

# How to Become a Fencing Referee

The Fencing Officials Commission wants every person who can qualify to become a rated referee. The Commission's program has as its main purpose the encouragement and assistance of interested people to become good referees. Some general guidelines in this regard:

- Becoming a good referee depends, in large part, upon establishing confidence in one's self and in others that your judgments will be sound. This takes time, effort and exposure. This requires the referee to be available to accept opportunities to direct at higher level competitions.
- A referee must do more than know the rules. The rules must be applied! And - they must be applied under the pressures generated in competitions.
- The referee not only must apply the rules competently but do so in a manner that is positive rather than negative.
- Referees must train and practice their skills as surely as the competitors they judge must train and practice. Just as a competitor's skills deteriorate without practice, so do a referee's. A top referee officiates often.
- One must study (not just read) the rules! The referee must realize that application of the rules is primary, but command of the rules is the best way both to gain confidence and to convince others of one's competence.
- Attend approved referees' clinics - these will give a better idea of what is expected of a fencing referee. In addition, literature, videotapes, et cetera provided by the FOC should be studied for clues to proper application of the rules.
- One must remember that our sport is constantly changing. The fact that a referee directed in the finals of the Nationals two years ago does not necessarily mean his or her level of competence is the same today. A good referee stays current!
- Attend as many competitions as possible. Be sure to arrive before the first round. That is when you will most likely be assigned. Don't become one of the complainers who are often heard to say: "They never use me as a referee! For the past five years, I've arrived just before the finals of the Nationals and offered to referee, but the FOC Representative never assigns me! It is important to understand that the person in charge of assigning referees must have confidence in your abilities at the moment of need - it simply is not fair to the fencers to assign you even though you might have directed well at another time.
- Develop habits to aid you in remembering what you should do. (Example: Every time you do your inspection of a fencer's equipment at the start of a pool or direct elimination bout, you should do it in exactly the same order. It will be far less likely to find a fencer on the strip without a required inspection mark.) Keep score, time bouts, check scoresheets, watch other referees. We learn by doing and by example, and a competition is the place to learn.

Many clubs organize tournaments for the dual purpose of training novice fencers for competition and for providing practice opportunities for referees. If your club does not, organize an event. Offer to referee whenever you see two people fencing for touches. Top coaches are in agreement that understanding refereeing can only help the competitor. Compare your judgments with those of

experienced referees at every tournament. You may not always agree, so ask questions and discuss things.

Most referees' first experience with tournament officiating will come unexpectedly; when there is no one else readily available, you will be asked to preside. If you have prepared as outlined above, you will survive this experience, and you will learn from it. Be warned, however, that your first opportunity will probably involve inexperienced fencers, and their actions are often extremely difficult to analyze. There is no help for this; persevere and learn from each exposure.

## Referee Ratings

The following system has been established by the FOC and approved by the USFA Board of Directors for the rating of USFA referees, and is based on a 10 level scale, with 1 being the highest:

A level 10 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of an Unclassified competition.

A level 9 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of an E rated competition.

A level 8 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of a D rated competition.

A level 7 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of a C rated competition.

A level 6 rating requires a passing score on the written exam and a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the finals of a B rated competition.

A level 4 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the Direct Elimination round of 128 of an Open North American Cup competition.

A level 3 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the Direct Elimination round of 32 of an Open North American Cup competition.

A level 2 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the Direct Elimination round of 8 of an Open North American Cup competition.

A level 1 rating requires a demonstrated proficiency at any level of an Open North American Cup competition.

Once you have gained some experience, you should make arrangements to attend a Referee Development Seminar in your area. Once you have completed the seminar, you may apply to the Fencing Officials Commission to be examined for a rating. You will be required to first pass the *USFA Referee Written Examination*. When you have passed the written exam with a score of 90% correct or better, you may apply to be given a practical examination by an FOC-approved examiner.

The first step for any examination is to obtain a copy of the *Study Guide for National Referee Examination*. This may be obtained from the USFA National Office, One Olympic Plaza, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80909, for a four (\$4.00) dollar postage and handling fee or by downloading it from the USFA web page on the Internet (<http://www.usfencing.org>). You will not be given an "answer key" to the *Study Guide* as that would defeat the purpose of the guide, which is for you to develop a thorough knowledge of the rules. The *Study Guide* questions are organized in the order of the rules in the *Rules Book*. You are expected to find the answers to each question in the *Rules Book*.

The Referee Development Seminar will provide you with a broad understanding of the role,

responsibilities, and duties of a referee, as well as refine your sense of right of way, timing, and application of the penalties. The *Study Guide* will prepare you for the written exam. The two together are designed to prepare you for the demands of refereeing actual fencing bouts.

With the *Study Guide*, you will also receive a list of FOC-approved examiners and Referee Development Seminar instructors. (If there are one or two answers to questions in the *Study Guide* that you cannot find, an examiner will assist you in finding the applicable rule.) Contact any one of them (obviously, geographic considerations should be made) to arrange for a Referee Development Seminar in your area, and to administer first the written test and, after successfully passing it, a practical examination. For National Ratings, the practical examination may be given during any round of any competition that is considered by the examiner to be equivalent to the first round of the USFA National Championships, or the examination may be arranged with a group of fencers selected by the examiner outside of an actual competition. Please be aware that this may allow examinations in the first round of some Divisional Opens or during a training session at a club but not allow examinations in the finals of some Sectional Championships. The level of the fencing while you are being examined is the only governing factor. The FOC will continue to arrange testing (and clinics) at Sectional Championships.

Once an individual has any rating, the FOC requests that the referee use the rating. A referee who does not successfully officiate at their rated level for a period of two years will have her or his rating lowered automatically one level. If the referee does not successfully officiate for an additional two years following such a decrease in rating, the rating will automatically become Class 10. If a referee is inactive for five successive years, the National Rating will be withdrawn. All Nationally Rated Referees who do not preside at USFA National Competitions (North American Cups, National Junior Olympics, or National Championships) are required to notify the FOC of their activity in order to maintain their 5 rating. All lists of Nationally Rated Referees published by the FOC (released at least annually) will indicate the most recent year of activity at the rated level.

Fencing needs good referees! Fencing needs referees who are active!

The Class 4 rating may be awarded by the FOC's Domestic Rating Committee. The Classes 3-1 ratings are awarded only by a vote of the entire FOC. Referees who feel that they have improved up to a higher level or referees who feel that their rating is incorrectly low may apply for examination (only a practical is needed for 4-1) by writing to the Fencing Officials Commission.

Immediately after any practical examination has been given, the candidate will be advised by the examiner(s) as to the evaluation(s). The results of the practical examination for Classes 3-1 will be reported to the FOC and will then be voted upon. Members of the FOC who are familiar with the candidate's officiating level will vote on the person's rating, while those who are not currently familiar will abstain.

## **Referee Development Seminars and clinics**

With the requirement of the Referee Development Seminar, The Fencing Officials Commission has certified a number of Instructors, based, as much as possible on a geographic distribution. All Divisions that wish to have a Seminar should write to the FOC with as much lead-time as possible. These seminars usually require two full days to complete, and usually have a fee associated with them, which is established by the Instructor.

In addition to the Seminars, referee clinics can be arranged. The purpose of these clinics is to provide a refresher to the Seminars, to provide a conduit for news and developments at the international level to the local level.

All Sections have been mandated by the USFA Board of Directors to have a representative of the Fencing Officials Commission at the Sectional Championships to conduct such clinics and, if the level of the competition is sufficiently high, for examining referees. Section Chairs should write to the FOC as soon as the dates of the Championships are set to make the necessary arrangements. Expenses (honorarium, room, board, and transportation) for this are to be borne by the Section.

The Seminars and Clinics are essential to develop and maintain standardized officiating practices. Standardized officiating practices are essential to the development of our sport in the United States. Only approved people may conduct seminars and clinics. All too often (despite the best of intentions), wrong and outdated information is passed on to the unsuspecting by so-called "knowledgeable referees." Please - contact the FOC for seminars and clinics.