

Conventions” of foil and sabre fencing

—are rules designed to teach fencers to fence *as if* their blades were sharp.

- The rules are not arbitrary but are based on logical and intelligent behaviour.
- They instil in a fencer a specific response to an opponent's move, as opposed to an instinctive reaction.
- Above all, the conventions establish right-of-way, or who has the right to hit whom at any given moment.

The core assumption behind right-of-way is that a fencing bout is always in one of three states:

-- **nothing** significant is happening:

-- **both** fencers are conceiving and executing their actions simultaneously: *no hits awarded*

-- **one** fencer is controlling the action and tempo and the other is trying to gain control:

The controlling fencer has the right-of-way, and his hit has precedence over any hit from the other fencer.

The job of the referee is to decide which fencer was NOT controlling the action, and annul his touch.

If he cannot decide, the referee should abstain and annul BOTH hits.

- Control is taken whenever one fencer threatens the other with his blade. A threat can be either an attack, or a "point in line" that is established before the opponent attacks.
- Control is lost when the threat misses, falls short, is broken off, or is deflected away from the target by a parry or other engagement from the defender.
- The defender has a split-second window of opportunity to return the attack (ie. riposte) before the attacker recovers; if he does so, he takes over right-of-way and the tables have turned. Otherwise it is a toss-up; the first fencer to initiate an attack will seize the right-of-way anew.

The right-of-way relationships between common fencing actions are as follows:

- **derobement** has right-of-way over *attacks on the blade*
- **attacks on the blade** have right-of-way over the *point in line*
- **point in line** has right-of-way over the *attack*
- the **simple attack** has right-of-way over the *stop-hit*
- the **stop-hit** has right-of-way over the *renewal of the attack*
- the **stop-hit** in time has right-of-way over the *compound attack*
- the **riposte** has right-of-way over the *renewal of the attack*
- the **counter-riposte** has right-of-way over the *renewal of the riposte*
- the **remise of the attack** has right-of-way over the *delayed riposte*