

USA Fencing Referee Workplace Code of Conduct

Preface

The USA Fencing Referee Workplace Code of Conduct (heretofore referred to as the “Code of Conduct” or CoC) communicates the USA Fencing Referees’ Commission’s expectations for how referees should conduct themselves as representatives of our sport, community, and country. Refereeing is an important part of any sport: the guarantee of impartial adjudication is what gives any competition its legitimacy and its sense of fair play, and as the people entrusted to uphold these principles, we must comport ourselves accordingly.

Please review the Code of Conduct regularly. Each season, all referees are required to agree to the **Official’s Contract** that stipulates each referee must adhere to the Code of Conduct in order to serve as an USA Fencing official at a National-level competition.

Failure to abide by the Code of Conduct can result in remedial action at the discretion of the Referees’ Commission.

1. Job expectations

Referees are at the forefront of USA National Events; we are among the most prominent public-facing representatives of the organization at any National competition. As such, referees should strive to meet a certain standard of professionalism to ensure the best possible competition experience for athletes.

Report times. Referees are assigned a report time for every day they are working at a competition. All referees must be present, ready, and able to work at their designated report time. It is highly recommended that referees check in with the event’s Referee Coordinator and with the Head Referee (also called the Assigner) for their assigned event at, or prior to, the designated report time.

Note: “Present” means within hearing distance of all announcements regarding referees unless properly excused.

If a referee should be delayed for any reason (travel difficulties, illness, transportation logistics, personal emergencies, or other unforeseen circumstances), they should communicate their situation to the Coordinator and Head Referee

Assignments. Referees are expected to accept all assignments given by the Referee Coordinator or the Head Referee, unless there is a demonstrated conflict of interest.

Duration of work day. Referees are expected to be available to officiate until formally released from their duties by the Referee Coordinator. Referees typically work both the preliminary and elimination rounds of any given competition. The release protocol is as follows:

- During the direct elimination tableau, each referee is assigned to a specific section of the table administered by a Pod Captain (as designated by the tournament head referee). Referees must remain with their section of the table until released by the Pod Captain.

- Once released by the Pod Captain, the referee reports to the Head Referee for the event. The Head Referee may designate further assignments (if any) or release the referee from that event.
- Once released by the event's Head Referee, the referee reports to the Referee Coordinator. The Referee Coordinator may then reassign the referee to a different event, or release them from duty for the day.

Referees must remain present and available to work until released by the Referee Coordinator (or the Coordinator's designee).

Rules and applications. Referees are expected to be current on rules and their application.

Dress code. Referees are to be appropriately and professionally attired at all times while working and must maintain a uniform standard of dress. Throughout the fencing world, this typically consists of various forms of semi-formal business attire (e.g., business suits), with some competitions, like the Olympic Games and World Championships, providing official uniforms. USA Fencing officials at National competitions are expected to maintain these standards of professional dress at all times. This helps ensure that:

- Competition officials are easily identifiable
- Officials' appearance is in line with our level of responsibility to, and respect for, the competitors and the sport
- Officials are properly equipped to serve as the primary public-facing representatives of USA Fencing to athletes and spectators

Appropriate referee dress includes:

- *Traditional referee uniform of grey pants/skirt, blue blazer, blouse/collared shirt and tie; OR*
- *Dark suit (grey, black, navy blue), blouse/collared shirt and tie; OR*
- *World Championship (Olympic, or FIE Championship) uniforms or blazers; AND*
- *Comfortable dark shoes (plain dark colored sneakers are acceptable)*

Examples of inappropriate dress include but are not limited to:

- *Ill-fitting clothing (excessively baggy or excessively tight, sleeves or pants too short)*
- *Overly revealing*
- *Costume like or performative clothing*
- *Shirts, ties, or pins with offensive imagery*

Referees who do not meet the dress code may be sent back to change or dismissed from the floor for the day.

Referees will not be discriminated against for dressing in accord with their religion, gender identity or comfort. This includes but is not limited to transgender, gender-fluid, and non-binary referees.

Cell Phone Use. Cell phones, for personal, non-emergency communication, should not be used during pool bouts or during the 1-minute break during DE bouts. Using your cell phone to contact tournament staff (e.g., referee coordinator, assigner, bout committee, armory, medical, etc) and for score keeping is permissible.

2. Respect for the sport

Referees serve the sport of fencing. The good of the sport and the integrity of the competition must be their guiding principle: prioritize the needs of the competition and the athletes above all else.

Abide by the USA Fencing Referee Code of Ethics. The Referees Code of Ethics governs the relationship of the referee to the sport itself. Within the Code of Ethics are the guidelines to upholding the integrity of any given competition. These include:

- Reporting and avoiding conflicts of interest
- Maintaining complete neutrality at all times

Referees should regularly review the Code of Ethics, and the Official's Contract stipulates that referees agree to adhere to it at all times.

Respect the athletes. The athletes are the reason that fencing exists. Referees should respect the athletes' time, effort, preparation, and desire by striving to do the best possible job of adjudicating at all times. Part of this respect means doing one's level best to ensure a fair and equal competition experience for all participants. Another part includes conducting oneself toward the athletes in a proper and professional manner; be approachable but maintain the respectful distance necessary to avoid any appearance of favoritism or conflict of interest.

Put the needs of the competition first. Referees are part of a full team of staff whose ultimate goal is a smooth, predictable, efficiently-run competition. For this to happen, referees must carry out their assignments without delay, but also in a manner that provides no undue advantage or disadvantage to any athlete participant.

Referees must, of course, see to their own needs: rest breaks, lunch, etc. However, when choosing a time and place for these necessary functions, they must be placed in the context of the larger competition and strive to complete them with minimal disruption to the event.

3. Respect your colleagues

Refereeing fencing is a difficult and often thankless job. A fencing referee carries a burden of responsibility unique in sports; their decisions and judgment shape the character of every single encounter. Each referee has volunteered to shoulder that responsibility, and as such, must treat each other with respect and provide one another with the support needed and deserved in such a difficult undertaking.

Referees shall not publicly criticize, or invite public criticisms of, a colleague's decision. Referees in all sports accept their positions fully cognizant that their work is part of a public performance and, therefore, is open to public comment and criticism. However, the voices of referees themselves can carry disproportionate weight in such discussions, potentially undermining the trust and respect referees must command in order to function. Referees should *never* engage in public discussions of a colleague's work.

This includes instigating or participating in any discussions of a colleague's decisions on social media, including comments, reactions, or increasing dissemination (e.g., sharing/re-sharing).

Harassment, bullying, hazing, and discrimination are prohibited. Colleagues are to be treated with the respect and consideration due as people and as fellow officials. All referees should regularly review and abide by USA Fencing's [Policy Prohibiting Discrimination and Harrassment](#). Referees are expected to maintain a basic standard of civility and professionalism toward one another.

Note also that the role of a referee is about judgment. As such, behaviors that take place outside of a National competition may be considered when evaluating a referee's suitability for the role (e.g., suitability for hiring at National events). One's actions in all areas are reflective of their judgment, including participation in widely available public discourse such as social media. Engaging in any behaviors that call into question one's ability to adjudicate *all* fencers fairly and impartially may be taken into consideration under the Code of Conduct and could result in remedial action.

Social media usage. Social media participation is a voluntary, public act. As such, referees' conduct in such an environment also reflects on their judgment and values. While a referee might not be acting as an explicit agent or representative of USA Fencing while engaging in social media use, it's possible—even likely—that profiles are identifiable as belonging to a USA Fencing referee. As such, it's important to keep that in mind when using social media. Posts that include content that can be interpreted as racist or homophobic will be cause for concern. Similarly, name-calling, aggression, and bullying are problematic for referee neutrality.

4. Workplace concerns

When the Referees' Commission learns of a violation of the Code of Conduct, it has an obligation to review the matter. Workplace concerns will be addressed by the Referees' Commission Ethics Committee. If it finds a violation of policy in the course of a review, the Commission will take appropriate remedial action. The goal is to ensure a safe and respectful competition environment for all participants and officials.

As the Referees' Commission is empowered by USA Fencing's bylaws to select, train, and accredit the officials for all National-level events, violations of the Code of Conduct can result in measures including, but not limited to:

- Probationary selection
- Temporary or permanent suspension from hiring for USA Fencing sanctioned events
- Reduction or rescinding of ratings

Revision History

July 2022: Initial release (Referees' Commission)

August 2024: Added expectations for acceptance of assignments and cell phone use. Clarified dress code to include non-discriminatory practices for dressing in accord with religion.