

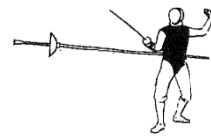


Weapons

Foil, epee and saber are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. While it is not unusual for fencers to compete in all three events, an athlete typically chooses to hone their skills in one weapon.

Foil – The Sport of Kings

The foil is a descendant of the light court sword formally used by nobility to train for duels. The foil has a flexible rectangular blade, approximately 35 inches in length and weighs less than one pound. Points are scored with the tip of the blade and must land within the torso of the body. The valid target area in foil is the torso from the shoulders to the groin in the front and to the waist in the back. It does not include the arms, neck, head and legs. This concept of on-target and off-target evolved from the theory of 18th-century fencing masters who instructed their pupils to only attack the vital areas of the body – i.e. the torso. Of course, the head is also a vital area of the body, but attacks to the face were considered unsporting and therefore discouraged.



The foil fencer's uniform includes a metallic vest (called a lamé), which covers the valid target area so that a valid touch will register on the scoring machine. The flexible nature of the foil blade permits the modern elite foil fencer to attack an opponent from seemingly impossible angles.

Epee – Freestyle Fencing

The epee (pronounced "EPP-pay," meaning sword in French), the descendant of the dueling sword, is similar in length to the foil, but is heavier, weighing approximately 27 ounces, with a larger guard (to protect the hand from a valid hit) and a much stiffer blade. Touches are scored only with the point of the blade, and the entire body, head-to-toe, is the valid target area, imitating an actual duel.

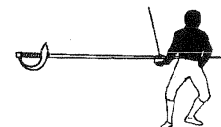


A full-body target naturally makes epee a competition of careful strategy and patience – wild, rash attacks are quickly punished with solid counter-attacks. Therefore, rather than attacking outright, epeeists often spend several minutes probing their opponent's defences and maneuvering for distance before risking an attack. Others choose to stay on the defensive throughout the entire bout.

1996 was the first Olympics to feature team and individual Women's Epee events.

Saber – Hack and Slash

The saber is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword, and is similar in length and weight to the foil. The major difference is the use of the blade. The saber is a cutting weapon as well as a thrusting weapon; therefore, saberists can score with the edge of their blade as well as their point. The target area is from



the bend of the hips (both front and back), to the top of the head. This simulates the cavalry rider on a horse. The saber fencers' uniform includes a metallic jacket (lamé), which fully covers the target area to register a valid touch on the scoring machine. Because the head is valid target area, the fencer's mask is also electrically wired.

If epee is the weapon of patient, defensive strategy, then saber is its polar opposite. In saber, the rules of right-of-way strongly favor the fencer who attacks first, and a mere graze by the blade against the lamé registers a touch with the scoring machine. These circumstances naturally make saber a fast, aggressive game, with fencers rushing their opponent from the moment the referee gives the instruction to fence. Athens was the first Olympics to feature a Women's Saber event.