

## **“DEFENSIVE EXCELLENCE” COUNTED BLOWS TOURNAMENT RULESET**

HISTORICAL REFERENCES ON CONCEPT OF COUNTED BLOWS:

[https://irongateexhibition.com/igx\\_historical\\_rules\\_set.html](https://irongateexhibition.com/igx_historical_rules_set.html)

**The following document is the unedited Counted Blows ruleset used in 2024. This ruleset is currently under review, and an updated ruleset will be released as soon as possible. IGX Fall 2025 will feature an invitational Longsword Counted Blows exhibition event, as well as an open Dueling Saber Counted Blows tournament. The 2025 ruleset will feature updates concerning the following considerations:**

- Simplified scoring and scorekeeping methods.
- Focus on rewarding clean deep hits that are followed by clean defense and recovery.
- Deescalation of force and intensity throughout matches. Expect more frequent and thorough communication between staff and fencers.
- Increasing efficiency of matches.
- Prioritizing rulings that can function across different weapons and that do not favor any fencing tradition over others.
- Minimizing match interruptions.

## **“DEFENSIVE EXCELLENCE” COUNTED BLOWS LONGSWORD TOURNAMENT RULESET**

HISTORICAL REFERENCES ON CONCEPT OF COUNTED BLOWS:

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**SUMMARY:** During an exchange, 2 Fencers attempt to receive as few blows as possible, while trying to land more blows than the other. Exchanges do not stop after a single blow lands, but rather continue until the combined number of blows thrown by both Fencers reaches a threshold of 8-10 attempted blows. During the exchange, each Fencer has a Judge dedicated to counting the number of blows landed on them. A match consists of a series of completed exchanges per match. A match will contain no more than 8 exchanges, and ideally ends with a fencer winning by achieving a sufficient Excellence Category (defined below) and accruing a minimum of 4 points over the course of the match.

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- This format prioritizes defense over offense, but still requires good offense in order to win.
  - Due to the persistent incentives to attack while still prioritizing defense, this helps both avoid big, overcommitted attacks and general fighting escalation
- The cognitive load on the judging staff is EXTREMELY LOW: Refs only count combined blows thrown, and Judges only count blows landed on a single Fencer.
  - There is no need for Refs or Judges to distinguish between the tempi of actions between Fencers.
  - Refs have some flexibility on when to end an exchange, since the exact number of blows is not critical; the goal is simply to make sure both Fencers are put at combative risk for a sufficiently long time.
- This ruleset puts Fencers in an environment where they must continue fencing, even after a blow has been landed, and even beyond a single tempo. This is a skill set that many fencers lack, without realizing they lack it.
  - This emphasis on fencing in longer exchanges helps mitigate- and even removes- several other complexities common to tournaments that use single-tempo afterblow conventions, including:
    - Cardable behavior linked to escalation in aggression due to quality or visibility requirements
    - Lockout time (1 tempo, 1 second, a specified number of steps, etc)
    - Premature holds and reset of exchanges

### **Tournament Structure:**

- **Pools:** This tournament will take place over the course of two rounds of pools, followed by finals.
  - We will aim to place 5 fencers per pool, but exact pool size may vary based on participant numbers
  - Finals will consist of the top 5 fencers following pools.

#### **Staff:**

- **Ref (1):**
  - Counts the total number of sufficient attempted blows thrown during an exchange, starts and halts exchanges, announces scores and penalties
- **Judges (2):**
  - Counts the number of blows landed on each individual Fencer and identifies if any of the blows are Deep- 1 Judge assigned to each Fencer. Judges may also help the Ref to identify penalties
- **Table (1):**
  - Keeps track of points, Excellence Categories, and Match Scores

#### **Judging Style Guidelines**

- There will be one Ref and two Judges per ring. The Ref will be equipped with a wooden pole to make visual indications of instructions.
- **Ref'ing Language:**
  - Refs should refer to competitors as "Fencer," and may differentiate the Fencers by the color of their side of the ring (Ex. "blue fencer" and "red fencer").
  - If pronouns are necessary, Refs should use gender neutral pronouns when referring to Fencers.
  - Refs will use the phrase "Ready, fence!" to begin an exchange.
  - Refs will use the word "Hold!" to end an exchange.
    - Hold should be called loudly and firmly. The call should last approximately one second. Only the Ref should call Hold unless there is a safety concern.
      - A ref should only call Hold once, unless the Fencers do not respond to the initial call.
      - Hold should be called as soon as the attempted blows threshold (8-10 attempted blows) is met.
  - When an exchange ends, each Judge will visually indicate how many blows they saw land on their assigned Fencer. The Ref will then compare the blows struck and decide if an Excellence Category has been met.
  - If an exchange is ended early (such as due to a safety hold), the exchange will be reset, and will not be counted
  - When a Ref gives a penalty, they must provide one of the reasons detailed in the "Penalties" section below.

#### **Exchange Format:**

- The Ref will use a marshal pole to indicate the beginning and end of each exchange
  - The Ref will use the words "Ready, fencer!" to begin an exchange
    - "Ready" is a command, not a question. It is the responsibility of the Fencers to speak up if they are not ready to begin the exchange.
- The Ref will watch and count the number of sufficient attempted blows thrown by both Fencers. When 8-10 sufficient attempted blows have been thrown, the exchange will be ended.
  - The Ref will use the word "Hold" to end an exchange
  - A **sufficient attempted blow** is defined as:
    - An attempted attack that **would have posed danger to the defending Fencer if the defending Fencer had not blocked the attack.** A sufficient attempted blow does NOT need to land in order to be counted towards this total.
- Judges will indicate the number of blows they saw land on their assigned Fencer. Judges will also indicate whether any of the blows struck landed on a deep target.
- The Ref will announce the exchange winner, Excellence Category, and the fencer who has Advantage. The table staff will record this information.
- **Matches continue until a sufficient Excellence Category has been reached, and/or until one Fencer has reached a total of 4 or more points, or until 8 exchanges have been fenced. If 8 exchanges are fought without either fencer winning, the winner will be determined through the following methods:**
  - Excellence Category: The Fencer who has attained the higher Excellence Category will win the match
  - Points: If both Fencers have attained the same Excellence Category, the Fencer with the highest number of points accrued during the match will win the match
  - Tie: If both Fencers have attained the same Excellence Category and have the same number of points accrued during the match, the fencers will tie the match (info on scoring ties below)

## Scoring:

- **Target Areas:**
  - Deep Targets:
    - Head
    - Throat/ Neck
    - Torso
  - Shallow Targets:
    - Arms (upper and lower)
    - Legs (upper and lower)
    - Hands
  - **Illegal Targets (may be subject to penalty):**
    - Groin
    - Back of head
    - Back of body, including spine

- Feet
- All worn equipment within on-target areas is considered to be valid targets.

- **Valid Blows/ Actions:**

Half-swording is allowed. Any action made while half-swording must still meet all other criteria of the action in order to score.

- **Cuts**

- Cuts should make obvious, intentional contact with the opponent. Incidental contact will not be considered a scoring cut.
- Cuts must land with the edge of the blade. Touches made with the flat of the blade will not be considered quality.
- Cuts should be initiated with a chambering action in order to make cuts discernible and clear to judges. A cut made without a chambering action may not be considered quality.
- Cuts must be made with the weak or the middle of the blade. A cut made with the strong of the blade is subject to penalty.
- One-handed cuts are illegal and may be subject to penalty.

- **Thrusts**

- Thrusts should make obvious, intentional contact with the opponent. Incidental contact or passe thrusts will not be considered scoring thrusts.
- Thrusts do NOT need to bend the blade in order to score.
- Thrusts do NOT need to plant the point in order to score. A thrust that slides off of protective equipment (such as a fencing mask) will still count as a scoring action, so long as the initial thrust was valid in landing on the target.
  - A thrust is considered valid if it lands on a generally perpendicular angle to the target. A thrust that lands on a generally parallel angle to the target is not considered valid.
- One-handed thrusts are allowed- they must still meet all other criteria for thrust quality

- **Slices**

- Slices are only valid if made to the arms, shoulders, neck, or head
- Missed thrusts may not be converted into slices. A slice must have a clear chambering action (placing the blade on a valid target area of the opponent) followed by a clear slicing (drawing forward or backwards) action.
- A slice must pass the weak and/or middle of the blade over the target
  - Slices may be initiated with either the weak or strong of the blade, but contact made only with the strong will not score
- One-handed slices are allowed.
- **Note:** the action of pushing the opponent with a stationary blade(including the strong of the blade) is permitted as a setup/ grappling motion (similar

to an elbow push), but will not score without a follow-up action, such a completed slice with the middle/weak of the blade or control via grappling

- **Grappling**

- Grappling at the arms and at the body are allowed, as are trips and throws.

- **A throw will count as a blow to a Deep Target, and will end the exchange. All blows made during and prior to a throw will still be counted.**

- Throws must be made with control- explosive throws, slams, throws meant to land an opponent on their head, or throws that disallow an opponent from falling safely (performing a breakfall) are illegal and will be subject to penalty.

- Joint locks or manipulations, submissions, gouges, pulling on/ removing protective gear, placing body parts or weapons underneath an opponent's protective gear, and strikes with a body part of any kind are illegal and will be subject to penalty.

- In order to score via grappling (without a throw), a Fencer must demonstrate that they are able to make a strike with their own weapon. **A score made via grappling will end the exchange. All blows made during and prior to the indication will still be counted.**

- **When demonstrating a strike with the hilt, crossguard, or pommel, a Fencer must clearly indicate that they are able to strike their opponent WITHOUT MAKING CONTACT.**

- When indicating a strike, a Judge will count to 2 seconds- the indication must be maintained for the entire 2 second count in order to score.

- **When demonstrating a strike with the blade, a Fencer should make contact, rather than indicate.** When striking, thrusts and slices are allowed as normal. When making a cut, a Fencer must place the blade carefully on the opponent, as if they were initiating a slice, and never deliver a full force cut or chop. When grappling, Judges will be very generous with quality, and will count any blade placement as a cut. Fencers are encouraged to place the flat of the blade on the opponent in order to indicate a cut. **A Fencer should never make contact with the pommel, hilt, or crossguard, and doing so will be subject to penalty.**

- Fencers are encouraged to gain control of the opponent/ their opponent's weapon before attempting to indicate a

strike during grappling, as any blows made by the opponent will be counted against the Fencer.

- **Disarms**

- If a Fencer drops their weapon for any reason (other than safety, such as dropping their weapon to alleviate force from a thrust), this is a disarm. **A disarm will count as a blow to a Deep Target, and will end the exchange.**
  - Ex. A fencer's weapon is taken from them by their opponent during a grapple. This is a disarm.
  - Ex. A fencer drops their weapon without an action being taken by their opponent. This is a disarm.
  - Ex. A fencer delivers a hard thrust to their opponent, and drops their weapon to alleviate force upon landing the thrust. This is considered an action taken for safety purposes, and is NOT a disarm.

- **Ring-Out:**

- If a Fencer places two entire feet outside of the ring for any reason outside of grappling, this is a ring out. **A ring-out will count as a blow to a Deep Target, and will end the exchange.** All blows made during and prior to the ring-out will still be counted.
  - **If a ring-out occurs during grappling, the ring-out will not be counted as a blow, but the exchange will still end, all blows made prior to the ring-out will still be counted.**

If an action occurs that ends an exchange before the Attempted Sufficient Blows threshold (8-10 blows), the exchange is ended, and all blows that occurred during the exchange are still counted, including the action that prematurely ended the exchange (ringout, disarm, grappling action).

Regardless of the nature of the blow, **Fencers are expected to be exhibiting (in fact actively showing off) the highest degree of control possible:** throwing fast blows with clean structure that land with crisp, light contact. Actions made recklessly or with excessive force will be subject to penalty.

### **Scoring:**

At the end of each exchange, the number of blows struck to each Fencer will be compared to see if either Fencer has met an Excellence Category. An Excellence Category is one of three winning scenarios that may be met by a Fencer. It is only possible for one Fencer to meet an Excellence Category in a single exchange.

- **Excellence Categories:**

- **Nothing Done (no points awarded)**

- Neither Fencer has met any of the Excellence Categories below. Fencers have either landed the same number of blows against one another, or they have each received 3 or more blows from their opponent.
  - Advantage: No Advantage given. Advantage stays with the Fencer who previously had it.
- **Dirty (1 point)**
  - A Fencer has received 1 or 2 blows struck by their opponent, but has landed a greater number of blows on their opponent than they have received
    - Advantage: A Fencer may only gain Advantage with a Dirty exchange if their opponent has met no Excellence Categories, or if their opponent has only accrued Dirty exchanges. A Fencer must have Advantage in order to win a match via a Dirty exchange.
- **Shallow (2 points)**
  - A Fencer has received no blows struck by their opponent, but has landed at least 1 blow on their opponent. All blows landed have been to shallow targets.
    - Advantage: A fencer may gain Advantage with a Shallow exchange if their opponent has had Shallow or Dirty exchanges, or if they have met no Excellence Categories. A Fencer must have Advantage in order to win via a Shallow exchange.
- **Deep (4 points)**
  - A Fencer has received no blows struck by their opponent, but has landed at least 1 blow on their opponent. At least one blow landed has been to a deep target.
    - Advantage: Earning a Deep exchange automatically ends the match, and thus Deep exchanges have Advantage over all other Excellence Categories.
- **Defensive (+1 point to match score)**
  - In the event that BOTH Fencers end an exchange with no blows struck by their opponent, both Fencers will be awarded 1 additional point to their match score. A Defensive exchange does not count towards points to end the end, nor can it end the match as an Excellence Scenario.
    - Advantage: Advantage will stay with whichever Fencer previously had it.

To win and end a match, a Fencer must accrue a total of 4 points or more for the entire match, as well as have Advantage (if applicable). Within this ruleset, Advantage means having earned the highest Excellence Category of the match.



- EX. Fencer A has earned a Dirty exchange during the first exchange of the match. Fencer B then earns a Dirty exchange. Fencer B now has Advantage.
- EX. Fencer A has earned a Dirty exchange during the first exchange of the match. Fencer B then earns a Shallow exchange. Fencer B now has Advantage, and can win via a Dirty, Shallow, or Deep exchange. Fencer A must now earn a Shallow exchange or higher to take back Advantage and win the match.
  
- **Computing Match Scores:**
  - **Losing Fencer:**
    - The Fencer who loses the match will be awarded the point value of the highest Excellence Category they earned during the match + any additional points earned from Defensive exchanges.
      - EX. A Fencer earns 2 Dirty exchanges and loses the match. Because the highest Excellence Category they earned was Dirty, they will receive 1 point for the match.
  - **Winning Fencer:**
    - The Fencer who wins the match will be awarded the point value of the highest Excellence Category they earned during the match + 2 points + any additional points earned from Defended exchanges.
      - EX. A Fencer earns 1 Deep exchange and wins the match. They will receive 4+2 points for the match (6 points).
      - EX. A Fencer earns 1 Dirty exchange and 1 Shallow exchange. They will receive 2+2 points for the match (4 points).
  - **Tied Fencers:**
    - In this tournament, ties will only occur if the limit of 8 exchanges has been reached, and both Fencers have earned the same number of points in the same Excellence Category. In the event of a tie, both Fencers' scores will be calculated using the "Losing Fencer" method.
- **Computing Tournament Rankings:**
  - Tournament rankings will be based on the highest average Match Score. The top 5 fencers following pools will compete in finals, where they will be ranked based on the highest Match Score within the finals pool. Ties will be broken based on the following methods:
    - Win/loss
    - Tiebreaker match

## **Gear Requirements**

Protective equipment will be inspected at the start of each pool. Fencers will be inspected upon check-in.

- **Protective Equipment**
  - Full Skin Coverage

- No skin may be exposed- including the back of calves and palms of hands
- Fencing Mask
  - No dents or holes in mesh
- Back of Head Protection
- Puncture-Resistant Jacket
  - Must be minimum 350N rated
- Rigid Throat Protection
- Rigid Chest Protection
  - **Chest Protection is required for ALL FENCERS, regardless of sex**
- Hard Elbow Protection
- Hard Forearm Protection
  - Gloves with rigid protection that covers the forearms is sufficient
- Hard Knee Protection
- Hard Shin Protection
- Purpose-Built Longsword Gloves
  - Light gloves and lacrosse gloves are not sufficient. No Red Dragons, Thokks allowed if Longsword Peripheral is attached
- Groin Protection
  - Required if anatomically appropriate
- **Feders**
  - Must be purpose-built longsword feder
    - Blunt longswords are not acceptable
    - Sword-shaped feders are acceptable
  - Must flex at or below **45 lbs**
  - Must be within 33-42 inches in blade length
  - Must be within 2.5-4 lbs in weight
  - Must be reasonably straight
    - Blades with major warps will not be permitted
  - Must have a crossguard
  - Must be free of rust, burrs, spikes, and all other major damage

## Penalties

The goal of this Ruleset is to specifically penalize and correct **reckless or unsafe behavior** within the ring. As such, cardable actions are those which jeopardize the physical, emotional, or mental safety of participants, staff, and/or spectators. Refs are given complete discretion in deciding if and when to card participants. While situations that will likely warrant a card are outlined below, Refs should use common sense and their best judgment when assigning cards. There are no automatically cardable offenses, as Refs should consider each situation individually.

Cards do not automatically escalate. While escalation is optional, Refs are encouraged and empowered to escalate cards whenever they feel it is appropriate.

- Ex. A Ref may assign a Yellow Card for a first offense, or they may immediately escalate to a Red Card
- Ex. A Ref may opt to give a second Yellow Card to the same participant, or they may opt to escalate to a Red Card.
  - Refs are encouraged to escalate cards for repeated offenses
- **Levels of Penalty:**
  - Verbal Warning: no point penalty
  - Yellow Card: 1 point penalty
  - Red Card: 2 point penalty
  - Black Card: ejection from tournament
    - If a Black Card is issued, the receiving participant may also be subject to ejection from other tournaments, as well as prohibition from future IGX events. Such decisions will be made by event organizers on a per-case basis.

A participant may not attain an Excellence Category in the same exchange that they receive a card. A participant may attain an Excellence Category in the same exchange that they receive a verbal warning.

- **Cardable Actions**
  - Exposing the back of the head during a exchange
  - Striking any off target area (back of head or body, groin, etc.)
  - Striking with the pommel, strong of the blade, hilt, or crossguard
  - Failing to cease all action when a Hold is called
    - Performing a revenge strike (immediately subject to Black Card)
  - Performing any action that a ref deems to be reckless, dangerous, or excessive, including, but not limited to:
    - Striking an opponent with too much force
    - Making leaping or jumping attacks
    - Pushing or shoving an opponent
    - Removing protective gear during an exchange
    - Performing any other illegal action, as defined within this Ruleset
  - Arguing with or disobeying a judge
    - Influencing judges (as defined below) may be considered disobeying refs if done repeatedly
  - Exhibiting any other conduct within the ring which creates a hostile or unsafe environment for spectators, staff, or other fencers
    - Throwing gear
    - Insulting or yelling at other persons
    - Responding with excessive anger to ranking or judge decisions
    - Violating the IGX Code of Conduct
- Refs may also assign a card for any action they deem unsafe which does not explicitly meet criteria given here but otherwise poses a safety risk.

- **Other Prohibited Actions**

- Violating the IGX Code of Conduct, in or out of the ring
  - While actions taken outside of the ring are not cardable, they will be taken just as seriously as actions taken within the ring. Harassment or other violations of the IGX Code of Conduct will be immediately addressed by event staff, and may result in expulsion, suspension, or other punitive action.
- Improper interaction with judges (defined below)
  - Repeated prohibited interaction with judges may become a cardable action

- **Fencer's Rights and Interaction with Judges**

- Fencers may have up to 1 coach accompanying them at the ring.
- Fencers and their coaches may ask questions, request clarification on a scoring/penalty decision, or raise safety concerns with the Judges. Fencers may not argue with the Judges, nor may they make friendly/casual conversation with Judges during a match.
  - Fencers and their coaches are empowered to approach Judges or other staff (not during an ongoing match), if they feel there has been an oversight related to safety or penalty. **If a Fencer is injured, suspects injury, or has been caused pain by an opponent, they should immediately approach event staff.**
- Coaches may not speak with Fencers or Judges during an ongoing exchange, except in the case of a safety concern.
  - Coaches may not yell out advice, encouragement, etc. to Fencers during an exchange
- Fencers have the right to deny an Excellence Category/ a point. Fencers may not deny Excellence Categories or points to their opponent. Fencers must wait until the Ref has announced the score for the exchange before denying a point.
  - To deny a point, the Fencer should clearly state to the judge "I'd like to deny the point." A Fencer may only deny a point that was awarded in their favor.
- Fencers should remain calm and collected following each exchange. Excessive celebration or anger may be considered to be influencing the Judges, and therefore subject to penalty.
  - Fencers may not self call in any way- including, but not limited to:
    - Tapping their body where they believe they were hit.
    - Correcting a Judge.
    - Early point denial
    - Arguing with a Judge.
    - Announcing a hit made by themselves or their opponent.
    - Attempting to end an exchange before a hold is called by a Judge, except for safety reasons.

