

# SEACOAST FENCING CLUB

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## **Competition: Local, Regional, and National**

*The benefits of competition are many.* You learn to fence in the club, in a low key, very supportive environment. Life is generally not like that. Competition gives you important tools for handling life. In addition to the opportunity to fence those trained by other coaches, competition will develop your ability to adjust to rapidly changing situations, to deal effectively (and without anger) to others trying to trick and defeat you, and show you how to ask for advice, tailor it to your own situation, and then use it. You will learn how to put wins and losses into perspective, and take pride in the quality of the effort as much as the status of the result. It will improve your ability to focus mental, emotional, and physical energy in moments of stress (there is always some level of stress in a competition, just as there is in life).

### **The appropriate level of competition changes over time**

*The first competitions are usually club team/novice tournaments meets,* limited to Seacoast fencers only, between the Manchester and Dover branches (although I may invite members of other clubs to join us). My experienced fencers direct and coach, as it will be somewhat intimidating to the first time competitor. I am usually at these meets, and I will help put the wins and losses into perspective. Electric weapons, lames, and knickers can be rented for a nominal fee.

*Please note:* The times listed for meets are the *close* of registration, and if you show up after that, you will not be allowed to fence. You should plan to show up ½ hour before the close of registration, to allow time to register, warm up, stretch, dress, and get some practice bouts. Fencing will start 20 to 30 minutes after the close of registration. You will fence for two to five hours, depending on how many enter, and how well you fence. Expect the meet to take all day- so don't make plans to do something else until evening. National meets can take up to 12 hours, with lots of down time.

*The next level are local USFA meets,* (schedules for these meets can be picked up at the club, or online at the Division web site: [www.northeastfencing.net](http://www.northeastfencing.net)). The first USFA meets should be age or ratings restricted meets (Unclassified or "E"). *Age restricted meets* are a great opportunity for the younger fencer to bout others his or her age (and hopefully size). The Youth events include the accompanying age (i.e., a Y-14 event includes 14 year olds), and Cadet (U-16 or U-17) and Junior (U-19 or U-20) mean the fencer must be under that age (i.e., 15 for a U-16, or 19 for a U-20). Ages are determined by the age of the fencer on December 31st of that competitive season (the middle of the season). Generally, you should enter their age group and the next older one.

Since *ratings restricted meets* are open to both adults and younger fencers, the younger fencer's size and strength should be considered. The skill level at these meets are defined by the national ratings system: "A" fencers are the top in the country, "B" next, and so on down to "E" and Unclassified (those who have no rating at all). Ratings are based on one's finish at a particular

event - the better the finish, the higher the rating. The more highly rated fencers in a meet, the higher (and more) ratings given out. However, you should not get overly focused on earning a rating. Ratings are in reality, merely a tool to seed the opening round of an event evenly. Earning a particular rating is mostly a matter of being at the right event, and meeting the right opponents (luck of the draw). The fencers tend to boast about their ratings, and so everyone wants a higher one than they have, but it is an imprecise measurement of a fencer's skill level. Fencers should enter events at their rating level, and one level higher. More experienced and motivated fencers can enter the higher rated meets, but talk to me first. Most women should enter every women's event in their weapon, irregardless of their particular rating.

***The United States Fencing Association:*** The USFA is the national governing body for the Olympic sport of fencing. Their web page (see links) has much useful information. You must join the USFA (\$50 per year) to fence in USFA competitions (and have the USFA magazine and the Northeast Division newsletter and competition schedule mailed to you).

***Equipment:*** All USFA meets require two electric weapons, two body cords, knickers, and for foil and saber, a lame. For a local meet, your child should have their own knickers (~\$55), a least one electric weapon (~\$90-\$130 for a foil), and one body cord (~\$35). A foil lames costs ~\$145, a saber lame \$180. You can rent everything at first, but at larger meets, we risk running out of equipment, so we encourage everyone to start accumulating their own.

## ***Division Meets***

***Running Local Tournaments: PARENTS: PLEASE READ!!!*** Tournaments benefit all fencers, including you (or your child). Meets must be run by someone, and that someone is (of course) you, the parents. Some of you will be there anyway, as drivers and to support your child. Running a meet is not particularly hard to do, and it has to be done. At most, it will keep you from seeing a few of your child's bouts.

SFC is responsible for running all USFA meets held in Manchester and Rochester. For each day of fencing, we need a morning crew of two parents, ready to open up the building at 9:15 am, register the morning entries, handle paperwork, hand out rental gear, and run concessions until 2:00 pm. A second crew should take over at 1:30 pm, and hopefully be able to close up the building by 6:30 pm. Parents who have not run a meet should plan on volunteering at least twice: the first time or two to learn how, and again, to run one. Please volunteer, as these meets cannot happen without your help.

## ***Regional meets***

These are regularly scheduled meets within driving distance, but may require an overnight stay in a hotel. These are open to all, but realistically, only fencers with at least a year or more competitive experience should attend, and most require pre-registration three or more weeks ahead of time. The most important ones are the North Atlantic Section Championships (our Section of the USFA), and includes our Northeast Division (Maine and New Hampshire), Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York State (except NYC). ***To attend a Section Championship, you must pre-register four weeks ahead of time.***

Other major regional meets are the various Regional Youth Circuits, and the Pomme de Terre in Boston, the Turkey Stab in Connecticut, and the Middlebury Open in Vermont. There are also meets in New York and Canada for the fencers competing on the national circuit. For these meets, you should have *all* your own electric competitive gear: three electric weapons, two

body cords, knickers, jacket, mask, and lame. It is also a good idea to have a fourth weapon available.

## *National Meets*

It is here that the top fencers in the country gather to test their skills against the best the United States has to offer. I believe every fencer who qualifies should go to the two national championships (the Junior Olympics in February, and the Summer Nationals in late June/early July). These are huge tournaments, and provide a great experience for the fencer. They learn how they stack up against the very best in the country, get to see how the top national meets differ from local meets, and provide a great learning experience. It also exposes them to the

NAC level of fencing, after which the fencer, and their parents, can decide if they want to compete at that level on a more regular basis. The NAC's are where the college coaches recruit fencers for their varsity teams. If the fencer gets on the national point standings, they will get coaches interested in having him or her attend their college. Seacoast fencers are *very* popular with college coaches (virtually every SFC fencer has become a team captain before graduation).

These are Div I (all ages, but the fencer must have a C rating or higher to enter), Junior (U-20 and U-19), Cadet (U-17 and U-16), and Youth (Y-14, Y-12, Y-10). The "U" means *under* that age as of Dec. 31 of that competitive year. The "Y" *includes* that age, or younger as of Dec. 31. (I don't know why the USFA has two ways of indicating ages.) The top 32 finishes in each event will earn national points, which are then used to establish your rank in the country. These points determine our national teams. ***Please note: Before entering a national event, you must clear it with me, the head coach. And make sure all advance registrations for regional and national meets are submitted on time!***

## *Coaching at Tournaments*

When I coach at a section or national meet, I give each fencer a warm up lesson, and try to watch as many of their bouts as I can. I give them observations and suggestions during time outs, and I critique the bout once it's over. The meets I usually attend are: the Junior Olympic Championships in February; the North Atlantic Section Junior/Cadet Championships (U-16 and U-19), usually the last weekend in April; the Connecticut and Massachusetts Regional Youth Circuits; the Summer National Championships; and occasionally one or two other national meets (called NAC's in fencing vernacular), which I pick at the beginning of the season.

***The time I spend coaching (and traveling) is something I give to the fencers,*** but I do charge a fee which covers about half my expenses: travel, hotel, and meals.

***Fencing can, and should, be a lifelong sport. It is a fun way to achieve fitness, and to improve your mental and emotional mettle, as all of us (coaches, parents, and fencer) work to reach the next level of our sport.***