



# **Westdale Fencing Club's NAC / US Tournament Survival Guide**

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## Stuff You Need

There are a number of things you'll need to make sure you have.

- For NACs, you must have a NAC Registration Confirmation letter that has the correct classification (U/E/D/C/B/A) and does **not** have a “Pending” status. If you don't have one, or if it has any status other than confirmed/accepted, or an incorrect classification, find out why asap by [contacting the USFA office](#). For other US tournaments, you should take a copy of your proof of registration with you if you do not receive a confirmation letter.
- You must have your CFF license number, and a copy of the CFF webpage, or a receipt, confirming that you really do have a license.
- You should have an international passport from your country of origin that isn't expired for your travel dates (generally speaking a passport needs to be valid for 6 months after your intended date of return, especially for the US). If you need a visa to enter the US, you should organise this in plenty of time.
- You **MUST** have medical insurance and all required account numbers/phone numbers in case you get hurt – travelling to the US without medical insurance is **very** foolish indeed. It is generally a good idea to have a letter authorizing someone to agree to medical treatment on your behalf just in case you end up in a situation where you can't make decisions about your own care. It's not a bad idea to give these details to one of the traveling coaches, ahead of time, just in case.
- If you are under 18 you should have a signed letter from both parents allowing you to leave the country unless you are traveling with both. It is a good idea for this letter to name the supervising coach.
- You should have the equipment you'll need to fence (or be absolutely sure someone is bringing it for you).

For most US tournaments, this means:

- Running or fencing shoes
- Fencing socks. They must cover all bare skin when worn with fencing pants (some people like having 2 pairs)
- Fencing pants. Track pants or sweats are generally not allowed.
- Fencing jacket
- Sous plastron (even if you have an FIE jacket, this is still required)
- Lamé (for foil and sabre)
- Manchette (for sabre)
- Fencing glove (it's a good idea to bring a spare)
- Mask
- You should have at least 3 (4 is recommended) electric weapons
- You should have at least 2 (3 is recommended) body wires

- You should have at least 2 (3 is recommended) mask wires for sabre
- A towel (never forget your towel!)
- A tool kit for last minute repairs
- A small first aid kit (including tape / plasters for blisters)
- A change of clothes (it's often a long walk to the hotel)
- A washable blue marker (see below)

Some other vital preparatory equipment notes:

- Your name must appear on your uniform or lamé for USFA events. Unless you are fencing at an FIE event, you do not need country codes - just the name will suffice). Names must be printed legibly by hand or machine in dark blue capital letters not more than 10cm high, either:
  - a) on the back of the jacket for épée, on the lamé for foil and sabre, between the shoulders
  - b) on the front or side of the rear leg
  - c) on a piece of fabric or lamé material that is firmly sewn to the uniform in such a way that it will not detach during fencing or catch the opponent's point
    - Fabric sewn on in this manner must be the same colour as the part of the uniform to which it is attached. Conductive materials must be attached in such a way as to not alter the conductivity of the metallic vest or jacket. Names printed on tape are not acceptable. In Southern Ontario both the [Fencer's Network](#) (Igor) or [Kirk Girard](#) can do name printing for a price of approximately \$30.
    - Usually the NAC vendors will provide this service as well, but it's best not to rely on that if possible, unless you are traveling with plenty of time to spare (and bear in mind that Marx Enterprises, who do most of the labelling at USFA tournaments only take cash (US \$) as payment).
- Lamé, jacket, breeches, and gloves cannot have any holes.
- US referees are sometimes very strict about the straightness of blades – be sure not to show up with all of your blades already having bad S curves.
- Test your weapons (or have them tested) close enough to the leaving so that they are not used again until the tournament. Be sure to test (where appropriate):
  - Weight
  - Gap extended and depressed (for épée)
  - Resistance of body wires and weapons
  - No loose or “hanging” wires
  - Tip barrel is tight
  - Screws are present and tight
  - Blade curvature
  - Tape is the right length, and not so thick as to interfere with the weight

- Check that your mask is good shape (there can be no rust or dents) If you are in a pinch and you have rust spots to cover, try a black sharpie (if it's a black mask!). For sabre, they **will** test conductivity, so make sure it passes, especially around the bib. It's a good idea to bring conductive tape, and a credit card, just in case.
- It's a good idea to have your name and club on all of your equipment so you can easily identify it if you leave it somewhere or it becomes collected into someone else's gear. Remember that there are many US clubs with the initials WFC, so try to be a little more specific.
- Make sure you are carrying an allen key and any necessary tools for quick repairs (and/or a credit card for emergency purchases. If you do get stuck, visit Amanda at Absolute Fencing or Bill at Leon Paul USA and tell them that you are one of Ranil's fencers, and they will likely look after you)
- Bring a washable blue marker for writing your name on your breeches if your jacket or lamé fails (see below... not that a certain sabre-ist has had to do this!)
- If you have a lamé jacket, try also to bring a small piece of lamé fabric for patching small holes and a sewing kit for sewing stuff together.

## Getting Ready to Go

So, like, I have this, uh, "friend" who once missed an entire NAC and flight because they weren't careful in preparing to leave for the tournament. I also have another friend (no, really this time) who booked a flight to the wrong city for a NAC. The point is, although it may seem to be a given, an important part of surviving and thriving at a NAC is actually just getting on your way with all your stuff.

For some, travel preparation, especially air travel, is a major source of stress. For others, it's something that kind of just happens on its own. Neither end of the spectrum is good, so we want to be somewhere in the middle. You should be concerned enough to ensure all your arrangements are in order, but not so much that you're going throw off your game by burning up all your mental energy just getting to the plane.

This list should hopefully help keep you organized and give you that touch of comfort that you've looked after the essentials:

- Quadruple check your flight. Check the following items: just after you booked it, after talking about it with others who are also going, five days before you leave, and the night before you leave:
  - Is your flight going to the same city and state that the tournament is in? Check the official up-to-date itinerary (it may have been changed by the airline) and check the official tournament web site to be sure you have the location correct.

- Make sure you know what airport you are travelling out of. Some cities have more than one airport and some of the cheaper discount airlines don't fly into the major international airports.
  - When making travel arrangements try and plan on arriving at least 24 hours before you fence. This allows plenty of time for problems with airlines / luggage and time to scurry around and source new equipment should you need to.
  - What time does the flight leave? Remember times are usually in 24hr time. 04:00 means 4am, not 4pm. Really.
  - Do you have transport to the airport and does it leave with enough time to get you to the airport? If you can, you should aim to be there 3 hours ahead of time. If you have trouble with your ride, you should still be able to get there for the cutoff 2 hour international flight lead time.
  - If you're travelling with someone to the airport, be sure to have contact numbers... **both ways**. Be sure everyone can contact everyone if something happens. Generally speaking, it's a good idea to post travel plans on the [WFC Forum](#) or on [Tripit](#) (make sure you are connected to one of the coaches).
- Pack two to three nights prior to leaving. Then review your pack again the night before you leave. You know how you often realize an hour after leaving your house "Shoot! I forgot to pack..."? Now you'll have a whole day or two to realize what you forgot!
  - Don't forget your passport. Put it somewhere it's impossible for you to forget it. If you're packing a carry on bag, put it in there. It's probably not a good idea to "temporarily" store it in your checked baggage as you may forget it there until after it's been checked. A good idea is to get into the habit of constantly asking yourself "Where's my passport?"
  - Double check your passport expiry date. Make sure you can both leave and return with it.
  - Take your Registration Confirmation paper, fold it, and put it in your passport. You **need** this to get into the tournament. If you always know where your passport is, you also know where your registration is.
  - Make a copy of your confirmation and pack that with your fencing equipment – inside a shoe is typically a good place for important documents
  - You also need your fencing license number. Again, store a copy in your passport. If you know where your passport is, you also know where your fencing license details are.
  - Take a copy of your flight itinerary, including confirmation numbers. Put it with your passport, carry-on, or jacket. Put another copy in your fencing shoe. Seriously.

- For the outward bound leg of the trip, pack your mask and fencing clothes/lamés and shoes in your carry-on luggage if your carrier allows it. If your luggage is lost for a few days, those items would be the largest pain to replace on the spot at the tournament.
- If someone is bringing your equipment, confirm at least twice that they are bringing those items; one of those double checks should be three or four days before you leave, close enough to remind them and far enough so alternate arrangements can be made if there's a problem. Be sure to list off each individual item, don't just say "You're bringing my stuff, right?" Remember that ultimately, **you** are responsible for having the equipment you need to fence.
- Know the name and the address of the hotel you're staying at. Customs will want to know where you're staying. If you don't know the address, it becomes a hassle. If you don't know the name of the place you're staying, you're in trouble. Write it down and take it with you. Again, keep this piece of paper in your passport.
- **Check that you've packed any medicine you might need** or anything else you couldn't do without/buy easily. Make sure that any pills are in labelled bottles. Little white tablets with "E" on the side get interesting looks! Also, make sure you stick to the airline limits for liquids and gels.
- Relax, you've got everything under control.

## Travelling

Fencing is at least half, if not more, your state of mind. Make this as smooth as possible and it'll help you arrive in a good head space:

- Your equipment is "sports equipment". If asked what sport, only then say "fencing". Don't call your equipment "weapons", "swords", or "blades" at any time unless asked very specifically. Even if asked "So you have swords in there?", say "I have a few sport fencing epees/foils/sabres in there. None of which are sharp." Avoid terminology that implies a real weapon, but don't be evasive.
- Try not to wear metal when travelling. E.g. pick a pair of pants that don't need a belt and leave the steel toe boots at home.
- Have your papers out and ready at the check points. At luggage check, security, and when boarding.

- You need to fill out a Customs form when travelling to and from the US. You can usually pick them up at the luggage check in line. If not, they'll be given to you on the flight. Ask the luggage check person if you don't see them.
- Pack a pen in your hand luggage. You need it to fill out forms when entering the US, and also to fill out forms when entering Canada
- Don't take citrus fruit, scissors (even cute fold up ones that might be in a sewing kit), lighters, or turtles. Generally, the less you can bring besides what you need to wear and brush your teeth with, the better. Best to buy food as you need it (tinned and preserved food is fine, though remember that there are limits on liquids and gels in hand luggage.. and yes, preserved food **can** be considered as a gel if it's a "high security" day).
- Don't lock your luggage. They may cut the locks and also be more likely to go in. If you still feel you have to lock your luggage, be sure to tell them at the luggage check-in and they'll advise you.
- Don't be afraid to ask directions to terminals or connections. It'll save you some stress and time. Also be sure when you are checking the arrival and departure monitors your looking under the right spot. As I have this friend that spent the better part of a day at the wrong gate because they looked on arrivals instead of departures.
- It's been said before, but airlines are great at losing your fencing bags. Especially if you fly through Denver (seriously, avoid Denver wherever possible... every single time we've flown through there, somebody's bag doesn't make it). So if you can fit your lamé, mask, jacket, pants and shoes in your carry-on, you won't have to worry about it in the event your fencing bag does not make it.
- Wherever possible, try to allow plenty of time between your arrival and your fencing time. The more time there is, the more time the airlines have to get lost bags back to you. Also, do not underestimate the amount of time that it takes to acclimatise, especially if there is a big altitude difference. It's ideal to allow at 18 – 24 hours between arriving and fencing, though this isn't always possible (this has the added advantage that you can usually get your equipment checked and make any emergency purchases in plenty of time (and before the vendors run out). The more important it is that you get a strong result (for example, if you're chasing selection points), the more time you should leave to try and get settled in before you have to do anything.

## Arrival

Once you've checked into the hotel and have got your gear up to the room, relax. Be sure to have a good supper as that will be your long term energy for the next day. Get some decent fluids as well, as your body needs to maintain a steady level. You will likely be dehydrated from the flight, and you can't just make it up the next day.

Also, check that your luggage has all of the contents it had when you left and that nothing has been damaged or abnormal condition (e.g. wet). If they spot checked it in transit, they may have missed placing something back and you may need to replace something.

Be sure to relax as much as possible and get to bed early if your arrival time allows it. If you have the skill, equipment, and extra time, check your weapons and wires again. Never hurts to check.

If you arrived early enough and the tournament is still going on for other weapons, see "The First Day" heading below. You can get your equipment checked on any day of the tournament previous to your event so that way you don't need to worry about it the day you fence.

Be sure to have ample food and drink for your fencing event. Energy bars, sports drinks, water bottle, sandwiches, nut snacks, etc. You'll need them and you'll save someone else having to run around and get them for you while you're fencing.

If at all possible try and arrive at a reasonable hour of the day. This means getting in at a time that allows you to unpack have a meal and get a good nights rest. A good Rule of thumb is to arrive one full day before your first event when you can.

Don't go to sleep yet though! You need to plan a few items so you are relaxed and in control the next day (this is repeated in your daily evening preparation as well).

- When you awake in the morning know where you are going to eat. Also have an idea about how long service will take. It can ruin a good meal and your warm up if service takes forever to get your food to you.
- Give yourself enough time for your warm up routine. The theme here is don't rush things. Slow and steady wins the race.
- Be sure that you have your day's piste-side food and drink ready before you need it. So do your shopping the day before and mix your drink before you need it.

## The First Day Administration

Masks, lamés, manchettes (for sabre), body wires, and head wires must all be inspected prior to your event. This is done at the armoury table. They will be marked and will be good for the duration of the NAC, unless the certifying tag comes off or you need to change equipment. The armoury table will allow you to come early to have your gear inspected, but if somebody who is fencing soon comes, they have priority.

You do not have to have your weapons checked at the armoury table as they will be checked before *every* bout on piste.

If you are a coach, you may need to pick up coaching credentials from the registration desk in order to be allowed to coach fencers on the piste side. Check this in plenty of time.

## Daily Preparation

### *Morning*

Have a good breakfast. If service is abnormally slow, don't be afraid to let them know you're on a schedule and ask for the bill before you're done eating. In fact, ask for the bill before you're done eating anyway.

You need to register prior to your registration closing time on the day of each event you are fencing. You will need a copy of your fencing license information and the NAC confirmation letter. Do this as early as possible so that any problems can be resolved well before your event.

You did your planning the night before, right? Now you have time to leisurely prepare yourself for the coming day.

- Do your warm up routine
- Chat with other fencers and your coach(es). This can often be a relaxing activity, especially if you joke and fool around a little. Take it easy. You've planned and have time, but don't get too distracted, you want to keep up a steady pace of preparation. And stay away from fencers who are balls of stress or worry-warts! It can be contagious. Hopefully that doesn't include your coach 😊
- Double check that you have all the food and drink you'll need throughout the day
- Check that you have all your equipment with you (see the "Stuff You'll Need" heading at the top)
- Suit up and don't unsuit. One less thing to be rushing around doing when you're called.

## ***Evening***

Every evening you want to recap your day and prepare for the next day if you fence again. Talk to your coach and others who saw your fencing. For things that went well, why did they go well? What was your state of mind at the time? How are you going to do that again? What pieces of advice helped? If something helped, remember it! Use it again the next day.

For things that didn't go as well, don't obsess on these but do give them some analysis and just ask why... it's no big deal, but hey, why not try to correct the issue. How did they relate to the things that went well? Was it because I changed what I was doing before? Did I stop doing something I was doing before? Was it a new situation and if so, how do I plan to try to deal with it if it comes up again? Did my attitude change for bit, and if so, how do I keep that awesome cool attitude I had before or why did it change? Was I out of energy and do I need to monitor my food and water intake a little more? If supporters are hindering, rather than helping your performance, don't be afraid to let them know (nicely), or talk to one of the coaches.

Now that you're done rejoicing about the good things and finished beating yourself up about some silly little issues that you'll just work on improving the next day (I ***said*** you're finished), you want to plan your next day just like you did on arrival:

- When you awake in the morning know where you are going to eat. Also have an idea about how long service will take. It can ruin a good meal and your warm up if service takes forever to get your food to you.
- Give yourself enough time for your warm up routine. The theme here is don't rush things. Slow and steady wins the race.
- Be sure that you have your day's piste side food and drink ready before you need it. So do your shopping the day before and mix your drink before you need it.

Test your equipment to ensure that everything is still working and in good shape. See the weapon testing section in earlier in this document. Ensure that your armoury inspection marking and tags are all still visible and attached.

Generally speaking, we try to eat evening meals together. It's not a 'rule', but it's encouraged as it makes the travelling experience a lot more fun. If you want to go off and do your own thing, please let the coaches know so they can adjust reservations or plans as required. Similarly, if there's a restaurant that you *\*really\** want to go to, just let one of the coaches know. Chances are it'll appeal to others too!

# Fencing

Okay, so you've finally arrived, registered, have your fencing equipment ready and tested, you have all your food and drink, you're warmed up, and are itching to fence.... you're done and ready to go, right?

Almost. We'll break this into the three parts. There are the administrative aspects (weapon check, score sheet sign-off, etc), the technical fencing aspect (keep good footwork, fence the judge, etc), and the most important, the mental aspect.

## ***Administrative Aspects***

This can be seen as two parts, things that happen to you (e.g. weapons check) and things you are responsible for (e.g. salute your opponent)

We'll cover things you are responsible for first:

- Listen to the PA and place yourself so you are within earshot of it as much as possible when they announce something that relates to you (this could be anything: poules posted, a problem with your registration, etc...). If you need to go somewhere that you can't hear the PA, make sure somebody else is listening on your behalf.
- When the registration list is posted, ensure you have club and country protection. You have travelled too far to fence a club mate. If in doubt, have your coach check your entry with you. Typically the coaches will do this anyway, but it's a good idea to remind them that your registration list is posted because they often have several fencers to worry about, and they're allegedly only human.
- When the poules are posted, check to see who is in your poule. Double check that they didn't accidentally put you against a club mate. If there is a problem, check with your coaches, then the Bout Committee (keep an eye out for Kathryn behind the table as she'll likely be able to facilitate any changes that need to be made).
  - Poules will typically be grouped with a small set of numbers (e.g. "26, 27, 28") on the sheet. Those numbers are the strips that those pools will be fencing on. The strip that is circled is the "reporting strip". That is the strip you want to go to initially to let them know you are present when the judge calls your name. What are you standing around reading this guide for? Get to your reporting strip!
- Once you're on piste side, stay on piste side. You cannot leave the piste area until the poules are done and you've signed off the score sheet. If you must leave for a moment, ask the judge for permission.
- When fencing, you cannot step off the piste even for the one minute breaks. If your coach needs to talk to you or you need a drink, they must come over to you (and must stay off the piste).

- The pistes are fenced off and no one is allowed inside except the fencers (who must still stay out of the way of the judge), and occasionally, the coaches.
- Besides the usual beginning salutes, you must return to the en garde line and only then remove your mask and salute your opponent once the bout is finished. Only approach and shake their hand after you have saluted. The US referees can be fairly picky about this.
- Be sure to always check the written score at the end of a bout, making sure that the numbers are in the correct boxes.
- If you do not hear the judge call the score after every point, ask. If you think it is wrong, immediately tell the judge that you thought it was different, why, and ask for a confirmation. Be polite. If you are eventually contradicted and no further evidence is available, accept it gracefully. Even if they are wrong.
- Do not leave the piste area until all the poules are done and you've reviewed and signed the score sheet. Remember your poule total and your indicators (so you can check them when rankings are posted).
- If you are fencing a DE, do not leave until you've signed the result. If you won, the judge will probably give you the sheet, and ask you to deliver it to the Bout Committee. If you don't know where that is, ask the judge. It may change depending on the room you're in. The Bout Committee may or may not give you a new sheet to return with. Ask if they don't give you one.
- Take all of your backup weapons and wires with you to the piste side when fencing. If you have a failure you will need to have those on hand or you will get red card immediately and another for every extra minute it takes you to get your replacement equipment.
- If you have someone strip side, have them record all the points as they are scored, for both fencers. This can be invaluable if there is a dispute. Ask any regularly competitive fencer and they are sure to have several stories of this sort of mass confusion.
- If a point was scored against you and there is a dispute about it, admit it immediately. A reputation for honesty, both for you and the club, will serve you well when the tables are turned. Besides, a dishonest win doesn't make you a better fencer, you still lost in reality.

- At the end of a bout, be polite and graceful. If you won, do not gloat or be smug; besides just being a jerk, you'll give them or their friends a good reason to try extra hard to beat (up on) you next time. If you lost, big deal. You have a great opportunity to learn something. Be graceful and *honestly* thank your opponent, not just because it's polite. Be happy they've given you the opportunity to fence and find something you can improve... perhaps they didn't "beat" you, you beat yourself because of attitude, focus, or whatever. But even if you look at it like that, they did give you that opportunity by fencing like they did. Thanks.

Things that happen to you:

- Judges will call your name when you are to fence. If they are mispronouncing (some people have really wacky names that are difficult to interpret... ahem), be sure to correct them. You'll recognize your name better in a noisy room if it's pronounced correctly. Sometimes, judges will just call your number (or expect you to know when you need to be on piste), so be sure to pay attention. If you miss your call, then you **will** be black carded.
- At the beginning of every bout, judges will do an equipment check:
  - Foils and epees will be checked for weight, barrel tightness, tip screws, and under the guard pad for proper wiring.
  - Epées will be checked for gap, extended and depressed
  - Sabres will be checked for maximum curvature
  - Mask, lamé, manchette, and wires will be checked for armoury stamp or armoury tag
  - Weapon operation must be checked against your opponent in view of the judge (guard hit for épée, lamé hit for foil, mask hit for sabre)
  - You may sometimes be directed to test a hit against the piste as well.

## ***Technical Aspects***

Ah, the practice of fencing. Books upon books have been written on this. Obviously this guide will not cover the all of the art of fencing, even if such a thing were possible. What we will cover though are some important general rule-of-thumbs, catch phrases, and sage advice. Good luck!

- The first thing you should figure out (in foil and sabre) is how the judges are scoring priority and make any accommodations. If you are not the first fencer, pay attention to the current fencers. Better to learn the judge while your opponents are fencing than trying to figure that out while fencing yourself. Don't become focused on the judge being "bad", *you* have to adapt... suck it up and don't try and force the judge to see that you're "suppose" to have priority. It ain't gonna happen. Adapt. And get one light touches wherever possible.

- Speaking of which, pay close attention to the fencers. Learn what they are doing, their strengths, their weaknesses, their reactions to situations. Start planning your match with them immediately. If your poule isn't fencing or you're just wandering around, still watch closely and remember. You may see them in the DEs. You might also learn a cool technique that you can add to your own repertoire.
- If at all possible write down the name of each fencer, what the score was and anything that didn't work (maybe one of your teammates could be beside the piste with a piece of paper and they can write down what you tell them between bouts).
- While you shouldn't let your opponent dictate the match, you also shouldn't be afraid to take away their advantages: ex. if they're comfy in one area of the piste, make them move; if you have a jumper, try to keep them grounded.
- Keep good form. Don't focus on this, but keep reminding yourself to get into it whenever you fail to keep it. Besides giving the technical advantages that good form was designed to do, it will also put your body into the "mode" that you've been training with and it will be more likely to take care of itself, leaving you to focus on strategy and reaction.
- Distance, distance, distance. Oh, and also, I'd like to say *distance*. 'Nuff said. (PS. Distance!)
- Have immediate goals that will influence every point. "I want to finish top 25%" is not good enough. Choose a goal that has easily and immediately measurable progress and that has both a defensive and offensive quality to it. For example, my favourite, "I will score 5-0 in at least one of my pools" will impel you to fight hard for every point and fight hard to not get hit even once, right here, right now. Even if you don't make that goal (don't you dare have that thought though!), that kind of attitude will translate to some pretty good fencing. Remember, a good goal you can "get close" to as well. For example, with the "5-0" one, if your opponent scores the first point, you can still shoot for 5-1, or 5-2, or 5-3, etc. Keep pushing to your goal even if you over/under shot it. Get as close as you can. Keep in mind that goals don't have to be score-based. It's perfectly acceptable (and often more useful) to have a goal such as 'I want to get at least successful parries', or 'I want to spend at least half of the bout beyond my opponents en garde line'. Goals need to be meaningful to you. If in doubt, ask a coach, or a more experienced fencer for help!

## ***Mental Aspects***

The mental aspect is probably the most significant and difficult part of fencing. A big problem is that it is difficult to even describe the mental states, Jedi mind tricks, and mental acrobatics that you have to do. It's not really something that anyone can tell you how to do, and when we do try to tell each other how to do it, it's usually in symbolic or vague terms like "Jedi mind tricks", or it's not "how", it's just "what" (i.e. "Don't get nervous" or "Don't think about the score").

However, what we can share are some thoughts to hold in your head and techniques that seem to be conducive to that most glorious of mental states, "being on".

First and foremost, is to just remember it is like any other event, you're there to fence. Do not let the size or fact of travel play with your game. As a former world champion said, "You have a job that is to fence. There is no bad day." If it helps, think of it is a (very!) crowded day at the fencing salle, nothing more.

One thing that came out of a previous NAC was using mnemonics and catch phrases that helped refocus the fencer. A common phrase was "PDF" which meant "patience, distance, focus" for those of us fencing at the Reno NAC. Whatever it is, it must have meaning and use to the fencer. When you have your mantra picked out, keep repeating it to yourself. Constantly.

We all know that if you let yourself get angry, nervous, or intimidated, it severely affects your fencing. Of course, the trite answer is "don't get angry, nervous, or intimidated", but let's try to take it a bit further. Why do you get into any of those states? Because you care. Otherwise, why are you spending all this time at practice? If it was "just for fun", why do you need to regulate your diet, make personal sacrifices to improve yourself, and let's face it, practice isn't always fun, regardless of what you think about fencing itself. If it was just about fun, wouldn't you just do the fun parts of practice, leisurely pick up new things here or there, and just fence? If it was just to stay in shape, there are much cheaper and less time intensive ways to do that. So then, why do you care?

That is a personal question that doesn't have one answer and may take a lifetime to figure out completely, but it is one you should be asking yourself. Only by coming to understand your reason for caring are you going to control your anger, nervousness, intimidation, or other such emotions. The answer can be very diverse and will almost certainly include many "reasons" to varying degrees: perhaps it's because you enjoy the self-esteem you get from winning, perhaps you see fencing as the Aristotelian embodiment of spiritual, physical, and mental excellence and you are morally bound to excel in it ☺, perhaps it's because you've just chosen fencing as something to care about and that's that, perhaps you started fencing for fun and now it just has its own momentum, perhaps it's the accolades of your family and peers, perhaps it's because fencing is really fun and being good just makes it more fun for you. Perhaps you like ruining peoples' days. There are a million possible reasons, but they are highly personal and difficult to detect. Just keep asking yourself those hard questions.

Whatever the reasons, you need to try to understand them in order to control any “negative” emotions, as those reasons will be your source for asking new questions and generating new answers. For example, say one of your reasons for caring was “because fencing is really fun and being good makes it more fun for me”; then your questions regarding your negative feelings might be: “Why am I upset about losing? This is fun. I can beat many people, I’m pretty good. Yeah, sure, there’re people who are better than me, but so what? Maybe I’m even ‘better’ than the person I just lost to and just had a bad day... but so what? So I didn’t have as much fun as I could’ve if I would’ve won, but am I *actually* angry about not having as much fun as I could’ve? That’s weird...” By analyzing your emotions like this often, you eventually come to no longer even have the negative emotion because it just doesn’t make sense any more, even emotionally... it will have just become so absurd to you.

There is a danger here though. Everyone has probably also had those days where they weren’t “into it”. You didn’t care and it showed. If you’ve worked on figuring out your reasons for fencing, you need to also celebrate those reasons (assuming of course, that you haven’t come to the “I don’t actually like competition fencing” conclusion). Your reasons for striving at fencing aren’t just useful for neutralizing negative emotions; they’re good for reinforcing positive emotions. You get more fun out of being good? Then go be as good as you can be, it’ll be fun! You’ve just chosen fencing as something to care about and that’s that? Then go fence hard. You’ve chosen to care, so care! Take your reasons for fencing and build on them and remember them. That’s why you’ve given so much of yourself to the sport, celebrate it. And *\*enjoy\** it.

Ultimately, the ideal mental state is a kind of “caring without caring”. Zen, I know, but that’s fencing for ya.

## Supporting Your Team Mates

Always be looking out for each other at events. When you’re not fencing and a teammate’s event gets posted, check and see where they are fencing, what is their seed, who it is that they are fencing, etc and let them know. If you see a teammate is in distress and the coach is some place else, go let the coach know what is going on. If they cannot be at the strip they might be able to give you advice to give the fencer.

- At the NAC events the only person that can be in the fencing area besides the fencers and ref is the ‘coach’.
- At the break the one and only person who can speak to the fencer is the coach/person who is acting as the coach (basically only one person can be talking to the fencer).

If you have fenced a fencer and you have a teammate that will fence them let them know what worked or did not work for you against this fencer.

## Getting Home

Go back and review the Travelling section of this document. That all still applies.

In addition:

- The day before your flight, triple check your flight times and airport. Do you know how you're getting there? If you're getting a ride with someone, double check with them now regarding time and where to meet. Be sure you have a contact number for them (room # or cell phone #).
- Plan to be at the airport at least 2 hours in advance. Be sure to consider whether there will be rush hour traffic and perhaps a slow-to-arrive taxi.
- When you're ready to leave, take your packed stuff and get it all by the door. Now that you've done that, go back through your room and scour it, looking for stuff you forgot. Look under the beds, in the bathroom, in drawers, etc. Be thorough.
- Do you know who is paying for the room? If it's not you, double-check with the person whom you think is paying. You may be surprised that they thought it was someone else too, possibly you.
- Turn in your room key.
- If your flight has changed or been delayed and you have someone picking you up back home, you should call them to let them know.
- Relax. You had fun, now use your travel time to wind down and reflect on the tournament.