

SEACOAST FENCING CLUB

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To the Parents of Youth and Junior Fencers

Welcome to Seacoast. We have had a tremendous past few seasons, one of our fencers, Abby Emerson finishing the Junior World Cup season ranked 10th in the world in U-20 Women's Foil for the past season. And at the Junior World Championships last spring, she was the alternate in both the U-20 Women's Foil *and* the Women's Epee Teams! Previously she made the US team for the Cadet World Championships in 2003, finishing 22nd in U-17 Women's Foil. In 2002, Seacoast fencers won two bronze medals at World Championships: the mother daughter team of Kerry Walton (3rd in U-20 Women's Epee, and her mom, Yvonne Walton (2002, 3rd in 50+ Women's Foil). This is the first time a parent and child have *both* earned medals at World Championships! Kerry made the US team for the World Championships in October, 2005. Seacoast fencers have now been on these teams nine times since 1999 (only the top three fencers in each weapon make the team each year). Two fencers have been offered full fencing scholarships, and three others have been offered partial fencing scholarships. And eleven Seacoast fencers have won 30 National Championships over the past ten years.

While developing champions is great, I don't want anyone to lose sight of my core philosophy. I have never felt that the sole object of participating in any sport was to win. At the Junior Olympics last February, over 2000 fencers competed, but only twelve won gold medals. It would be a shame if the rest went home depressed because they did not win their events. My belief is that if you do your best, and learn from both victory *and* defeat, at the end of the day, you win.

"The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" attributes the English victory over Napoleon to the lessons learned from sports. Sports should develop good health, good character, demonstrate the power of teamwork, and be fun. If the children do not have fun participating in the program here at SFC, they will not continue long enough to develop the skills necessary to do well. If they do not get proper coaching, they will not develop good technique. But if they do not develop good sportsmanship, they will have missed the most valuable lesson of any sport. I take as much pride in the national reputation SFC has for sportsmanship and good manners as I do for its reputation for good fencing.

My job as head coach is to ensure that every fencer in my training program has the *opportunity* to improve in a safe environment. My job is to provide that environment, teach the tools and techniques, and insist on proper behavior. It is *not* my job to badger, yell, scream, or shout to "motivate" a fencer to do better. No coach creates a champion: the athlete does that, with their personal motivations, goals, drive, and desire. A good coach provides the environment and guidance.

At national and regional events, where egos and reputations appear to be on the line, I try to

counter this by asking the fencers two questions: "Why do we fence?" Answer- to have fun. "Why are we at this tournament?" Answer - to learn. After every bout that I am able to watch, I will analyze the fencing, regardless the result. Win or lose, I try to make each bout a learning experience.

What do I expect from the fencers? Their job is to work hard and do their best at all times, listen to their coaches, learn from those more skilled, help those less skilled, and to challenge themselves: their skills, fears, and aspirations. My coaches and I can help them reach their goals, but the motivation to achieve them must come from within each fencer.

What do I expect from the parents? Let the coaches coach your child. It is rarely appropriate for the parent to offer tactical or strategic advice. While I, or my coaches will try to watch every competitive bout your child has, we will miss many of them. This is not a bad thing, for your child must learn self reliance at some point in their life, and fencing is a good environment for your child to develop those skills.

Your job is to provide love, support, and encouragement for your child. Help your child maintain an even emotional base in victory and defeat. Be *visibly* supportive of your child and his or her teammates, club, and sport, for this is the best example you can give your child of the power of quiet leadership.

The three weapons: Fencers can use a foil, epee, or saber. Each has its own character, which may or may not match well with your child. We start with foils because the lessons learned with that weapon transfer over to the other two better than the other way around. There are also more foil fencers than epee or saber, both in the club and throughout the nation. So foil fencing gives the best opportunity to get significant competitive experience. Once distance, timing, and strategy have been learned, your child is free to pick up either epee or saber. My top epee fencers are almost always my top foil fencers as well, and they train in both. Epee and saber lessons are given on an individual basis with the coaches.

Costs and Responsibilities: I try to keep the costs as low as possible, to enable as many fencers as possible to participate. I think a busy club, with many active fencers, is more fun than a club with five or six participants a night. So to keep the base price affordable, I have the fencers pay for what they use: floor space, private lessons, coaching at meets, equipment. Use more, pay more.

Tuition System: There are five training sessions: Three roughly 12 week long sessions during the nine month regular season: Fall (Sept-Nov), Winter (Dec-Feb), Spring (Mar-May). A June session, primarily to prepare for the Summer Nationals, usually meets twice a week in Manchester and in Rochester. An August session meets twice a week in both venues. The club is closed in July. During the regular season (September through May), we meet three times a week in Manchester and in Rochester. Fencers can train one, two or three times a week. I have not found any particular advantage to training more than three times a week, as at that point, a fencer must reduce the intensity of practices, or risk overuse injuries and burnout. Fencers can attend training at either or both facilities. Dues should be paid in full the first week of each session, but payment schedules can be arranged.

Classes: David Rabitor, Ron Raiselis, Maureen Anderson, Yvonne Walton, and David Lake teach the beginning and intermediate classes. The head coach, Chris Pullo, teaches the advanced classes. Advanced classes are once a week for 30 minutes, during regular adult/junior training.

The course is has 27 sessions, meeting nine times during each three month term. Everyone takes the class at least once, and usually several times.

Private Lessons: Before taking private lessons, students should have been fencing for at least a year and have demonstrated a strong work ethic, and an equally strong desire to improve. When I feel it is appropriate, I will suggest lessons for your child, but feel free to talk to me at any time about how we can improve your child's level of fencing. Private lessons are arranged directly with the coaches, who are private contractors, not employees of Seacoast. The amount paid for private lessons depends on the experience level of the coach giving the lesson. I give foil and epee lessons in both Rochester and Manchester, as does David Rabitor. John Terninko is the saber coach in Rochester, and I give saber lessons in Manchester. Ron Raiselis and Yvonne Walton give introductory foil private lessons. Yvonne Walton gives introductory foil private lessons in Dover, and Ron Raiselis in Rochester.

Competition

While not required, fencers are urged to enter competitions: The benefits are many. In addition to the opportunity to fence those trained by other coaches, competition will develop your child's ability to adjust to rapidly changing situations, to deal effectively, and without anger, to others trying to trick and defeat them, and show how to ask for advice and tailor it to their own situation, and use it. Each of will learn how to put winning and losing into perspective, and take pride in the quality of the effort as much as the status of the result. It will improve your child's ability to focus mental, emotional, and physical energy in moments of stress (we try to minimize it, but there is always some level of stress in a competition, as in life).

Please note: The times listed for meets are the *close* of registration, and if you show up after that, your child 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. Your child will fence for two to five hours, depending on how many enter, and how well your child fences. Expect the meet to take all day- so don't make plans to do something else until evening. For more on competitions, see the attachment on "**Competitions**".