COACHING THE YOUNG FENCER

An Ontario Fencing Association project with funding assistance by the Government of Ontario

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Introduction

The coach is concerned with developing the three tools we’re given in life: the head the body and the heart. One - The head. Strategy. Most boys come to the coach from alley games and have no conception of the elegance of the game played on the court with two baskets. Second – the body. Work the boys into condition. Make their legs hard. Run, run, run. You can’t run enough. Thirdly - the heart. And here the good coach has his most solemn opportunity. Give the boys the will to achieve. Make them feel the sacredness of achievement, in a form of giving our best. A boy who has had his heart enlarged by an inspiring coach, can never become a failure in the greater game of life.”

The basketball coach, Tohero in “Rabbit, Run” by John Updike, 1960.

To manage the training process correctly, it is necessary to have comprehensive knowledge and skills, because the coach is fully responsible for the fencer’s development and sports progress. The objective of this Manual is to guide and strengthen the development of coaches’ abilities from beginner to high performance; to help them and their students reach their full potential; and to provide a reference resource useful to coaches, athletes and parents.

This Manual will also help the coach navigate the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) stages (slide 2), with an emphasis on the Train to Train and Train to Compete levels. Fencers will all progress through the LTAD stages in the same order, but the rate of progress and the amount of time spent at each stage will vary with the individual. It’s important to know which skills should be developed to what degree, and how to evaluate them during each of the LTAD stages.

The training program will depend on the LTAD stage of a fencer and their individual skills and goals.

Coaches who work with fencers at the initial two stages deal with different issues than coaches who work with High Performance (HP) fencers, so the manual is structured around the LTAD stages, and provides key coaching considerations on each one.

It is impossible to cover all fencing knowledge in one manual. Therefore, this manual emphasizes the most important aspects of fencing coaching at different stages of the LTAD. Some additional aspects are also covered in brief.

The chosen presentation format will allow users the to quickly access information. There is so much work is required in our daily coaching lives and one needs to spend time wisely, that’s why the manual has more practical material than theory.

Katya Belkina is a NCCP Level 3 foil coach, currently enrolled into the Advanced Coaching Diploma program. Katya is the head coach and founder of My Fencing Club, which opened in 2009 and has about 100 members in 3 Toronto locations. The majority of the fencers Katya works with are children from 7 to 15 years old, from beginner to a high performance level. Katya recognizes and appreciates the necessity of providing a nurturing and encouraging environment where students feel confident yet challenged within the salle. She encourages and assists students to become better athletes and in turn better people by valuing challenge, passion, dedication and teamwork.

Katya applies much of her teachings and experience into a practical setting in the club where students are able to take advantage of her theoretical and practical knowledge.

As with all levels of sport coaching that requires more than tactical and technical expertise, it is critical for coaches to bring a holistic approach to their students. Katya recognizes this importance and applies many elements including coaching philosophy, competition basics, safety rules, nutrition, goal setting etc.
The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is a training, competition and recovery program based on developmental age - the maturation level of an individual - rather than chronological age. LTAD is a great educational tool for coaches, athletes, parents, as well as community centers, Universities, clubs, provincial associations etc. It is athlete-centered, coach driven and administration, sport science and sponsor supported.

The goal of the LTAD for the governing body of each sport is to develop programs that support athletes from playground to podium and beyond. Children, youth and adults need to do the right things at the right time to develop in their sport or activity - whether they want to be hockey players, dancers, figure skaters or gymnasts. LTAD describes the things athletes need to be doing at specific ages and stages.

Stage 1: Active Start (0-6 years)
Stage 2: FUNdamental (girls 6-8, boys 6-9)
Stage 3: Learn to Train (girls 8-11, boys 9-12)
Stage 4: Train to Train (girls 11-15, boys 12-16)
Stage 5: Train to Compete (girls 15-21, boys 16-23)
Stage 6: Train to Win (girls 18+, boys 19+)
Stage 7: Active for Life (any age participant)

Stages 1, 2 and 3 develop physical literacy before puberty so children have the basic skills to be active for life. Physical literacy also provides the foundation for those who choose to pursue elite training in one sport or activity after age 12.

Stages 4, 5 and 6 provide elite training for those who want to specialize in one sport and compete at the highest level, maximizing the physical, mental and emotional development of each athlete.

Stage 7 is about staying Active for Life through lifelong participation in competitive or recreational sport or physical activity.

The main points of the fencing program on each stage of the LTAD are in the slide xx

Fencing is a combat sport, in which both fencers have the same goal: to outsmart the opponent and score a touch. They do this through the exchange of action and counter-action based on high pace, changing environment (distance, timing, target, action). Fencing is a sport of open skills. Open skills are those where movements are performed in an unpredictable environment. Despite the unpredictability of fencing, as athletes learn a new skill, they progress through a series of predictable stages.

References: [http://canadiansportforlife.ca/find-quality-sport-programs/fencing](http://canadiansportforlife.ca/find-quality-sport-programs/fencing)
The first couple years in fencing are vital to young fencers future development. At this stage the primary goal is to introduce children to fencing in a fun and safe environment, using modified equipment appropriate to their age, physical skills and attention span. You will also need to deal with a great variation between personalities, physical size, and physical abilities. Fencers develop fundamental movement skills: running, jumping, throwing/catching a ball, etc. The program should include a variety of games and fun exercises that help developing the basic motor skills of agility, balance and coordination (known as physical literacy). Coaches need to find ways of actively engaging children in the training process, to better facilitate the personal development of the fencer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Fencers: Males 6-9 and females 6-8 year old. No fencing experience. Coaches: Community Instructors or NCCP certified “Aide-Moniteur”.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Objective</td>
<td>Develop physical literacy through fun and daily physical activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armband Level</td>
<td>2-3 months of training, following by a Yellow armband Test. Transition point to the Orange level is based on rate of development of physical literacy and completion of the Yellow armband test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Structure</td>
<td>The program is year round, no periodization and includes camps and armband tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Training</td>
<td>Introduction to basic fencing skills in a predictable (no change or distraction) environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical Training</td>
<td>Introduce the priority (in foil and sabre) and basic tactical thinking (i.e. parry with the distance, hit-parry, parry-hit etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Introduce basic safety rules to students and parents. Collect athletes' medical info, parents contacts, and other important info in the registration form/waiver. Introduction of etiquette xxxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Training</td>
<td>Encourage fencers Include physical activity as part of daily life, eat healthy diets, rest and sleep enough. Develop physical balance (train both left and right sides).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Training</td>
<td>Introduce basic mental skills, build confidence and focus on the emotional development overall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>No formal competitions. Competition concept is introduced through fun activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport Integrity</td>
<td>Introduce students to simple rules of fair play and sport ethics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent – Coach Relationship</td>
<td>Educate parents about the program through informal gatherings (open house, parent’s meetings). Parents sign “Parent Guide” that describes parents’ roles and responsibilities in youth development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Effectiveness</td>
<td>Develop a coaching philosophy based on the core values, and mission statement and the future vision (slide xxx).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learn to Train - Play While You Train

Training at this stage should be geared towards student’s overall personality development, including physical and mental skills, as well as interacting with others. In order to get the full benefit of the training, coaches need to explain the role of training partners in the club - they are not opponents. Coaches need to encourage independence and long-term motivation among the athletes.

|Who? | Fencers: Males 9-12 and females 8-11 year old  
|Coaches: NCCP certified “Aide Moniteur” or “Competition Intro” |
|Main Objective | Develop and consolidate basic technical and tactical skills, good training habits and an appreciation that training demands a lot of work, but that it is still enjoyable. Emphasize on the effort and learn term development over short term results. |
|Armband Level | Yellow/Orange. Testing standards are under provincial control. |
|Program Structure | General/specific training ratio is 50/50. Introduction to individual lessons. A periodized YTP may be developed toward the end of this stage. |
|Technical Training | The basic skills fencers learned in the previous stage are practiced in a variety of situations (i.e. different opponents, speed). |
|Tactical Training | Tactical wheel: simple attack -> parry riposte -> compound attack -> counter attack (in foil and sabre). Introduction to principles of tactics (action, reaction, deception). |
|Physical Training | Introduce general physical primarily using own body, medicine balls or low resistance equipment, i.e. elastic bands. Fencers should continue participation in a variety of other sports that ensure symmetrical, whole body development. Introduction of fitness screens, i.e. FMS to prevent injuries (slide xxx). |
|Mental Training | Develop passion for fencing as individual/combative sport: (fun, basics, success), including basic mental skills, - focus, memory, respect, self-control, self-discipline and positive attitude. |
|Nutrition | Educate fencer on the healthy diet style based on the Canada Food Guide. |
|Competitions | Introduce individual and team competition skills, tournament format (slide xx) through youth circuits and local events “Just for Fun” (slide xx). |
|Sport Integrity | Consolidate proper fencing etiquette, demonstrate appropriate training behaviour and attitude and show respect for peers, coaches and volunteers. |
|Parent/Coach Relationship | Pre-season meeting with parent. Develop Parent Package that includes “Code of Conduct” (slide xx), Competition Format (slide xx) and other documents. |
|Safety Rules | Develop a safety plan, that includes safety rules in the gym, use of fencing gear and injury prevention plan (slide xxx). |
The philosophy coaches choose is central to how they define their coaching career, athlete development and how their team functions in practices and competitive situations. The coaching philosophy is the foundation of the program, it not only guides coaches and the staff, it also sets the stage for the athletes. It leads athletes to assume responsibility for their own actions and decisions, and it encourages them to meet the expectations that affect them as individual athletes and as an entire team.

Coaching is challenging, as you will often need to make ethical decisions. By having a clear philosophy you are able to make appropriate decisions in your relationships with athletes, parents and support team more effectively.

Coaching Philosophy - Modeling the Way

- Coaching Values
- Creating Mission (purpose)
- Vision

Mission Statement + Personal Core Values = Your Coaching Philosophy

Coach’s values have the greatest impact on your coaching philosophy, as it is a statement of what is important to you.

Values are coaches’ core beliefs. It should reflect who you are and who you want to be. Developing the value statement, ask yourself questions like “What are the most important things in your work?” or “How would you like your athletes to describe the experience they have under your coaching leadership?”. Look at the key words you used answering your questions and choose 3-4 of the most important ones. The examples of values are “integrity”, “teamwork”, “trust”, “structure”, “creativity”, “excellence” etc.

Mission is the purpose of your work as a coach. Write a few sentences about why you are a coach, what kind of coach you want to be and what keeps you going.

Vision is the dream or achievement of the future when coaches imagine exciting possibilities. How do you see yourself as a coach and your athletes 5 years from now? Imagine the future based on what you would like to accomplish in your professional life and write about it.

To formalize your coaching philosophy you need to write a statement that could be a couple of words or sentences but should explain the values and principles that the coach follows, the purpose of coaching and what goals you want to achieve in the future. The following topics might be considered while developing a coaching philosophy: coaching role, style, responsibility and guidelines for decision-making; role of the assistant coaches and staff; development of the club’s culture; athletes’ responsibilities; team rules etc.

To be effective the philosophy needs to be used. Communicate your coaching philosophy with your staff, athletes and parents through group and one-on-one discussions, website, Student-Parent Handbook etc. Apply your coaching philosophy in training/practice, in competition environments and within your coaching constituency. It is important to recognize that coaching philosophies grow and evolve over time. Discuss with athletes and parents how your philosophy evolves and will continue to evolve as the club develops.

Safety Rules

“Is fencing safe?” – this is a question fencing coaches hear a lot. The answer to it is “yes, if it’s done properly”. In order to prevent injuries, coaches are responsible for creating a safe environment and having safety rules and policy in place. Coaches must follow safety guideline for using the facility and equipment as well as having an emergency and injury prevention plan. It is important for the coach to maintain an open and frank dialogue with the fencers regarding safety, as fencers are beginning to compete, outside of the club environment. This dialogue, referencing the rules, will help the fencer both understand safety considerations and the rules.

**Safety at the gym** includes appropriate flooring which includes no obstacles, water or sharp objects laying around. Ideally the fencers should have access to full-length strips, but if it’s impossible to allocate a space for the full-length strips, they must at least have an extra meter at the end of the piste, and at least 1.5 meters between the pistes. Coaches need to educate students on the rules during the practice, i.e. it’s unsafe to walk through the pistes during fencing, caring the weapon pointing anywhere than down etc.

**Equipment’s safety.** The required fencing clothing includes a jacket and pants, an underarm protector (plastron), knee socks, and a fencing glove. All clothing, whether the club’s or personal, has to meet the specifications according to the rules (overlap, length, coverage, etc.), fit properly (snug fit for mask) and have no holes, seam tears or worn parts. Protection includes chest protectors for female and athletic cup for male fencers. Fencing pants are mandatory for electric fencing. Fencers can not fence without a mask (even when using plastic foils).

A guide on how to buy fencing gear: [http://www.dominionfencing.org/gear.html](http://www.dominionfencing.org/gear.html)

**Injury Prevention.** A study of injuries occurring in Olympic competition ranks fencing as having one of the lowest injury rates. Injuries in fencing are typically caused by poor technique, overtraining, repeating injuries and lack of attention to flexibility, stability and cross training.

The most common injuries in fencing are bruises, sprains, strains and pulled muscles. Prevention of injuries is facilitated by resistance training and exercises that increase flexibility and correct positioning (en guard, footwork). Stronger muscles can also prevent injuries in fencing by allowing for the absorption of contact force inflicted by the opponent.

Injury prevention plan can include exercises for the non-dominant side, as well as foam roller, stretch and recovery techniques. Appropriate warm-ups before training (dynamic stretches, footwork and sparring), cool-downs after training (light jugging and static stretches) and adequate sparring partners (male/female, physical size) also helps injury prevention.

**Bruises** from fencing is something fencers need to deal with by wearing appropriate gear, applying a cold compress within 24h and creams like Arnica. Developing muscle tone also helps prevent bruising and makes hits hurt less.

**Recovery time** allows fencers to work on things like cardiovascular fitness and endurance while getting a light workout on muscles that are allowed to “rest.” This helps prevent potential injury when an unusual situation forces fencers to use muscles not frequently exercised.

One of the standardized tools used to identify and prevent sport injures called **Functional Movement Screen (FMS).** It provides valuable and early insight into what inefficiencies may exist in athletes fundamental movement patterns (slide Xxx).

**Emergency Plan** has to include athletes’ medical info, parents contacts, directions to the nearest hospital etc. (slide Xx).

References: [http://www.fencing.net/13020/fencing-safer-than-badminton/](http://www.fencing.net/13020/fencing-safer-than-badminton/)
Youth Development Programs

Developmental Youth Circuit (DFC)

Aside from the obvious health benefits that come with activity and exercise, research shows that there are strong physical, social and psychological rewards associated with competition. Most fencers begin competing in youth circuits, entry level competitions. Youth circuits are competitions held at local fencing clubs, and every coach/club should consider organizing them (3-5 times a year). Youth circuits are extremely valuable for youth development at the yellow and orange armband levels as they introduce young fencers to the competition in a familiar and safe environment.

The emphasis in a DFC should be placed on fun, team building, and gaining competitive experience. It’s recommended to use the “dry” (not electrical) equipment to encourage participation. It’s also a great opportunity for fencers to practice their refereeing skills, including the corner refereeing Yellow armband. Coaches, fencers and parents can work together to organize the event. This is a great opportunity for the parents to watch competitive fencing in a familiar environment. Parents can observe and ask questions to better understand the rules and etiquette of fencing. This will help parents to be better prepared to support their children in their first regional tournaments.

A basic format for the different age groups might look like this:

Y10: Two rounds of pools of 5-6 fencers, up to 5 hits/2 min, no direct elimination bouts (DEs). Based on the first round of pool results, fencers are separated into "sharks" and "minnows" for the second round of pools. Top 4 fencers from the “sharks” are awarded medals and the top 4 fencers in “minnows” get certificates. Occasionally, every fencer gets the club’s pin or another souvenir.

Y12: One round of pools of 5-7 fencers, 5 hits/2 min, following by DEs, 10 hits/2 periods. The top 4 fencers are awarded medals.

Y14: The fencers in this group are at the “Train to Train" stage, so the format should be similar to the Cadets format: a round of pools of 5-7 fencers, 5 hits/3 min, then DEs, 15 hits/3 periods.

Peer Mentoring Program

Peer mentoring program helps develop bonds of support and friendship among fencers at different LTAD stages and promote athletic development at the club. The objective of the program is to enable more experienced fencers (Green/Blue armband) to develop leadership and coaching skills by working with less experienced fencers (Yellow/Orange armband).

Green and Blue armband fencers are partnered with Yellow and Orange fencers, working once or twice a month for 20-30 minutes. Each week “Mentors” are assigned to work on one of the technical, tactical, or refereeing skills with their “Mentees”. The Mentors make use of role modeling, team play and their communication skills to help their Mentees improve. Mentors and mentees should be randomly matched by drawing names. A successful Peer Mentoring program requires punctuality from members of both groups.

Less experienced fencers benefit from one-on-one skill acquisition with their mentor and have a supporter to go to with questions, concerns and feedback. At the end of each term the Mentors provide “progress reports” to their Mentees. Afterwards the group enjoys a small celebration at the club to give Mentees an opportunity to thank their Mentors and for the Mentors to appreciate the work of their Mentees.
Similar to the karate belt grading test, the Canadian Fencing Federation Instructional Program is a valuable tool for skill development and assessment in fencing. It is designed in-line with the stages of skill development and activity planning guidelines. These levels are called Armbands and are designated by colours. These colours are Yellow, Orange, Green, Blue, Red and Black and are obtained in that order through skill demonstration.

It’s a comprehensive progression through the sport for fencers of all ages, encompassing all aspects of the sport as fencers develop their skills from beginner to high performance. Fencers work toward receiving their Yellow, Orange, Green, Blue, Red, and Black Armbands, learning the skill sets necessary to become successful athletes, coaches, and referees. The skill set for each armband level is available at www.fencing.ca

The program is divided into five separate, but related, performance factors: technical, tactical, rules, refereeing, and at the higher levels coaching.

It is up to the coach to determine the time necessary for the athlete to attain the armband levels, however fencers need some encouragement to study the skills on their own. The passing rate of the Yellow armband is usually higher than the following ones, mostly because the new skills are built on the previous levels and can affect the future progression.

The coach should assure that the athlete is challenged by the program but not intimidated by it, especially at the earlier levels. The coach needs to emphasize the progress over the passing the test, specially at the early stages, while encouraging continuing participation and eventually competing.

For the yellow and orange armband the club coach is responsible for the exams and for the green and blue test, the test must include the club coach and another one (preferably from a different club). The final two levels (red and black), has to be assessed at the regional training camps hosted by the CFF or by the National weapon leader. The personal coach can be present at the exam but cannot participate in the examining process.

Fencers have to demonstrate the skills in two different contexts: within the regular practice of the club and within the context of a “formal” exam.

These two contexts assure the acquisition of the skills under different conditions. The club environment allows the coaches to assess the ease with which the fencer is able to demonstrate the skills in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. The exam environment allows the coach to assess the fencer’s ability to perform these skills in a more “pressed” environment.

Each of the five streams is tested and given a ranking as follows: acquired, being acquire, not acquired (or 3, 2, 1). To be promoted to the next level, a fencer must attain a minimum of two “acquired” marks and no “not acquired” marks. When delivering an armband examination, the examiner’s feedback should be limited to clarifying the skill that must be demonstrated. Multiple executions can be used if there is some small error, to test that the skill is acquired. If the student is not able to perform the skill to an acceptable level half of the time, then they have not acquired the skill and therefore can’t pass the test. However, when working with young fencers, the coach must have an ability to assess students’ mental state and find out if stress is the main reason for someone to fail. In this case, the coach could use some assistance from the Green and Blue armband students, who might make the examined fencers feel less stressed.

As fencers progress through the armband levels, they must demonstrate a progression through the stages of skill development. It’s recommended to run the armband tests 3-5 times a year, depending on the member profile.

References: xxxxxxxxx
Periodization in Training

Training should always be considered as ongoing and be planned in advance and consider the athlete’s age, potential, experience, the LTAD stage (whether it’s a performance oriented year or a developmental year) and competition calendar.

The Yearly Training Plan (YTP) is the tool that guides training over a year. It is based on the concept of *periodization*, the method of cycling different training variables (volume, intensity, frequency etc.) in a specific pattern designed to maximize performance and minimize fatigue.

There are three main phases (1-3 months each) in the YTP that focus on different goals and the corresponding load: preparatory phase, competitive phase and transition phase. The objective of training is to reach a high level of performance (peak performance) at a given time, and an athlete has to develop skills and abilities in a methodical manner. To achieve such a performance, the coach must properly periodize and plan the entire program so the development of skills, biomotor abilities, and psycho logical traits follow logically and sequentially. By changing the objectives in each phase and the training style, the progress can continue without reaching a plateau.

One of the most challenging and complex problems is peaking athletic shape on the planned date. Often, athletes peak before or after the main competition due to being pushed to reach a high level without adequately alternating work with short regeneration phases. When training youth, it is advisable to subordinate all competitions to this peak and to proceed in a way that enables the key performance factors to be improved methodically and systematically over a certain extended period during the year.

Below is step by step approach to design the YTP:

- Assess the athlete’s physical and mental abilities.
- Set up training and performance goals and determine the importance of key performance factors throughout the plan.
- Establish leads that will be responsible for each program, i.e. strength and conditioning, nutrition, metal preparation etc.
- List the important dates, - competitions and training camps (with designated levels and importance), including recovery days, - time after the competitions, school exams and holidays.
- Identify fitness tests and mental evaluation sessions.
- Identify the main competition/s and determine the demands of the event and work backwards from that date.
- Based on the number of peak tournaments, determine the type of periodization used in your program (one peak only known as mono-cycle, two peaks is called a bi-cycle).
- Determine the duration of the preparation, competition and transition phases.
- Determine the expected progression of the workload throughout the plan.
- Determine the Meso and Microcycle Planning structure of the plan based on of the events.
- Indicate the theme and loading pattern of the Microcycles of the first Mesocycle.
- Design the training sessions of the first Microcycle.

To learn more on how to do planning and periodization in details, use the references below.

Developing Athletic Abilities

The physical demands of fencing competitions are high and affected by age, gender, weapon and level of training. The physical demands of fencing are closely linked to the psychological ones, and all are subjected to continuous changes based on the behaviour of the opponent.

Fencing is predominantly anaerobic activity, characterized by explosive high-power movements, that requires the athlete to train for many explosive bursts of action while maintaining finesse and a clear head. Similar to sprinters, fencers come to a complete stop and then they ramp it up to full speed as quickly as possible. The explosive actions typically last a couple of seconds, followed by longer 20-60 seconds low-intensity and recovery periods. The low-intensity and continuous movements of the “on guard” position and recovery periods involve the aerobic energy system.

Athletic abilities in fencing include physical abilities, - power, endurance, flexibility and motor abilities, - agility, balance and coordination.

**Power.** A fencer has to be able to perform an explosive action at the right time. The two components of power are strength and speed. Constantly being in the partially squatted (“en guard”) position all day, advancing and retreating and lunging require both strength and speed.  
**Exercises:** high rep vertical jump, dead lift, squat-jump, lunges (alone or combined with dumbbells, kettle bells, sand bags or medicine balls), bench press, various grip exercises.

**Endurance.** A fencer has to be able to last a long time. An international fencing tournament may last between 9 and 11 hours. During the elimination bouts, a fencer may cover between 250 and 1000m, attack more than 150 times, and change direction approximately 200 times. Anaerobic endurance is an exercise which involves lower volume and higher intensity training.  
**Exercises:** plyometrics, jump training, interval training, resistance bands, footwork, boutting.

**Flexibility.** A fencer has to be capable of movement through a wide range of motion, i.e. in the lunge the distance between the front and back feet will be greater with a wider range of motion. The ability to reach the opponent with the arm will be better with a greater shoulder motion.  
**Exercises:** dynamic and static stretches.

**Agility.** A fencer has to be able to constantly change directions and body position. Ability to adapt quickly to the opponent’s action, constant change of the footwork direction, quick transition from attack to defense and vice versa, engagement in a seamless transition between the actions, quick movement from a current or intended action to a new one make agility one of the most important physical demands in fencing.  
**Exercises:** anything that involves change of direction (offensively and then defensively), change in height, ladder drills and tests (i.e. quick shuffle, jumping jacks, hop scotch etc.), floor patterns.

**Balance.** A fencer has to be able to achieve and maintain stability while moving or changing between positions. A lot of it depends on the technique of the “en guard position”, footwork and lunge.  
**Exercises:** proprioceptive training, unstable surfaces, perturbations, balance Y test.

**Coordination/Rhythm.** A fencer has to be able to move the body parts in the correct order and with the right timing, using a change of speed, tempo and direction of the footwork and making it confusing to the opponent.  
**Exercises:** fencing drills, skipping rope, ladder drills, target drills, cross-training.

Strength and Conditioning Program

This can be facilitated by an appropriate strength and conditioning (S&C) program in which strength, power, and power-endurance qualities (including economy of movement) can be enhanced. The conditioning program should depend on the pre-existing condition of the fencer (strengths and weaknesses), as well as the LTAD stage, fitness test results, training goals and on the season.

The Green and Blue armband fencers should consider how to vary their workout depending on the phase of the competitive season. About a month or two before tournaments start, training should start shifting more towards being fencing specific. Cardiovascular fitness should now be steered towards the sort necessary during a bout. This means that running long distances is no longer necessary-interval training, sprints, and jump roping are much more effective and efficient. The closer the fencer gets to the competition, the more he/she should focus on power and speed over short periods of time, and the more specific exercises and training should be to fencing movements.

Exercises and conditioning drills that develop repeat lunge ability, strength, and power should be used. The high proportion of lunging also dictates the need for eccentric strength and control, as well as the ability to reduce muscle damage.

Fencing produces typical functional asymmetries that emphasize the very high level of specific function, strength and control required in this sport.

Weight Training. Fencers should concentrate on building fast twitch muscle strength and not so much on gaining muscle weight. In addition to the fact that weight training programs can be designed to meet the specific conditioning needs of each individual sport, the nature of the training is such that it allows quantifiable control over progress in the conditioning program through precise manipulation of volume, intensity, frequency, and duration.

High-intensity interval training (HIT). HIT should be done with work/rest ratios similar to a fencing bout, i.e. jump rope for three minutes, “rest” by doing basic footwork for a minute, jump for three minutes, and so forth). For running, jog for 2.5 minutes, sprint for 30 seconds, and repeat that cycle. This may vary between the weapons, based on the average length of a touch.

Anaerobic test. As anaerobic activity is an important part of fencing, a repeated sprint tests format, using the 2-4-2 m shuttle is a valuable fitness test for fencers. The test should be completed using fencing footwork with the fencer facing forward at all times. The fencer must ensure that they start behind the 0-m line and ensure that both feet return back behind the line following each shuttle. The lead foot must cross the 2 and 4 m lines with each shuttle. The average time for fencers 14-17yo is 9-11 seconds.

Plyometrics (Plyos). Plyos or jump training, encourage full acceleration through the entire movement and are frequently included in a fencing program. Plyos are a broad category of exercises ranging substantially in intensity. At the low end of intensity there are exercises like hopping. They help develop the “bounce” reflex and appropriate conditioning, especially for styles that have bouncy footwork. At the high end there are exercises like hurdle jumps and drop jumps. These are very large stresses on the joints and they must come after appropriate strength has been developed. Plyos should be performed after workout. Example drills include box jumps, drop lands, drop jumps, and single-leg and lateral versions of each.

Fitness Testing: Functional Movement Screen

Fencers have many injuries and complaints of pain may stem from years of asymmetrical training without compensatory exercise to balance an individual’s underlying strength and conditioning. One of the standardized tools a coach can use is called the Functional Movement Screen (FMS). Since it’s a “screening tool" NOT an "assessment tool," coaches need to use it to refer to appropriate health care, not to assess issues. A coach can take the FMS course, order the equipment and screen their athletes or work with a conditioning coach who has taken the course.

The goal of the functional movement screen is to locate the body’s weak link in a movement pattern and improve it through therapeutic exercise. Fencers can take these results to any qualified medical practitioner or fitness trainer and check for development and improvements. It’s important to explain the fencers that these screens are designed not as a criticism or a measure of athleticism but simply as a way to assess imbalances in mobility and an insight into how to make training better for each athlete and encourage injury free sport.

A recent study of elite track and field athletes also suggests a relationship between high scores, which indicate fewer deficits, and improved performance.

There are 7 functional movements on the screen.

- **Deep squat:** challenges total body movement, required for power movements of the lower extremities. Assesses bilateral symmetrical functional mobility of the hips, knees, ankles, shoulders and thoracic spine.
- **Hurdle step:** challenges proper stride mechanics, requires proper coordination and stability between the hips and torso during the stepping motion.
- **In-line lunge:** places the body in a position that will focus on the stresses simulated during rotational, decelerating and lateral type movements. Assesses hip and ankle mobility and stability, quadriceps flexibility and knee stability.
- **Shoulder mobility:** assesses bilateral shoulder range of motion, combined movements as well as scapular mobility and thoracic spine extension.
- **Active straight leg raise:** assesses the ability to dissociate the lower extremity while maintaining stability in the torso. Assesses hamstring and ankle plantar-flexor flexibility while maintaining a stable pelvis and active extension of the opposite leg.
- **Trunk stability push up:** assesses the ability to stabilize the spine and trunk during a closed chain upper body movement.
- **Rotary stability:** complex movement requiring proper neuromuscular coordination and energy transfer from one segment of the body to another through the torso. Assesses multi-plane trunk stability during combined upper and lower extremity motion.

Scores range from 0 (pain or complete inability to perform the measure) to 3, which indicate full ability to perform the skill. Follow the reference material to find out more information on the FMS.

References: [www.functionalmovement.com](http://www.functionalmovement.com); [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxjKe-goqQI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxjKe-goqQI)

“Predicting more than risk: FMS may also have performance link”, LER, April 2014.
Nutrition in Fencing

Why do coaches need to know more about nutrition? So they can provide better support to athletes, flag potential nutritional issues, and gain more nutrition knowledge and awareness.

Athletes following a specific training plan for maximum results may be sabotaging all that work with poor diets. An athlete’s nutrition plan should be individualized to monitor nutrition factors that impact the athlete’s performance and meet the needs of training and competition.

Fencing is an anaerobic activity, which means fencers burn carbohydrates (carbs) and sugars. Nutrition requirements for fencing involve recovery of the phosphagens (energy storage compounds), making sure the fencer has small doses of quick energy replenishment on a regular basis. Carbs are the primary fuel for intense muscular effort and should be the cornerstone of a fencer’s diet.

Training diets vary based on level of training and season (pre-season vs. competition).

The key nutrition considerations:

• Eat small frequent meals and snacks every 2-4 hours
• Balance carbohydrate, protein and fats at each meal: low sugar, high fiber carbohydrates, lean protein choices and healthy fats.
• Decide on the quantity of the meals based on the athlete’s goals: are they trying to lose, gain or maintain weight?
• Ensure proper hydration: at least 2L or 8 cups/day minimum (does NOT include exercise or environment).

So what should fencers eat? These general guidelines are:

• 12-15% of daily calories from protein.
• 25-30% of daily calories from fat.
• 55-65% of daily calories from carbohydrate.

Before the competition:

3 to 4 hours: 60-200 g carbs, 10-30 g protein, at least 500 mL (2 c. ) fluids; low in sugar, fat and fiber.
30 to 60 minutes: a small high carb snack: 20 – 40 g carb, 250 – 500 mL fluids, low to moderate protein.

During the competition:

Small meals: Absorption of calories and nutrients is limited by time therefore small meals (fast energy) throughout the day should be sources that are easy to digest and prepare/pack.

Carbs: A variety of carbs will help athletes perform in the anaerobic alactic zone which foil fencing requires: dried fruit, fruit, grains, granola bars etc.), 30g to 60g carbs per hour.

Food to avoid: pop, frozen slushy drinks, candy, bars, chips, or other high fat/sugar snack foods.

Hydration: Hydration for fencers is key. Long days spent in venues with several hours of down time without proper hydration can affect the performance. Fencers need to drink at least 2L of water and fluids with electrolytes, home-made Gatorade and fruit juices throughout the day. Watch for signs of dehydration: thirst, headaches, poor concentration, dizziness or lightheadedness, cramping, nausea, fatigue, and dark-colored urine.

After the competition:

Protein intake: Fencers need to have a meal that includes protein and carbs to insure recovery. A 4:1 combo of carbs and protein is recommended.

Rest: Optimal performance requires 8 hours of sleep nightly.

References: www.coach.ca; www.dietitians.ca
Nutrition Assessment

Methods of Nutrition Assessment:
- Observation: training and competition, group events, etc.
- Communication with athletes and parents.
- Nutrient intake records, diet history, journaling (see below) or online tracking tools (i.e. www.myfitnesspal.com, www.fitday.com, www.mynetdiary.com).

Have your athlete complete a 3-day food record using the journal below, during the training, competition and recovery stages. Enter the data into one of the online diet analysis programs (www.eattracker.ca).

Make an assessment based on the following:
- Meal frequency & balance
- Diet quantity & quality
- Macronutrient intakes
- Hydration

Make recommendations to the athlete (or suggest a registered dietitian) to help the athlete to achieve nutrition goals at each stage of the YTP (preparation, competition and transition phase).

Journal

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Description of Intake</th>
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Total Water Intake: ___________________________________________________________

# of Bowel Movements: _________________________________________________________

Description (ex. Size, colour, undigested food seen, consistency...) ________________

Other Observations: (gas/bloating, burping, indigestion...), how long after eating? ____________

Circle which best describes your most predominant mood today:
- Happy
- Content
- Relaxed
- Tired
- Depressed
- Overwhelmed
- Stressed
- Anxious

Any foods that made you feel worse? Y N (Please circle the offending foods above)

Exercise Type: ___________________________________________ Duration: ________________

Bedtime last night: _____ Wake time today: _____ Average energy rating (from 1 to 10 out of 10): __________
Being mentally prepared for competition can help develop consistent results. Fencers may be able to perform up to their potential while improving already sharpened physical skills. The well trained (physically and mentally) athlete who is faced with critical performance situations is better able to tolerate increasing arousal levels and may even draw extra energy from the pressure of competition. Athlete Mental Skill Assessment tools can be used for pre- and post-competition planning or identifying athlete mental skills. It will include the following steps:

Step 1. Educate your athletes (and parents) on why mental training is an important part of fencing through individual and group meetings.

Step 2. Develop an individual meeting or interview template for your athletes, using questions like “How do you feel about competing?”, “What's your biggest concern when you're competing?”, “What do you do when stress affect your performance?” etc.

Step 3. Meet with your athlete to discuss how they relate their emotions to fencing. Write a quick reflection on how the process went and how you felt after.

Step 4. Identify strengths and weaknesses in athlete’s mental skills by using your own template or existing tool, i.e. Competitive Adjective Profile (CAP) template (see below).

Step 5. Set specific goals for developing and refining mental skills. Athletes need to consistently practice mental preparation methods to improve the performance (slide xx).

Step 6. Meet with your athletes on a regular basis to re-assess and discuss mental goals, progress and monitor their overall wellbeing, i.e. general health, school, relationships with friends, parents etc.

**Competitive Adjective Profile (CAP) process:**

- Athletes need to describe themselves in the context of fencing. They need to try being as objective as possible and avoid making themselves look better or worse than you really are. Any item scored 4 or below indicates weakness and 7 or higher indicates strength.

- Ask your teammates who know you well to fill out the CAP using colour markers to keep the feedback anonymous. The coach will collect all the copies and fill out his own one, after which the coach will go through the results with the athlete.

- Identify 4 top weaknesses from the list, gain a clear understanding about them and develop a strong commitment and strategy for change. Check your motivational score, - the level of drive is the number 1 predictor of how far you will go in the sport. If it’s below 7, it will be hard to improve in all other factors without motivation.

- State the weaknesses (i.e. impatient) in a positive form, i.e. “I am very patient”. For the next 30 days make those positive statements the most important themes in your life as an athlete. Put reminders about it everywhere, - in your fencing diary, in your room, school locker etc.

- Write a one page summary on what you’ll do to improve each positive factor over the next 30 days, i.e. “My plan to becoming patient is...”.

- Track the progress daily for one month on each of the 4 positive factors. Give yourself 0, +1 or - 1 if you felt nothing happened, you improved or you moved backwards.

- At the end of 30 days re-take the complete CAP, see if there is progress and find the other 4 top weaknesses.

## The Competitive Adjective Profile (CAP)

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Mental Preparation Exercises

Mental strength training involves learning and practicing mental skills that strengthen the ability to control thoughts, emotions and performance. The skills applied to manage the mental game involve the following basic mental training:

Relaxation/Breathing
The ability to be composed under pressure is a necessity. Finding the balance between feeling overly-energized and overly-relaxed is the key to mental training. Feeling excited and nervous before the competition is normal, however fencers need to know how to reduce stress and anxiousness to minimum while competing. Relaxation is designed to slow the heart rate and reduce the effects of adrenaline. Simple breathing techniques can reduce tension enough to allow for further muscle relaxation. Taking slow and deliberate breaths using the diaphragm instead of chest and shoulder muscles promotes relaxation. Once a relaxed breathing pattern is established, you can calm yourself even further by relaxing your muscles once group at a time. Listening to quiet music or thinking about some non-competitive event can also help with reducing anxiety. Be able to relax on the piste, analyze situations, find solutions and apply them in your fencing. Control your reactions until the right moment.

Concentration
Concentration issues are one of the most difficult and essential skills to master in mental skills training. No matter how well thought out your game plan, during the stress of competition your mind goes blank. Concentration allows you to develop a more comprehensive picture of your opponent. Learning to focus not only while fencing but also between touches and between bouts is paramount to good performance. Exercise practice involves focusing on internal sensations and external stimuli while at the same time being able to avoid distractions of noise and unwanted visual cues. Concentration skills allow you to be able to respond to your opponent’s style and recognize patterns in their game.

Self-Talk
Self-Talk is something that people engage in thousands of times a day. Successful athletes are self-confident athletes. What you think or say about yourself in practice situation is critical to how you will perform. Self-talk can become a self fulfilling prophecy whether positive or negative. Reframing negative statements into positive self-talk can often produce a dialogue to work through problems. At the first sign of negative statements you should take control by saying “STOP” and begin to think about a possible solution (“Let me try something different” vs. “I can’t beat this person”). Find a phrase that can bring you back to the positive thinking, i.e. “Think about next point”.

Imagery/Visualization
Imagery involves visualization of positive outcomes. To see in your minds eye successful performance can influence the outcome. Picture yourself walking into a gym with no fear, no emotion and no performance worries. Imagine yourself facing a known opponent and watch their attacks unfold in slow motion. See your response and rehearse it over and over until it becomes automatic.

Goal Setting and Performance Analysis

Goal setting is one of the most important skills taught to athletes in order to help them achieve optimal performance. It also helps athletes understand where they are currently and also where they want to go.

How to set goals and athletes’ accountability and commitment to them, will be decided by how much ambition they chose to apply. It’s important to look at both performance and results, because one does not necessary matches to the other.

Making a result oriented goal for a young fencer is not the best way to go. For example, if a fencer’s goal is to make the Cadet National Team it is not a goal that can be measured or benchmarked. The student and his coaches have no control over the other fencers in his age group. As coaches, our objectives would be to get athletes onto National teams but it can be destructive to an athlete's development if we focus on goals that are out of their control. Instead of focusing on points or rankings (outcome goals), identify specific gaps in athlete's performance (i.e. conditioning and development, psychological, tactical) and set up goals that are focused on the process and performance. Set a specific development plan, using the LTAD path. Athletes often set goals that are not specific, measurable and can not be controlled. S.M.A.R.T goals make more sense:

✓ Specific
✓ Measurable
✓ Attainable
✓ Realistic
✓ Timely

Goal setting is not just about identifying what you want to achieve but also how you will achieve it (process goals) and measure that achievement (performance goals).

Goals must be set according to the age, stage of development, confidence, ability and motivation of the individual.

Goal-Setting Process will include the following:

Discuss with athletes their goals, write them down and revise on a regular basis to promote development and accountability.

It’s easier to achieve big things by breaking them down into small tasks and help systemically grow motivation, commitment and self-confidence. Help athletes set goals that encompass all of the various areas of their development, including technique, strategy and tactics, fitness and mental toughness.

Performance goals can be broken into technical, tactical, physical and mental, as well as based on time needed to accomplish the goal, - long-term (1-3 years), Intermediate (4-8 months) and short term (1-3 months). Fencers at “Learn to Train” stage will require very short term easily achieved goals to boost their self-confidence whereas those at the “Train to Train/Compete” stage will need more challenging yet realistic goals.

Daily tasks should then be planned based on the goals set. Assess the athletes’ record of goals set and completed, evaluate the progress and readjust daily tasks or short-term goals based on the evaluation.

Remind your athletes that the end of a goal is a beginning of a new one.

Competition Basics

Careful planning allows fencer’s mind to relax and avoid having to deal with the stress associated with preparation. Below are a few recommendations fencer may use:

Prior to the tournament.

- Review your competition goals and establish positive self-talk for improving confidence.
- Register on time – all tournaments have a registration due date. Have your CFF # and registration receipt handy.
- Check all equipment the day before a tournament. Be familiar with your equipment bag and make sure you can find everything, even in the dark. Use the equipment checklist to ensure you have all of the necessary gear for the tournament (equipment requirements are slide xx). The fencing gear has to be recently washed. Other important things will include: cash, snacks, water bottle, warm-up suit etc.
- Establish sameness in your weapons. Many fencers have favorites in their weapon inventory, but what happens if your favorite breaks during competition?

During the tournament.

- The times listed on the registration form are for close of registration. That means you need to show up for the registration at the computer desk no later than the listed time, but allow yourself at least 30’ before that time. Tournaments start within 30' after the registration is closed.
- Allow enough time for a. equipment check, - the armourer will be at a table with lots of tools and put an inspection mark on your gear; b. warm-ups and c. to change into the fencing gear.
- Listen carefully to pools and DEs announcement.
- Plan for periods of inactivity between bouts, and between pools and DE’s. Warm-up before pools and each DE. Keep your muscles warm wearing track suits. Be mindful of the need to increase arousal or decrease anxiety between bouts.
- Keep your fencing gear in one spot, and don’t leave foils and cords on the floor unsupervised.
- Do not use brand new gear at the tournament – allow some time to get used to it.

Dealing with referees.

When dealing with referees it is important to be polite, know the rules and be able to change the action toward the referee. Fencers must be aware of how to ask questions:

- If video-arbitrage is not being used, then the fencer can only question the application of the rules. No allowance is made for the explanation of the fencing phrase.
- If video-arbitrage is being used, then the fencing phrase can be questioned (using the correct rules as per FIE rules) as well as the application of the rules.

Sometimes referees make mistakes, but other times fencers do. If a referee can’t see a certain action, fencers need to try to come up with a different, or “clean” action. The worst mistakes fencers make is to start arguing with a referee. Instead, ask questions politely. Respect the referees who spend long hours on the floor. Learn about referring rules and practice them at the club or local events to become a stronger fencer.

After the tournament.

- Cool-downs can include light jogging for 20’ – 30’ and static stretches.
- Write in your fencing diary to reflect on the experience and improve self-reliance, reflection and organization skills (i.e. pool and DE scores, what did you like/did not like about your fencing, how would you do things differently if you fenced that tournament again etc.).
Fencing Tournament Format

Most of the tournaments in Canada are run using a standard format that is used in most parts of the country and the world. The most common one is one round of “pools” (a pool is a group of 4-7 fencers who fence each other in a complete round-robin), followed by “DE” (Direct Elimination round. Once you lose a DE bout, you are done for the day). Some tournaments run two round of pools or use preliminary rankings to qualify for the fist round of DEs.

Pool bouts go maximum to 5 hits and 3 minutes; DE bouts go to 15 hits and 3 periods by 3 minute and 2 breaks by 1 minute each; DE bouts in Under-14 events sometimes go to 10 hits.

The Directoire Technique “DT” has jurisdiction over all the fencers who take part in a competition and is responsible for maintaining order and discipline during competitions and may use the penalties specified in the FIE rules. The results are being calculated by computer programs, i.e. “Fencing Time”.

DT creates an “initial seeding” list, with the highest rated fencer will be at the top, and the lowest/unrated at the bottom, based on the CFF rankings. The list is being posted before the announcement of the pools.

Depending on the size of the event, the organizers create any number of “pools”. This is the first round of the competition. Fencers are assigned a number (some referees call fencers by numbers), and the competition begins. The DT announces the pools so fencers hear names being called - they need to listen the names to know which numbered piste to go to.

After the pool is finished, fencers must check their score for the number of victories and points scored/received and initial the pool sheet. This means that the fencers are responsible to make sure all recorded bouts, points, wins/losses have been recorded correctly. If they are not correct, the fencer must tell the referee and the referee will correct the error. It is up to the referee to make this correction on the pool sheet. Many fencers or their parents bring blank score sheets to the tournaments to record the scores.

The “indicator” is the ratio of total touches scored vs. received, i.e. if a fencer scored 25 touches in the pool, and received only 5, the indicator would be “+20”. The completed pool sheets are given to the DT to tabulate the results.

Based on the number of victories and indicator, fencers are seeded into the “Direct Elimination” table. The second seeding list of fencers will be posted after the pools are completed. Fencers are responsible of checking the indicator and making sure that they have the same indicator as they signed in the pools. If fencer notice any inconsistency they have to report it to the DT before the DE start.

The seeding table works like this: the fencer with the highest pool results meets the fencer with the lowest result. If there is not a number of people present that fits a power of two, the top fencers coming out of the pools will get a “bye” to next closest round. That means they will not fence until it is determined who all are in the closest “power of two” round. So for example, if there are 9 fencers in the tournament, all but two people would get a bye. The bottom finishers out of the pools would fence for a spot at the bottom of the round of 8.

Every time a round of DEs is fenced, half the people get eliminated, until only one, the winner of the event, is left. These can be referred to as the round of 64, 32, 16, 8, 4 and the “Final”. This all depends on how many people are in the competition.

References: [http://www.fie.ch/fencing/rules.aspx](http://www.fie.ch/fencing/rules.aspx)
**Competition Classification and Selection Process**

**Canadian**
- In-club/Youth Circuit and youth league.
- ON: Just for Fun (JFF), OFA, ON Summer Games and other local competitions.
- Outside of ON: QC youth circuit, BC Provincials etc.
- Nationals: Canada Cup & National Championship.
- Team: University Circuit, ON Provincial Teams, Canada Games etc.

**International (www.fie.ch):**
- European Cadet Circuits
- FIE World Cups and Grand Prix, Junior & Senior
- FIE World Championships, Cadet, Junior & Senior
- Olympic Games

**USA (www.usfencing.org):**
- USA regional, open and super youth circuits
- Youth, Cadet, Junior and Senior NACs
- Pan American Zonal Championships and Qualifier

**Age Eligibility/Criteria**

**Domestic:** The following age groups are defined as of December 31st of the current license year (August 1st to July 31st of the following year).
- U15 or Y14 (fencers of 14yo or younger)
- Cadet any athlete Under 17 years old
- Junior any athlete Under 20 years old
- Senior any athlete 12+ years old

**International:** FIE rules require that athletes must be 13 years or older on January 1 immediately preceding the next World Championships to compete in any FIE official competition, individual or team.

**Selection Process**

Most selection processes are done the same way in Canada. Basic criteria are a membership (internationally it is a citizenship) and a selection of designated competitions (and camps) that accumulate points. In some cases the coach can select the most appropriate athlete within a top 4 ranking. The selection process for the Team Canada (Cadet, Junior and Senior) is posted on [www.fencing.ca](http://www.fencing.ca)

Rankings each have a specific purpose limited value. *The High Performance (HP)* ranking is the key selection tool for the National Team and funding. Junior and Cadet HP list has all athletes that participate in the designated tournaments, whereas Senior HP only lists people registered in the HP program. HP includes a domestic portion of the tournaments, plus international component.

*The Domestic/National* ranking keeps track of results of tournaments within Canada. It’s used to ranked people at tournaments within Canada (except the top 4 ranked in the High Performance Program, HPP). These rankings are used in some circumstances, i.e. the Vancouver GP.


**Competition Selection**

“Am I ready to compete” – is the questions that coaches are asked often. The main idea is to encourage children to improve themselves and learn new skills under pressure and through honest competition. Children need to accept the idea of losing and the fact that not everyone gets a medal, teaches them that they have to train hard to succeed and always have a winning spirit. In youth development competition the emphasis should be on the process rather than on the rankings or medals (slide xxx).

The transition between recreational and competitive levels can be tough, especially for younger fencers. Communicate your goals and expectation clearly to both fencers and coaches to avoid xxx

Carefully selected competitions provide an opportunity for ongoing skill and development. Competitions should be age-group specific and are selected to ensure a balance of self-confidence and technical/tactical development for youth development and reaching the potential for the “Train to Compete” and “Train to Win” levels.

The fencing specific LTAD document offers some guidance on the competition selection (slide xxx).

The competitive season in Canada runs from September through July.

Coaches need to assess athletes’ progress, determine readiness and help to select the tournaments, appropriate for the skill, level, and goals. I.e. fencers of 10-13yo who are at the Learn to Train stage, can fence in Y12 and Y14 categories at the local events, such as JFF and club's youth circuits.

Those who are at the Train to Train stage participate in the local events, Canada Cups and get introduced to the USA's youth circuits and NACs. The focus should be on getting as much experience as possible, rather than on points and rankings. A fencer should be competing at a consistent level at local events before entering national events.

Most fencers will compete in the Ontario Provincial Youth Championships and some may attend the National Youth Championships.

Training camps is an important part of youth development

During the summer there are many summer camps offered in ON and other provinces.

**References:** CFF LTAD Handbook:

Ontario Youth/Cadet Program Guide, 2013-2014:
Designing The Yearly Training Plan

### Preparation

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<th>Specific Preparation</th>
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<th>Competition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fitness and technical quality (skill)</td>
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<td>Power, strategy and tactics development, accumulation and recovery volume and intensity</td>
<td>One or more most important or qualifying competitions</td>
<td>- Mental training</td>
<td>- Tapering</td>
<td>- Low volumes, no intensity, fun, rest</td>
<td>- Psychological rest, relaxation and biological regeneration</td>
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### Competition

The Macrocycle

A macrocycle refers to an annual plan that works towards peaking for the goal competition of the year. There are three phases in the macrocycle: preparation, competitive, and transition. The entire preparation phase should be around 2/3 to 3/4 of the macrocycle.

The Mesocycle

A mesocycle represents a number of continuous (2-6) weeks phase of training, where the training program emphasize the same type of physical adaptations. The goal is to make sure the athlete peaks for the high priority competitions by improving each cycle along the way.

The Microcycle

A microcycle is typically a week or a number of training sessions, built around a given combination of acute program variables, which include progression as well as alternating effort (heavy vs. light days). Each microcycle is planned based on where it is in the overall Macrocycle.

### Event

Volume, intensity etc. of the YTP phases

Phases, sub-phases, macro- and micro-cycles

The YTP for the Canadian National Junior Women’s Foil
Parent Code of Conduct

The Ethics Code is intended to provide standards of ethical conduct that can be applied in fencing. It covers both general principles and the decision rules relevant to most situations encountered by coaches in interacting with parents. The Code also provides a common set of values. It is the individual responsibility of each coach to aspire to the highest possible standard of conduct.

The essential elements of character-building and ethics in sports are embodied in the concept of sportsmanship and six core principles: *trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship*. The highest potential of sports is achieved when competition reflects these principles. Below are the statements coaches can use in the Parent Code of Conduct:

- I will not force my child to participate in sports.
- I will remember that children participate to enjoy the sport and that the game is for youth, not adults.
- I will inform the coach of any physical disability or ailment that may affect the safety of my child or the safety of others.
- I (and my guests) will be a positive role model for my child and encourage sportsmanship by showing respect and courtesy, and by demonstrating positive support for all players, coaches, officials and spectators at every game, practice or sporting event.
- I (and my guests) will not engage in any kind of unsportsmanlike conduct with any official, coach, player, or parent such as interrupting bouts, or using profane language or gestures.
- I will teach my child to play by the rules and to resolve conflicts without resorting to hostility or violence.
- I will demand that my child treat other players, coaches, officials and spectators with respect regardless of race, creed, color, sex or ability.
- I will teach my child that doing one's best is more important than winning, so that my child will never feel defeated by the outcome of a game or his/her performance.
- I will never ridicule or yell at my child or other participants for making a mistake or losing a competition.
- I will emphasize skill development and practices and how they benefit my child more than winning. I will also de-emphasize games and competition in the lower age groups.
- I will respect the officials and their authority during games, will never question, discuss, or confront coaches at the game field, and will take time to speak with coaches at an agreed upon time and place.
- I will demand a sports environment for my child that is free from drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, and I will refrain from their use at all sports events.
- I will refrain from coaching my child or other players during games and practices, unless I am one of the official coaches of the team.

*By signing this document I agree with the Code and I understand that if I do not follow this Code, I may be asked to leave the club activity (such as a tournament or practice) or I may be asked to withdraw my child from the club.*

*Parent’s Signature:_________________________________  Date:_________________________________*
Success stories

“A winner is just a loser who tries differently one more time.” – Sherraine Schalm.

Q: Why did you become a fencer?
A: Fencing was only an excuse to spend time with the coolest guy ever: Alan Nelson. He was a teacher at my school and also happened to coach fencing. I wasn’t in any of his classes so I joined the fencing club just to hang out near him. I did not like fencing at first, but my dad made me stick with it and after a year it became enjoyable. Also I had lots of friends in the club so it was easy to go to training. Alan was possibly my greatest coach ever because he gave me skills to become good enough to develop a lifetime love of the sport. Also he motivated me to believe I could really accomplish something beyond what I imagined. I started fencing at 12 and then by the time I was 15 there was a the chance to qualify for the Canada Winter Games so I did my best, changed from epee to foil and started doing competitions.

Q: What’s your biggest accomplishment in fencing?
A: Two things: my consistency being in the top 16 in the world (1999-2010) and my qualification for the London Games after having a baby in 2011.

Q: What were your main challenges in fencing?
A: Having enough money and support for my career was the most exhausting and discouraging challenge of all. For this, Ontario was a fairly welcoming place. They offered help when it was needed and had the Ontario Quest For Gold program.

The other challenge was overcoming a fear of failure so that I could perform at international competitions. I worked successfully with Andre Wojcikiewicz to get a plan that gave me consistent, maximum performance.

Q: How did fencing help you to become a better person?
A: Fencing gave me more than I can count: a world-wide education, meeting my husband, going to 4 Olympics, understanding the media from both sides, learning how to set goals and work to achieve them, physical health from a lifetime of good training, the chance to contribute to the world instead of just taking from it, etc. But the MOST important thing I got from fencing was the chance to fail. So often in life we do what is comfortable and for what we have a high percentage to be successful but with fencing I learned how failure does not kill you! In fact, how you train yourself to react to failure determines more than any talent level, coaching or funding you could have. If you react well, it can lead to change, a lifetime of joy and a possibility of future success.

Q: Any advice you could give to a fencer’s parents?
A: Make sure your kid sticks with something long enough to decide whether they truly like it or not.

To read more about Sherraine: “Running with Swords: The Adventures and Misadventures of the Irrepressible Canadian Fencing Champion”, Sherraine Mackay, 2005