

Melee Combat Training Manual for the Kingdom of the West

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FORWORD BY THE KINGDOM RAPIER MARSHAL

Greetings and salutations to all who read this training manual! Rapier melee isa skill. skill. As such, it must be taught formally and practiced regularly in order to enjoy it in a safe and fun manner. Rapier combat in the Kingdom of the West has an exemplary safety record and each of us should all strive to maintain it. If you ever have any questions or problems please discuss them with the Marshalate and your chain of command, or choose the solution that provides the greatest degree of safety to everyone.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank our Guild brothers in Lochac: Henry Walker (Provost Lord Henry the Fox), Terry Cruikshank (Provost Lord Blaidd MacFaolen Tuatha Faol), Peter Chappell (Provost Lord Piers of Malmesbury) and Richard Cullinan (Guildmaster ibn Jelal) for all their hard work in providing the core of this manual. Without them it would never have happened. Have fun and fence safely!

In Service to the Crown of the West,
H.L. Michael of Castle Keep, CCW
West Kingdom Rapier Marshal

INTRODUCTION

Melee Combat can be much faster paced than single combat. A great many more issues come into play when there is more than one pair of Combatants fighting on the field. Both Combatants and Marshals must understand these issues. This training manual is designed for both the Marshals and Combatants who wish to participate in rapier melee. In it we hope to explain these issues and how best to deal with them.

The manual is organized under sets of headings for the vital concepts of what melee combat is all about. It is important for everyone to read and understand the Combatant and Marshal perspectives so that we all understand what goes on from the other point of view.

Each section will include areas that should be included in melee training and, where possible, a way to do it. Suggested training methods are just that: suggestions. Do what works for you and your people. These suggestions are only there to ensure that at least one method is available if you haven't devised your own.

All references to rules will be from the West Kingdom Rapier Combat Standards (WKRCS, see Rules for Melee Combat below). We hope that this manual will give meaningful and valid assistance in training fencers to meet the standards expected in the West.

DEFINITION OF MELEE

A melee is any combat that takes place between more than two Combatants. This means any two-on-one combats are classified as melee regardless of whether they are conducted on a list field or on the open field.

All melee combat at any event must be pre-approved by the Kingdom Rapier Marshal. Request for approval must include the RMIC information and any other information the KRM requests. No exceptions will be made to this rule.

AUTHORIZATION REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for authorization in melee are the following:

- Consistent calibration while in melee
- Demonstrated knowledge of melee combat conventions, including engagement, obstacles and death from behind.
- The applicant must attend and pass a West Kingdom rapier melee training course.

RULES FOR MELEE COMBAT

The rules for melee are quite simple and few in number, however they do rely on the participant's knowledge of the rules applicable to single combat, particularly the Rules of the Lists. Melee combat is not an excuse for bad behaviour. The following is a listing of the rules relating specifically to melee, with an added short list of rules applicable to behaviour.

1.5.1 Any melee combat at any event must be pre-approved by the Kingdom Rapier Marshal. Requests for approval must include the RMIC information and any other information the KRM requests.

1.5.2 In melees, Combatants are engaged with all opponents immediately upon the call to "lay on". Unless the specific circumstances of a given melee scenario dictate otherwise, you are to be considered engaged with all opponents. Such an exception is when you are participating in a "Last Person Standing" or "Roman Melee". In this case you are not immediately engaged with the individuals to your immediate left or right. (The person next to you is NOT an immediate target). They will be engaged with you once fencing commences on the field however.

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- 1.5.3 There must be a minimum of two Advanced Rapier Marshals who are authorized in melee combat & approved to run melee at the event for any Melee may take place.
- 1.5.4 A minimum of a 5:1 Combatant to Marshal ratio must be maintained when more than ten Combatants are on the field. (i.e. 3-10 = 2, 11-15 = 3, 16-20 = 4, and so on) The MIC of the melee will determine if extra Marshals are required for the minimum safety of the fencers to be maintained. Combat, Advanced and Senior Marshals all count towards the ratio above. MIT's do not qualify, nor count towards the 5:1 Combatant to Marshal ratio.
- 1.5.5 Combatants may strike any opponent with any legal blow if they are within the 180° arc of the opponent's face and are engaged with the opponent. A Combatant who approaches an opponent from behind shall not deliver a blow until they are engaged with that opponent. Engagement may consist of any of the following: entering the 180 degree arc of your opponents face; being able to see both of your opponents eyes; eye contact; verbal acknowledgement while within the 180° arc; your opponent coming on guard with you; line engagement.
- 1.5.6 Death from behind (DFB) is allowed if it has been announced beforehand. The norm for "death from behind" in melees shall be: if a melee scenario allows death from behind, a Combatant does so by approaching from behind and with the blade vertical and quillons flat, then laying the rapier blade over the opponent's shoulder to at least a third of the blade while calling "Dead, my lord" (or other short, courteous phrases) in a loud, clear voice. Reaching around the neck is forbidden. The opponent will be deemed "killed" from the instant the blade touches his shoulder and shall not attempt to spin, duck or dodge away.

NOTE: If DFB is not allowed in a given melee, a Combatant who deliberately ignores an attacker behind them, or repeatedly maneuvers to keep their back to an attacker (thereby preventing any attack on them) is considered to be misusing the rules and performing obstructive behavior.
- 1.5.7 Special scenario melees such as bridge or town battles may impose additional restrictions as needed by the Marshals.
- 1.5.8 No one may run into an engagement. Running attacks are illegal.
- 1.5.9 Refer to the West Kingdom Rapier Melee Manual for further information on melee combat.

The additional rules are paraphrased from Section 1 of the WK RCS regarding behaviour on the field; notes in italics are added for this manual:

- Obey the Marshals
- Stay in control of your temper and behaviour at all times
- Striking an opponent too hard is forbidden (*consistent calibration in melee a prime consideration and a key component of safety. It is also necessary for authorization.*)
- Stop everything when you hear a hold called and assume a non-threatening position. *Do not discuss tactics during a hold.*
- Conduct obstructive of normal combat, such as ignoring blows, misuse of rules etc. is forbidden
- Running into an engagement is forbidden. A Combatant must slow down from a run prior to engaging an opponent.
- A Combatant may decline any challenge without dishonour. *Melee is not a tourney, you don't forfeit anything by not fighting someone unless you're the last person standing on your side, in which case you fight or yield. See 'engagement' for further discussion of this.*

- Combat starts when the Marshal in charge calls 'Lay On', after receiving verbal acknowledgement that all participants are ready.

ENGAGEMENT

Once the Marshal has received verbal & raised-arm confirmation from the Combatants he or she may call 'Lay On'. At this point everyone is automatically "engaged". That engagement will likely not be "active" in that blades will cross immediately. The ebb and flow of combat will create situations where Combatants will be entering and exiting the "active engagement" of opponents. The following are methods of establishing that active engagement.

The questions that come up with engagement are "How is it done, and when is a person actively engaged?" Engagement can be split into "passive" engagement and "active" engagement, both have peculiarities about them, especially when it comes to engaging from behind or from the side.

To actively engage from the front the procedure is quite simple. Approach as you would on the tourney field. Care should be taken when engaging anyone at any time as they can attack into your engagement at will. It is assumed that any opponent within a 180-degree arc of the face of the opponent is considered to be in the front arc. The front arc of a person is defined by common sense. The head position is your best indication. If the target moved towards you and you felt they were advancing, then you are facing their front. If you think they are retreating toward you, you are facing their back. If you are in the frontal arc of your intended target you may attack as normal, with thrust or cut. You DO NOT need to be in their visual arc once engaged. It is also important to remember that, just as in single combat, an opponent you are engaged with may be struck from behind if they turn their back on you without disengaging. Two Combatants who approach each other from the front may come on guard once nearing range of each other and are thus 'actively' engaged, however there is nothing mandatory about this. One may decide to back away, seeking support from friends nearby and thus tipping the odds. This is NOT refusing a fight although it may be declining a challenge and is NOT counter to the rules or intent of melee. Of course, this is not to say that a challenge accepted off the field to meet in single combat during a melee could not happen, but it could be seen that both of these people are placing their own wishes above the interest of their team.

However, if the opponent is not in the frontal arc of their assailant, they are in a "passive" engagement. The assailant should not initiate an attack until the opponent has acknowledged their presence (either verbally or physically) or they have entered the 180 degree arc (see below). They should however be prepared to parry any attack initiated by the opponent. An announcement can be made either verbally, or by gently tapping the opponent's blade and stepping back on guard to create engagement. Once acknowledgment is received, the Combatants are in "active" engagement.

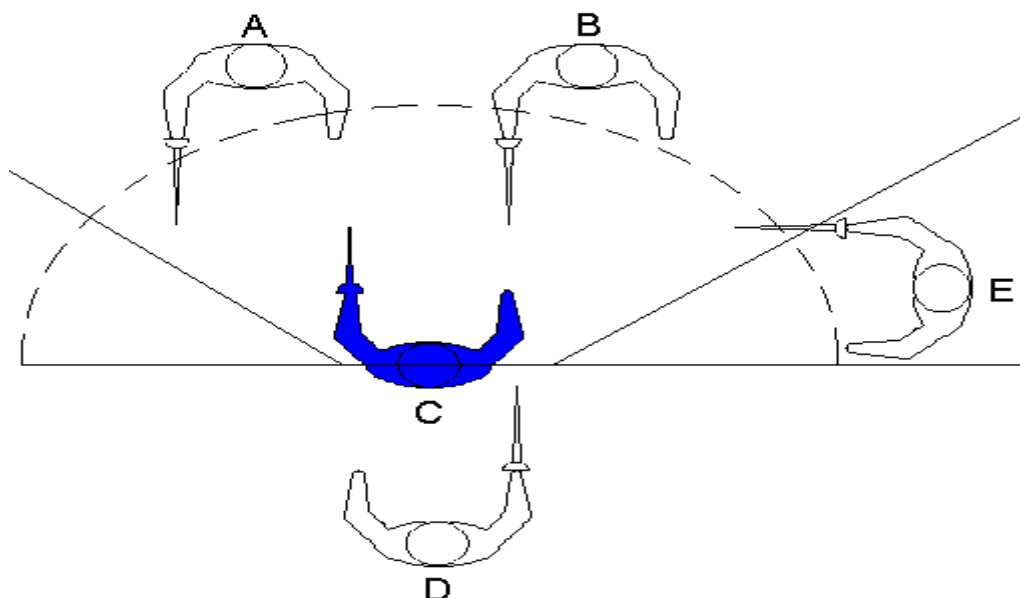
In the West we encourage Combatants to create "active" engagement. This will result in fewer arguments between Combatants. While attacks may be delivered when in "passive" engagement while within the 180 degree arc, it is discouraged as this situation is usually when injuries occur during melee, due to the struck Combatant being unprepared to receive a blow. The exception to this is when you are "rolling" a line from one end to the other.

Engagement from behind is always tricky. The best way to do this would be to declare in a loud, clear voice, "You are engaged from behind my lord." Only when the opponent turns to face you and acknowledges the engagement should any offensive move start. If there is death from behind then engagement from behind is a moot point, unless the particular Combatant wishes to face the other Combatant. From behind, no physical engagement should be attempted unless it is absolutely safe to do so. If the opponent is not engaged in any other area they should turn around immediately and acknowledge the engagement. If the opponent is engaged from another source the Combatant behind should wait until the other engagement is dealt with, move to the front arc of the intended target, or find another victim! A Combatant who is engaged from behind cannot keep their back to their opponent in an effort not to engage

them in scenarios where death from behind is not allowed. Such behaviour should be reported to the Marshal on the field, if they have not seen it. A Combatant who repeatedly does this may be pronounced dead by the Marshals if they continue to refuse engagement.

A seated Combatant should only be engaged from the front, as it is much more difficult for that Combatant to turn and face the other Combatants. Killing a seated Combatant from behind should be done in the same way as a Combatant who is standing. A seated Combatant can still perform Death from Behind on an opponent.

To clarify the concept of engagement, let's look at the engagement of the Combatants in the following diagram.



The frontal arc is demonstrated here for Combatant C. As we can see, Combatant C is engaged with Combatant A, B and E. Combatants A and B are in his visual arc and in "active" engagement, and Combatant E is at his side and in most likely in a "passive" engagement. Combatant D is behind Combatant C and not engaged.

Let's assume that Combatants A and B have just approached Combatant C. They are both within Combatant C's visual arc, and thus should come onto guard, and then proceed with combat. In the West, we encourage people to attack once they can see Combatant C has come onto guard. Very clean cut, and no problems should occur here.

Combatant E has approached Combatant C from the side while Combatant C is engaged with A and B. So long as he is within the 180 degree arc of C he may attack. Because C may not know you're there, we encourage you to be positive you are more than 1 degree inside that arc so there are no misunderstandings.

Further, we prefer that as E is not within the visual range of Combatant C, he should inform Combatant C of his presence. This can be done either by calling "milord, engaged on your right" or something similar, or by tapping C's blade and then stepping back on guard. Combatant E should not initiate an attack until C has acknowledged his presence, either verbally or physically. He should however be prepared to parry any attack initiated by Combatant C. Once Combatant C has provided acknowledgment, the Combatants have moved from a "passive" engagement situation, to an "active" engagement situation. Again, the exception is when you are "rolling" a line. (Starting at one end and killing opponents in succession like Sgt. York in WW1.)

Combatant D has only 2 options with respect to Combatant C. He must announce his presence to Combatant C and wait for acknowledgment, or move to place himself in the frontal arc of Combatant C. If the Death from Behind convention is in force, Combatant D may choose

to make a death from behind on Combatant C. However, if Combatant D is allied to Combatant C, he is free to attack either A, B or E, as they are all within each other's frontal arc.

Friendly Troops

If you kill a person who is on your side in a melee they are just as dead if they were on the other side. Care should be taken not to slay anyone who is on your side.

Breaking Through

It is not possible to break through an opposing force as is done with shield walls in heavy combat. Body contact is forbidden in rapier combat, so the application of brute force to break a line is not allowed. You may parry a blade and pass a line safely if you can step through a gap, but you must not charge, you must not run into an opponent, and your weapons must be under control at all times.

CONVENTIONS

Conventions are an integral part of all rapier combat, and especially with regard to melee combat. The conventions cover several aspects in melee combat, which can change things during the combat. Such conventions are: death from behind and other rules particular to the scenario.

The Marshals need to define which conventions will and will not be used during the combat. They should be fully explained so that all of the Combatants and Marshals may understand which ones apply and which ones do not.

The conventions are an important part of the combat because, in a sense, they control what happens during the combat.

Death from Behind

Death from behind is a particularly enjoyed convention. It adds a further element to the combat. It is important that death from behind is performed safely. The rule for death from behind is clearly stated in the rules. The Combatant who is killing from behind should under no circumstances hit their opponent. Seated Combatants can still perform death from behind by laying their blade by their opponent's side as high as they can place it safely.

Scenarios

Scenario conventions also need to be described and discussed before combat commences. They should be explained as clearly and concisely as possible so that both Combatants and Marshals understand what is going on. It is important that all conventions and scenarios are explained thoroughly before the combat commences. Participants should ask questions if they need clarification. The conventions can make things much more interesting when included into a scenario. It is not the purpose of this guide to define or illustrate particular scenario options. Use your imagination! However there are simple guidelines for Marshals before a scenario is enacted.

- 1 Walk over the location, noting obstacles. Holes, logs, rocks etc may force you to declare the site unsuitable for the scenario envisaged. Keep it safe.
- 2 Check any man-made inclusions. Hay bales in some limited cases are quite safe to walk on, but check to see what there is to fall on. Tables are a biggie with this; picnic tables in parks are usually set well into the ground and are safe to walk on, but don't let someone run over one. Fighting from a tabletop may look cool, but is actually a weak defensive position. Generally discourage people from trying it. Fighting OVER a table is fine. In short, if something is on the field, push it, walk on it, shove it with your foot, poke it with a sword, and see what it will do. Keep it safe.
- 3 Once you have checked the site, explain the restrictions to the Combatants. In the case of tables and chairs, they should not be moved during a melee. The complex spatial

circumstances add spice to a scenario, but people have enough to keep track of without someone pushing a table behind a group of people fighting. Keep it safe, but treat the Combatants as adults. Have you spotted the recurring theme here?

Deaths

When a Combatant is killed in a melee it is much safer for the Combatant to place their weapons above their head after calling the blow and then to leave the field than to fall upon the ground. No “dead” Combatant should lie on the ground as they might be stepped upon or fallen over. The “dead” Combatant should leave the field with their weapons above their head via the shortest path so as not to get in the way of any of the other Combatants. Dead Combatants should not leave the field through their opponent's line. It is also unsafe to fall upon the melee field due to the nature of open ground so please try not to.

If the scenario allows a person to remain dead on the field they should die in a controlled manner and lie, preferably on their side, such that they can be generally aware of what's happening around them. Being aware of changing circumstances underfoot is a part of being in a melee.

COMMUNICATION

It is important that there is clear communication between all Combatants and Marshals. Communication is the vital element that keeps this high-paced form of combat under control and safe. Therefore, you should always clearly call any blows that strike you. As a Combatant you must communicate problems to the Marshal and also clearly communicate with the other Combatants on the field.

Marshals need to communicate problems to Combatants as quickly as possible. Important factors such as terrain elements need to be communicated to Combatants as soon as you become aware of them. It is also important that you communicate any major problems to other Marshals on the field so that they are aware of them. With so many Combatants on the field it is important that you make Combatants aware of each other, especially if they have not, and will not see each other. An example of this would be two groups who are fighting and about to back into each other unexpectedly. It is the Marshals' job to communicate safety issues to the Combatants and other Marshals.

CONTROL

Control is vital to all aspects of Rapier Combat, and this is even more critical in melee combat. Due to the fact that melee is a fast-paced, intense form of combat full of issues that do not present themselves in normal combat, a Combatant's adrenalin level will be increased. Combatants must be aware that extra caution should be taken with regard to calibration while engaged in melee combat. This should include awareness of being hit as well as controlling the power of an attack. It is likely that the increased excitement and adrenalin will ‘desensitise’ a Combatant somewhat with the unfortunate side effect of encouraging people to hit harder in order for the attack to register.

It is important that the Combatants retain as much control over themselves as possible. All of the normal rules apply to this form of combat, even though it is somewhat different. Uncontrolled actions such as the fleche will not be tolerated, especially in melee combat.

No weapons or devices may be thrown or left upon the field for any reason. Cloaks may not be thrown in melees.

SAFETY

Safety is the most important part of any SCA-related combat. It should be the prime concern of both Combatants and Marshals. There are several safety issues, which become a concern when talking about melee combat. Each one of these issues will be discussed in turn so that the Marshals and Combatants are aware of them.

Terrain

Because melee combat is conducted out of the controlled space of the list field, we have less control over issues such as holes, sticks and trees. The Combatants should be made aware of any significant problems in the area in which melee combat is to be conducted. The Marshal's job on the melee field is also to make Combatants aware of any terrain problems that may present themselves.

Boundaries and Obstructions

Boundaries and obstructions are common in melee combat. The boundaries should be made clear to the Combatants, and Marshals should warn the Combatants about where these boundaries are. Obstructions such as trees, large sticks and anything else that a Combatant may run into should be brought to the attention of the Combatant. Holes are especially dangerous because they are often not obvious at first glance. People may fall into a hole and injure themselves. These terrain issues should be brought to the attention of the Combatants immediately when they come close to them.

Dangerous Actions

Wild actions should be avoided, especially actions such as waving weapons about. This becomes a real issue when the Combatants come into close contact. Any action that a Marshal could construe as dangerous should be pointed out to Combatants and stopped. A person who persists with such actions should be removed from the field at once.

Running

Running can be extremely dangerous in melee combat, especially if it takes place outside the list field. There are terrain issues such as holes and large sticks which can cause a running Combatant to fall. There should be no running into an engagement. The only place running might be used would be to cross the field to reach an engagement, but the Combatants must stop running well before they come into weapons range. There is no running within engagement range. A Combatant cannot run through an engagement, nor should they run in close vicinity to Combatants who are engaged. If a Combatant runs in a dangerous manner they should be warned, and then removed from the field if they persist.

MARSHALS

As with any form of rapier combat, the presence of Marshals during melee is vital. The Marshals are mainly there for safety as per usual but they have other roles during melee combat.

Ratio of Marshals to Combatants

A minimum of a 5:1 Combatant to Marshal ratio must be maintained when more than ten Combatants are on the field. (i.e. 1-10 = 2, 11-15 = 3, 16-20 = 4, 21 = 5) The RMIC of the melee will determine if extra Marshals are required for the minimum safety of the fencers to be maintained. Marshals in Training (MITs) do not count towards this number. This is to ensure that there are enough experienced and authorized Marshals on the field to oversee the melee.

Role of Marshals in Melee

The Marshal's primary role in melee combat as with any other form of combat is to oversee safety on the field. However Marshals should not interfere with the flow of combat unnecessarily.

There are two types of "Holds" in melee combat, the general hold and the local hold. In a general hold all combat on the field ceases as per usual with rapier combat. Each one of the Marshals and Combatants should repeat the call to ensure that the call has been heard by all of the Combatants. Only the RMIC of the melee may lift a hold, regardless of who called it. For large melee scenarios Local Holds may be called. (See Local Holds below.)

The main issue that will come up in a melee combat due to the amount of Combatants on the field will be the problem of groups of Combatants colliding due to not seeing each other. This can lead to serious problems, so Combatants should be warned that they are coming close to other Combatants. Anything that the Marshal thinks may be a safety issue should be brought to the attention of the Combatants...preferably before it happens.

The Marshals must define conventions and other pertinent details of the combat prior to the lay on. This includes the scenario, the boundaries to the area that will be used, and major obstructions that may be present on the field. These need to be explained clearly and concisely, and no combat should commence until all of the Marshals and Combatants understand what is going on. The Marshals should expect questions and requests for clarification about any of these points. It is important that both the Marshals and Combatants understand what is going on and what is required of them. Do not make it up as you go! Only after all Combatants and Marshals have acknowledged understanding the conventions may combat commence.

Local Holds

Local holds are different as they only affect one area of the fighting and a particular Marshal's "zone of control". Marshals in melee combat operate in these zones so that each Marshal can oversee a particular area, rather than trying to observe the whole combat. The Marshal should be aware of other areas in case a safety issue comes up in another area. Typically a zone of control covers either an area or a group of Combatants. It is the Marshal's job to oversee the safety in this area.

The procedure for calling a local hold is a Marshal calls, "Local hold!" which the Combatants in the area respond to. This only affects the Combatants in that Marshal's area. Combat in other areas of the field may continue unless they pose a safety issue to the particular area.

These local holds can be used to sort out problems within a particular area without affecting the whole combat. In this way Marshals are able to control the flow of combat so that things do not get out of hand, and so that issues may be resolved quickly so that the combat can continue. Local holds may be lifted by the "zone" Marshal and/or by the RMIC of the melee. They are used at very large melees such as occur at Pennsic and Estrella.

TRAINING A BEGINNER

Calibration for single combat is not difficult, but calibrating and teaching attacks on potentially multiple targets is much harder. The great dangers are really twofold; one is of course the excitement level being higher as it's a much more intense environment. The second is the likelihood of distraction from a third party. In modern fencing terms, the potential is quite real for someone you aren't even facing to 'attack into your preparation' as you initiate an action against someone else. You may be required to parry one person while completing the attack on another. If the focus of attention becomes the parry, the attack will be completed blind.

One method of teaching a safe way to do this is to take away the visual cues for an attack. Have both trainee and trainer in full protective gear. The trainer may also want additional

protection at first. Stand at normal engagement distance for a lunge, let the trainee have a few practice lunges to set the line in his/her mind, then get them to make the attack with their eyes closed.

The objective is to get them to take ALL of their force information through their hand and wrist. They won't have the visual cue of distance, or the vision of point on body/cloth or anything else. Teach them what is sufficient force. Adjust their grip so that once sufficient force is achieved they AUTOMATICALLY ease off by bending/flexing wrist, shoulder and elbow.

Once they can do this, start changing distances once their eyes are closed. Let them get used to a varying environment. Finally, have them practice this in offline attacks. Needless to say, they'll have to be able to do this with both hands, and with any other weapon/device they're authorized in!

The ultimate objective of this exercise is to allow the trainee to parry effectively and still safely attack another target, offline, using peripheral vision only, with no risk of overpowering the attack.

Senior Marshal's Note: Test for this during an authorization. With the candidate facing two opponents, have them try to parry one and thrust at another. You may need to 'set up' the circumstance. It doesn't really matter whether someone says they'll never do it; the rules allow it and it's better to be sure. Besides, it isn't all that difficult to do!

Control is an issue as well, and not just in regards to temper or excitement. There is a tendency for new melee Combatants when engaging two opponents to stand in range of both and try to move their sword quickly back and forth to cover both. This can rapidly degenerate into uncontrolled motion and whippy/chopping strikes, even accidental ones. Remind them of footwork and tactics of range; a half pace to one side should take one of them out of range, or at least narrow their line of approach to you, thus allowing a more controlled defence.

Senior Marshals Note: Be hard on this during testing. Visualize a ragged, 'windscreen wiper' parry with a metal blade crashing into your knuckles and you'll see the importance. It can break fingers.

Footwork may also need to be addressed. Practice on different types of ground, even walking on or over things. Slips and passes become even more useful in melee! Let them learn what they can safely do while in training, and hopefully they won't be tempted to try something excessive in an actual fight. Redo your footwork drills in a cluttered space (tables and chairs are good) so they can develop their spatial awareness.

Conventions cover things like death from behind, arcs, terrain, engagement and so on.

- Death from behind is an option. Make sure the trainee knows how to do it, and ensure they are aware that it is not necessarily included in every melee.
- Understanding "frontal arc" is important. Generally, if the target moved towards you and you felt they were *advancing*, then you are facing their front. If you think they are *retreating* toward you, you are facing their back. If you are in the frontal arc of your intended target you may attack as normal, with thrust or cut. The hard line on this is that if a person cannot safely execute a controlled attack on a person's blind spot in the frontal arc, they should not be authorized. Participants should also be made aware that they are likely to be hit from a blind spot during melee. This can cause distress to some, and should be tested for and worked on in training prior to their being authorized. In all cases, Combatants should be encouraged to achieve active engagements during melees.
- Terrain is a big issue. When a person fences rapier in a tourney setting they are supposed to assess the list field as they walk on; how big it is, what shape it is, what the surface is like (slippery, rocky, etc). Melee is just an extension of that. They should know where they can fence, and how to deal with what they are allowed to do. If you have access to a good, solid table, let them try walking on it. Most will find the situation too precarious and too vulnerable. Don't discourage

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that – it is! Teach them how to cross an obstacle safely (a table, for example, may be crossed by sitting on one side, facing in the direction you intend going, and swinging the legs across. It ‘can’ be done safely even while engaged). Marshals should endeavour to warn Combatants of dangerous ground and define where they can and cannot go, but that doesn’t excuse the Combatant from being aware of their own circumstances and position!

When building a beginner melee fencer’s awareness of multiple opponents and the concept of teamwork, one method that has shown rapid results is to start with a group using single rapier only, and begin with two people attacking one. The pair learn teamwork while the one learns to move and defend against two. Swap them around so each has had a turn alone. Then repeat allowing them to use whatever they have been authorized in. Once this has been done, build up as far as you can with two on two, three on three, four on four and so on. Remember that once you go past five on five you need a third Marshal!

CONCLUSION

Melee combat can be a lot of fun, but there are important safety aspects that must be taken into consideration. Certain words and phrases have been intentionally repeated during this manual; this was done because they are the most important.

To ensure that melee combat goes safely and is enjoyable to all of those participating, there are three vital elements: safety, communication and control. Each Combatant and Marshal has an important role to play to ensure that rapier melees are safe and fun. Each person must play their part to make things run smoothly. Combatants need to listen to the Marshals and be aware of the other Combatants and Marshals on the field. The Marshals need to communicate all safety issues to both the Combatants and the other Marshals, they also need to explain the pertinent issues, which apply to the combat, and the Combatants should get clarification for anything and everything that they do not understand.

Combatants and Marshals should read all of the sections of this manual so that they know what everyone’s responsibilities are. The knowledge and application of these points will ensure that the melee combat proceeds safely and is fun and exciting for both Marshals and Combatants.

Once this document has been read, and comprehended, the best way to teach melee from a practical point of view is to put both the Combatants and Marshals through a number of scenarios and point out all of the problems. Melee combat is a skill that can only be improved by practice.

Lastly, any and all questions should be posed to the Principality Rapier Marshals or the Kingdom Rapier Marshal for resolution. You should always use the chain of command at an event if a question or issue comes up. The chain of command is: the Marshal in charge of the melee, then the Rapier Marshal in Charge of the event, the Principality Marshal, the Kingdom Rapier Marshal, the Earl Marshal and then the Crown.