy access to good tasting beverages before, during and after exercise. "Good tasting" means:

- A cool temperature (most athletes prefer between 60-70° F)
- A little sodium
- An appealing flavor. (What makes a flavor "appealing" varies greatly between people, cultures).

[1][2][3] Always eat breakfast and eat during the competition. You don't need a big meal but you will need energy throughout the day.

[2][3] Pro-tip: always carry at least 1 meal's worth of food with you. The more complicated the diet then the more meals you should carry with you. You may arrive at your destination too late to find a restaurant or grocery store so carrying your own food will ensure that you are ready to start the tournament day.

[2][3] If possible, choose accommodations with a kitchenette. Cooking your own food is a great way to ensure that you meet your dietary needs and save money, particularly for breakfasts.

[2][3] Find a local grocery/convenience store and purchase food and drinks. Many venues do not meet most dietary requirements and almost all will not have the beverages that you need. Hydration is one key to maximum performance.

[3] Consider a travel friendly meal prior to long trips. Having that 5 alarm Chicken Vindaloo or Street-vendor kabob is probably a dangerous choice prior to a 5 hour flight and a hard competition the next day. Many name-brand fast food restaurants maintain a standard menu and consistent health codes.

[3] If you are traveling to a foreign country and have a specialized dietary requirement then do your research and write your needs on a card in the local language. Never assume a waiter understood your verbal question. "Yes" often means I heard you, not I understand and agree.

At the Competition

Almost every fencing competition follows a similar flow and routine. Understanding a basic routine will allow you to adapt to a local tournament's peculiarities.

Check-in

The first thing that every competitor must do is check in. Find the check-in desk and be prepared to show ID. Some events just have you cross your name off whereas others (NAC) require you to produce your passport. Be prepared to pay your entry fee if it has not been collected previously. Bring along any pertinent receipts to avoid unnecessary complications. Always check that your name is correct, your club/province/country is correct, and that your ranking is correct.

Bag Drop

Once you have checked in then proceed to the designated bag drop off area. Try to stay in the same area as your teammates. If you are alone then store your bag with other groups of athletes. A busy bag area reduces the chances of items going missing. Always keep your bag sealed up when you must be away from it. Avoid leaving valuable goods and documents in your bag.

Weapon Control

Find out what equipment is being checked and go to weapon control with your equipment.

- Masks will always be checked.
- Some tournaments may be checking everything so be prepared. Particularly rigorous armorers will also be checking the conductivity of your electrical gear.
- Take your gear to weapon control yourself.
- Pro-tip: get in the habit of checking your gear before you leave home and then again the night before your competition. Carry a small repair kit and some extra parts (tips, screws, springs, tape, wrench, jeweller's screwdrivers, Allen key, etc.). If possible, carry a small testing kit with weights and shims. Remember that if a tip is loose in one of your weapons then probably all tips should be checked.
- Some events also conduct a weapon control the night before the competition. Use it.
- If possible, go to weapon control when it is not busy. If your event begins in the afternoon then don't crowd the armorers first thing in the morning. You will be surprised at how helpful they can be when a lot of anxious fencers are not breathing down their necks.
- Don't panic if your gear fails. Start scavenging gear from friends and club mates or quickly head over to a vendor and buy new stuff. If you had followed our Pro-tip then this would not have been a problem.

During your event

There are several tips that will make life a lot easier for you once your event is ready to launch.

- Check the rankings prior to poules being cast.
- Check the poules once they are cast and note any strip assignments.
- Watch the referees. When they move then so do you. Be at your strip before they get there.

- Take your gear, food, and drink with you to the strip.
- Check in with the referee and listen carefully to them.
- Always be aware of when you are next on strip and hook up without being told.
- Keep a running total in your head of your victory count as well as your indicator.
- Verify and sign the scoresheet at the end of poules. Shake your referee(s) hand.
- Be aware of when the end-of-poule results are out and check them for accuracy.
- If you are still fencing (have not been cut) then be aware of any strip assignments and times noted.
- Large events break DE's into quadrants so be aware of your quadrant.
- Report to your strip/quadrant 10 minutes before your DE begins and check in with the referee. Again, if you see referees moving then you should be moving to your strip quickly.
- Sign your DE slip. Some events will have the winner take the DE slip to the Directoire Technique (DT). Make sure you know where this is and follow their instructions.

Video Recording

- Video recording a bout is acceptable as long as there is no flash photography, bright lights, and you are not in the way. Stay away from the referees and follow their instructions.
- The best recording is located near the end of the strips at about a 30-45 degree angle to the strip.
- Make sure that you add the referee's call and score for each point.
- Your video is for your personal use and is not 'evidence' for the referee to consider. Stay away from the referees.
- Be aware of privacy concerns and obtain the necessary waivers if you plan on using any video for public display or profit.

On the Podium

I have hung many medals around athlete's necks from club fencers to Pan American Games' champions and there are a few tips that every athlete should know. When I am particularly inclined, I often ask athlete's leaving the podium for the first time if they plan on climbing the podium again in the future. They usually look at me strangely and reply 'of course'. I then instruct them on how to be professional when mounting the podium. Here are the tips:

- Always wear your club/country outer uniform. If you don't own a club jacket then get one or borrow one. Never stand on the podium in your dress whites.
- Always wear shoes.
- Make yourself presentable. The photographs and videos may make it to a wider audience and you want to look your best.
- Always shake hands with your fellow medalists who are already on the podium before you mount the podium.
- Never mount the podium from the front. You should walk around behind the podium and step up facing the audience or step up from the side using the bronze or silver podium steps. If you

think about the asset that you are exposing as you bend over to step up from the front then you will never make that mistake again.

- Ensure your medal is hanging properly around your neck.
- Smile for the photographs, even if you just lost. Potential sponsors are always looking for great photos.
- Always do a fun photograph with all of the medalists on the gold medal step.
- Take some extra time after the presentation to take a photograph with your coach.

Parenting Tips during the Competition

The one constant for any young athlete in any sport is the presence of parents at their competitions. There are some good parents and a handful of bad parents. Here are some tips to help you be a better parent to your developing athlete.

- Your main role is the chief member of the support team. You handle the bookings, travel, paperwork, transportation, and costs. A well-organized trip will reduce the stress on your athlete and allow them to focus on the competition.
- Make sure your athlete has the food and drink required for the tournament.
- Let your athlete control their competitive environment. Let them 'do' while you watch.
- You are not the coach. Let the coach handle all of the coaching duties.
- Stay away from the referees. Nothing good will come to you from any in-competition encounter with a referee.
- Keep an eye on your coach's location. Let the coach know when, and where, your athlete will be competing next. Be aware that your athlete's coach may have other students going at the same time so they might not make it to your athlete's strip.
- Be the cheerleader that your athlete wants.
- Celebrate victories immediately after the coach's meeting with the athlete.
- Let the athlete cool down alone (or with their coach) after a loss. This might take several minutes to hours but give them some space.
- Seek out, and control, the sitting resources. Fencing tournaments can be long so sit down and relax.
- Stay fed and hydrated. It is a long day for the parent as well.
- Do not plan functions too close to the close of an event. Dinner reservations will be missed if the event runs long or your athlete goes deeper in an event. Remember, your athlete is attending the event to compete. Extra distractions do not help their competitive mindset.
- Have your camera ready for those spur of the moment shots or medal presentation moments.

Add-on vacations and tours

At some point in your athlete's life they will attend a competition near some fun or interesting location. Often the first thought about this trip is to make it into a mini-getaway or family vacation. This may be a good idea but remember that your athlete is making this trip to compete. Schedule any trip or tours for after the competition's completion or, for multi-day events, on the day off. If you are scheduling

something for a day off then make sure the coach, team, or chef de mission knows of it and approves. They may have scheduled extra training or a team function for that day.

Social Media

The world has gotten smaller and more connected in the past 20 years. Once an afterthought, social media and your athlete's online presence is now something that must be actively managed. Sponsors, schools, and potential employers now actively check your profiles and coverage. Thera are many good sites with tips and advice and I have cherry picked some of the best tips by Cassie Calvert, Baltimore Raven's Social Media Coordinator:

DO: Research yourself.

I can't stress this enough. Put yourself in the shoes of someone else learning about you via social media. Look through your own platforms. Is there anything that might cause a potential coach or employer to raise an eyebrow? Be proactive if so! Remove the post if possible or be prepared to give context if the issue is ever raised.

My number one piece of advice to athletes is "back-stalk yourself." We've all found ourselves looking through a friend's sister's boyfriend's cousins' Instagram page. If someone stumbles across your page what would they see?

Twitter can surprisingly be the worst culprit here. It happens nearly every year during the NFL and NBA drafts. Old tweets of a high profile top draft pick resurface where he says something derogatory about his now team or teammate, or something cringe-worthy about women or people of another race.

Sure, great advice would be to not tweet or post anything like this in the first place. But as great as social media is, it doesn't allow for time travel or the foresight that comes with age and experience. But, the good news is any tweet of yours that someone else can find, you have access to also.

Go back through those middle school or high school tweets of song lyrics and complaints about homework and make sure there's nothing to truly be embarrassed by. Everyone has lapses in judgement. The downside of social media is that these lapses—that may not reflect who you are—can become very public, very quickly. By doing research on yourself, you can save yourself any future awkwardness or embarrassment and ensure you're putting your best foot forward online.

DO: Use your platform for good.

If you're at a point where you have a decent following, you have the ability to leverage your platform to raise awareness to causes that are important to you and make substantial change.

My favorite example from this year was Houston Texans' J.J. Watt raising money for the victims of Hurricane Harvey. He posted an initial video asking people to donate to the fundraising page he created, hoping to raise $100,000 for hurricane relief.

> Recovery efforts from Hurricane Harvey will be massive.
>
> We must come together to help rebuild our communities.https://t.co/SR6DmnNbyM pic.twitter.com/iiMsG2i4dl
>
> — JJ Watt (@JJWatt) August 27, 2017

37 MILLION DOLLARS LATER, Watt made a huge impact in his community at a time where people desperately needed it.

> This is what we'll be distributing today pic.twitter.com/YVyOC4jRaj
>
> — JJ Watt (@JJWatt) September 3, 2017

DO: Use your actual name and make your accounts public.

Don't let the fear of posting keep you from making your accounts public. In the age of screenshots, nothing is truly private. While you should cautiously use social media, your personal social media accounts can help you network, promote your brand and even be a source of income.

DO: Show Personality.

Your accounts should be an expression of you! There is nothing worse than an athlete's profile that's all advertisements or clearly run by an agent or assistant.

> "Excited to head to (City) and join the (team name)."—Markelle Fultz pic.twitter.com/eUzTf7fs46
>
> — Rodger Sherman (@rodger_sherman) June 23, 2017

DO: Remember screen shots are forever.

This one is pretty self-explanatory. Don't send anyone anything you're not okay with being screenshotted and posted online. Texts, snapchats and private messages included.

This also goes for posts. No matter how quickly you delete something, remember someone can screenshot it just as quickly. Before you hit send, make sure it's something you're comfortable having attached to your name forever.

DO: Learn from other influencers and celebrities.

I work in social media in sports, but I often find my best inspiration and ideas from accounts that have nothing to do with sports. My favorite social media follows include Chrissy Teigen (she's hilarious), Chance the Rapper and The Rock. Lots of people and brands are doing cool things in the social media space and you can learn from them.

DO: Encourage other athletes, regardless of sport or team.

Some of my favorite moments on social media come from elite athletes being impressed by elite athletes in other sports and congratulating them on their performances.

> Man I just witnessed the greatest catch ever possibly by Odell Beckham Jr! WOW!!!!
>
> — LeBron James (@KingJames) November 24, 2014

> Game! Blouses! @JordanSpieth with the hole-out from the bunker to win it! Congrats bro
>
> — Stephen Curry (@StephenCurry30) June 25, 2017

DON'T: Make fun of other athletes or teams, you never know when your paths will cross.

See aforementioned Lonzo tweet.

DON'T: Comment on, share, or like anything offensive or inappropriate.

Remember things you like are just as public as things you post yourself.

DO: Share fun workouts, training tips, recipes.

But, don't become one of those serial gym mirror-selfie picture takers. No one likes those. (And everyone loves a good cheat day.)

One final bit of advice from Adam Juratovac. A former collegiate and professional football player, he now is a corporate attorney who works with emerging companies and businesses in the Silicon Valley. As part of his practice, he consults with professional athletes coaching them to leverage their platforms for social change within their communities).

"The bottom line is that you never know who's watching, but they're watching.

People are not only analyzing what you do on social media, they are seeing how you act in real life. Your body language, the way you dress and speak all matter when it comes to creating a brand for yourself.

Social media is often the first thing that people think about when it comes to branding because of how connected the world is through them and how many people use them.

Your brand really starts before it even gets to social media. Social media is just an extension. Keep in mind that no matter where you go or what you do, as an athlete you are held to a high standard in this world and everything you do will be amplified. And without a doubt, the negative things that you do will always be highlighted and broadcasted before the positive things that you do.

Let this be your guiding point before any post, picture or twitter you put out in the world."

Amateur Status, Fencing at University, and the NCAA

Graduating from high school is never the end of your educational pathway. For those athletes that are looking to combine post-secondary education and fencing then a few options are open to you.

Canada

The Canadian option is the Ontario University Athletics (OUA) conference. Other provinces do have recreational fencing clubs in their universities but only the OUA has an organized conference.

The OUA has active fencing programs at Brock, Carleton, Guelph, McMaster, Ottawa, Queen's, RMC, Ryerson, Toronto, Trent, Waterloo, Western and York. Check with the university to see how active their program is and if it is a fit for your academic career. The OUA hosts regional tournaments as well as their G3 championships. The CFF also hosts the University Championships which are held alongside their National Championships (usually in May). Participation and results in these events will help you qualify for the World University Games.

NCAA

The big fish in the University athletics pond is the USA's National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA is a non-profit organization that regulates student athletes from 1,268 North American institutions and conferences. It also organizes the athletic programs of many colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, and helps more than 480,000 college student-athletes who compete annually in college sports.

If you are considering attending and competing in athletics at a NCAA school then you need to familiarize yourself with their massive eligibility requirements. See the following links for much more information:

https://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future

https://www.rvrhs.com/docs/NCAATipsforEligibility.docx

Your eligibility as a student-athlete begins from the day you enter your first competition so become very familiar with the rules, regulations, and guidelines.

Some bonus tips for athletes considering an NCAA career:

- Always maintain your amateur status. Do not accept any free merchandise or money that is related to your athletic achievements.
- Modeling jobs related to your athletics will violate your NCAA amateur status.
- Betting on any sport related to NCAA sports is forbidden (e.g. NBA, NFL, NHL, etc.).
- A NCAA coach will never approach you. You must initiate first contact or have someone introduce you to the coach.
- See https://www.rvrhs.com/docs/NCAATipsforEligibility.docx. It offers good advice even though it is geared to US students. Be aware, Grade 9 academic achievements are counted in your NCAA application.

- Check with www.collegeboard.org for locations nearest to you that host the SAT exam.
- Pro-tip: if you miss the reservation date to write the SAT exam then ask to be placed on the standby list. Students on the standby list may take the place of students who do not appear for the exam.
- Follow our social media section's guidelines. NCAA schools will evaluate your social media presence.
- Speak to other athletes who have traveled this path before you. They can comment on programs, coaches, and many other issues related to fencing in the NCAA.

Final Words

Our fencing journey has been going for over 25 years and covered every aspect of fencing. The old proverb (circa 1592) holds true: forewarned, forearmed. We hope that this guide will help all fencers, parents, guardians, and interested bystanders understand their fencer's journey and avoid the pitfalls along the way. Fencing is a marvelous sport and it creates fantastic human beings. We wish you the best of luck on your fencing pathway.

Contributing Authors

Brad Goldie – Brad got involved with fencing at the age of 39 while sitting in a gymnasium watching his oldest daughter learn to fence. Her early success saw him drawn deeper into the fencing community as both an athlete and administrator. Brad became an NCCP certified coach in foil, epee, and sabre and has developed a handful of Provincial, Regional, and National champions. Brad got involved in refereeing while living in the USA and went on to become a Canadian nationally certified referee in foil, epee, and sabre. Brad is currently working with the Alberta Fencing Association in an effort to revive their referee development. Brad began his administrative career as the Secretary for the Epic Fencing Club in Calgary. This innocuous position eventually led him to become the President and Chairman of the Board for the AFA before, and after, his time living in the USA. Brad eventually went on to become the President and Chairman of the Board for the Canadian Fencing Federation. Brad became involved in running fencing tournaments at the club level and eventually created and conducted courses on how to run effective fencing tournaments. He has been involved in the running of tournaments ranging from club level pizza cups to the Pan American Games. Finally, Brad's competitive fencing career started late but he became Alberta's Provincial Epee champion at the age of 46. He retired from competition after this feat. You can now find him developing sabre and epee fencers at the Gladiator's Fencing club in Calgary.

Jean Goldie – Jean got involved in fencing as the main support and logistics person for a family of 3 highly competitive children. Jean developed her logistical skills as the main chauffeur, travel agent, medical resource planner, equipment purchaser, educator, and emotional support agent for her family. Jean was also the family's main administrative point of contact with the NCAA. Jean never really took up the sport of fencing except for 1 adult class in foil. She can often be found at local fencing competitions providing support and advice to the novice fencing parent.

Alanna Goldie – Alanna is the youngest daughter of Brad and Jean Goldie. Alanna began fencing at the tender age of 8 and has gone on to numerous fencing achievements in Women's foil. Alanna is a 13 time National Champion, 4-time First Team All American for The Ohio State University, Pan American Games Gold medalists in Women's Team Foil, and just recently qualified for the (now delayed) 2020 Olympic Games in Women's Team foil. You can read more about Alanna at https://olympic.ca/team-canada/alanna-goldie/ and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alanna_Goldie.