

The MID-ATLANTIC SOCIETY For HISTORIC SWORDSMANSHIP

Bouting Information Fall, 2000

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GENERAL DISCOURSE:

At MASHS, we recognize the importance of bouting in the development of good swordsmanship. The main emphasis in our bouting is *Tactics* and *Techniques*, and not competition. We take a duelist approach, or to paraphrase our colleagues in the Classical Fencing Community, “What would we do if these things were sharp”. Thus we focus *not* on how many points are scored, or who wins or loses. Instead we concentrate on hitting our opponent without getting hit, that is, how do I survive the fight but all within the context of good esprit de corp, and the safety of the participants.

There are essentially two forms of bouting at MASHS. The first is based on some historic prototypes that have seen recent resurgence in the major Western Martial Arts events and their associated tournaments. For the longsword there are several precedents, the more ritualized being the *Behourd*, or the informal unarmoured tournament of the 13th and 14th centuries, and the *Pas D'Armes* which serves as the other medieval test of skill at arms for armoured combatants. In the German language the word *fechtenspiel* is translated as “an assault of arms”. The term assault (assalto) was used for rapier bouting and for most later period dueling weapons.

Historically, these forms of competition were designed to test one’s skills in a “friendly” atmosphere. That same spirit carries through to the present. Today, at MASHS, these tests of skill at arms take the form of controlled bouts, undertaken typically during the course of a training session. But unlike the historical precedents, bouting at MASHS are tools for learning, not for competition. Within this context, they are in all cases, adjudicated by an instructor.

The second form of bouting at MASHS is the freeplay. This is much more informal. Here the objective is to test one’s own skills by taking the opportunity to fence with other MASHS participants. These are not adjudicated and can be initiated by any fencer with the simply invitation to another member to fence. These are not a part of any structured lesson.

Regardless of whether it is bouting or freeplay, the following protocols are to be followed:

1. **Safety First.** If any action is deemed unsafe by any instructor, or by any participant in the bout or freeplay, or by any MASHS member observing the bout or freeplay, a HALT shall be called. Once a HALT is called, all action stops immediately, and any problems are corrected before combat resumes.
2. In Bouting, the commands of the instructor directing the bout will be followed without question.
3. In Bouting and in Freeplay both, a salute is given. In Bouting, the salute is first given to the bout director, then to participants who are observing, and then to your opponent.
4. Once the salutes are given, both combatants should go on guard, and masks are donned (if not so already). Once the director observes that both combatants are on guard, he/she will ask if they are ready. Both combatants must reply with the word, READY. Fencers commence upon the command, BEGIN.
5. In Freeplay the participants salute each other and immediately go on guard. Fencing begins when both fencers acknowledge to one another that they are ready.
6. In Bouting, touches are awarded against the fencer that received the hit. Each fencer is obliged to acknowledge a touch against him/herself. At that moment, action stops. The director/instructor may take this pause in the action as an opportunity for discussion and/or analysis. When action is ready to resume, both fencers are placed back on guard, are asked if they are ready, and once acknowledged the action commences upon the command BEGIN.
7. In Bouting, the bout ends after one fencer receives a predetermined number of touches. The limit is established by the instructor, but usually the number is five. In that way, all participants in the class has an opportunity to bout.
8. In Freeplay, touches against one's self are also acknowledged. However, there typically is no set number of touches, so fencers continue at their own discretion. For convenience, both fencers can agree at the beginning of the bout to set a limit on the touches (again, five is the usual number). In that case, touches are awarded against the fencer hit.
9. Fence with intent but in control. Combat can be with full speed, but the hits should never be without control.
10. At the end of the bout, a salute is again given. In Bouting, this final salute is given first to your opponent, then to the observers, and then to the director. The combatants remove their masks and acknowledge each other for combat well done. In Freeplay, the fencers salute each other, unmask and acknowledge each other.

BOUTING WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

At MASHS safety is paramount in our bouting. As such, the following information establishes the standards for both personal safety equipment and weaponry that is used in bouting at MASHS. For each weapon, the minimum safety equipment is described. However, each participant can add equipment and more protection as his or her comfort level requires. The weapons listed are deemed to be of good quality and are safe to use in bouting. Other weapons can be used with the approval of MASHS' Administrator.

Wearing of garb appropriate and historically accurate for the weapon during bouting and freeplay (as well as for training) is certainly acceptable.

Longsword

Weapons:

1. Aluminum sword simulator, such as that from Swordcrafts, Valentine Armory, Noble Armory, or MASHS own Paul Wiedorn.
2. Blunted steel sword simulator, various manufacturers.

Safety Equipment:

Minimum personal protection should consist of a three weapon fencing mask with or without protection to the back of the head; 3-weapon fencing jacket, fencing tunic, or gambeson; chest protector; groin protection; padded gloves; padded forearm and elbow protection; padded knee and lower leg protection; and a gorget to protect the neck and throat.

Rapier

Weapons:

1. Currently the weapon of choice is the Darkwood Armory rapier with either the Practice Rapier Blade, or the Rebated Blade. Darkwood's hilts are well crafted and overall the weapons are very well balanced and historically accurate. Any hilt design is acceptable. As a budget minded alternative, the Practical Rapier with the 40-inch blade by Hanwei is also accepted.
2. Daggers shall be either side ring, main gauche, straight quillon, or down turned quillon, with the standard blade.
3. Bucklers and targes shall be of at least 18 gauge steel and should be around 12 to 14 inches in diameter, without spikes. Bucklers and targes in rectangular configurations will also be accepted.

Safety Equipment:

1. A three weapon fencing mask; a three weapon fencing jacket or tunic; long pants, or knickers with covering for the lower leg; gloves with cuffs long enough to cover the end of the jacket sleeves; chest protectors, and groin protection for the men; a metal or leather gorget; and any other additional padding.
2. If you wish to wear more "period appropriate" attire, such as doublets and knickers, this is acceptable.

French Smallsword

Weapons:

There are several suitable smallsword simulators available, with a range of quality and prices. The following list these in order of pricing from low to high, and all the sites can be found on the Links page of the MASHS website.

1. American Fencers Supply. Look in the Armoury Section (not their sport weapons). Either the Napoleonic or the Classic hilt will do, with a musketeer blade (aka, double wide epee blade).
2. Rogue Steel, offers quality simulators with a variety of hilt designs. These handle well and are reasonably priced.
3. Smiling Fox Forge offers accurate hilts with standard epee blades.

4. Hanwei manufactures a stage combat smallsword they call the Washington Fencing Sword that looks appropriate for smallsword. There are various vendors that sell the Hanwei line. Kult of Athena currently has the best prices. See the Links page for a link to their website.
5. If you're not too concerned about budget, Arms and Armor has a superb smallsword replica.

There is one thing to consider when ordering your smallsword. Unless stated otherwise by the individual manufacturer, the smallsword will come with a standard blade length of 35 inches. Historically, this is the maximum blade length for a smallsword. When ordering, ask if they can outfit their hilts with a No. 2 epee blade (32-inches) or a No. 0 epee blade (fairly rare 30-inch blade).

Safety Equipment:

A three weapon fencing mask; a three weapon fencing jacket or tunic; long pants, or knickers with covering for the lower leg; gloves with cuffs long enough to cover the end of the jacket sleeves; and chest protectors for the women and groin protection for the men.

Italian Dueling Sabre

Weapons:

Currently, Hanwei manufactures the most historically accurate dueling saber in terms of guard style, weight, length and balance. There are three sabers available named appropriately after three historic fencing masters ... the Hutton, Radaelli, and Pecoraro. Various vendors sell the Hanwei line with Kult of Athena currently offering the best prices.

Safety Equipment:

A quality three weapon or sabre fencing mask, fencing jacket or tunic, long pants, and gloves are considered minimum. Chest protectors and groin protection is also minimum safety equipment. A leather elbow guard for the sword arm is highly recommended.

Dueling Sword

Weapons:

A modern standard (non-electric) epee with a French grip will be suitable for Dueling Sword training. These can be purchased from any of the on-line sport fencing vendors listed on the Links page under Modern Fencing Equipment. For those wanting to purchase an Italian style grip, look at the vendors listed under Classical Fencing Equipment. Some of these vendors also provide quality reproductions of period French epees as well. Modern sport "pistol grips" should not be used as they are not historically appropriate to classical dueling sword techniques.

Safety Equipment:

A quality three weapon fencing mask, fencing jacket, long pants or knickers with knee socks, and a fencing glove for the sword hand is considered minimum. Chest protectors and groin protection is also minimum safety equipment.