

A Youth Combat Marshal's Handbook



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Introduction

Welcome to marshaling youth combat in the Society for Creative Anachronism, and thank you for your service! This manual contains the basics of marshaling youth combat, including:

- Becoming warranted
- Acquiring and maintaining equipment
- Performing armor and weapons inspections
- Authorizing fighters
- Running practices
- Teaching fighting techniques
- Leveraging adult fighters
- Running tournaments and melees



This manual is intended to supplement, not replace Society and Kingdom Youth Combat rules. We urge you to familiarize yourself with those rules. Youth combat rules may vary by Kingdom.

Becoming a Warranted Youth Combat Marshal

You do not need experience fighting in the SCA to be a Youth Combat Marshal. Many YC marshals are moms and dads who've never worn armor or swung a stick! All you need is the willingness to work with kids and adults, and some enthusiasm to impart to the youth fighters.

To run youth combat practices as part of your shire or barony's official activities, you must be warranted by your Kingdom Youth Combat Marshal as a Youth Combat Marshal. Start by talking with your local Knight Marshal and Seneschal. In most kingdoms, you need approval from your local officers to become a group YC Marshal. You can be a YC Marshal-at-Large if your shire or barony already has a group YC marshal, or if you want to be able to marshal without having the responsibility of being in charge of practices. Ask your Kingdom YC Marshal

about any other requirements, like being a paid member of the SCA, filing reports, or demonstrating knowledge of the rules.

Background Checks

To work with minors in any capacity in the SCA, you or someone attending your practices must have a **Background Check** performed by the SCA's corporate office. Contact your Kingdom's Youth Combat Marshal, Earl Marshal, or Seneschal for the procedure to obtain a Background Check.

Once you have local officer approval (for group marshals) and a completed Background Check, contact your Kingdom Youth Combat Marshal, or your Kingdom's Earl Marshal if there is no Kingdom YC Marshal, to determine the procedure for being warranted.

You can, of course, train your own children in youth combat at home without being a warranted YC marshal. However, for safety and liability reasons, you may not represent your training sessions as SCA-sanctioned practices to other kids' parents if you are not a warranted marshal.

Basic Rules

Familiarize yourself with the rules for Youth Combat in your Kingdom and the Society.

- Society YC rules are available from the SCA.org YC web pages
- Kingdom YC rules vary; check your Kingdom website or contact your Kingdom YC Marshal or Earl Marshal. A list of [contacts for each Kingdom](#) is also available on the SCA.org website.

At the most basic level, you need to understand the three divisions of youth fighters:

- **Division 1 (ages 6-9):** All blows are touch calibration, and face thrusts are not permitted.
- **Division 2 (ages 10-13):** Calibration is "positive force;" a clean, unimpeded blow that is readily felt threw ¼ inch of open cell padding, but is not hard enough to leave a bruise in an area covered by medium weight cloth. Face thrusts have touch calibration.
- **Division 3 (ages 14-17):** Calibration is "light force;" a clean, unimpeded blow that is readily felt through ½ inch of open cell padding, but is not hard enough to leave a bruise through ¼ of open cell foam padding. Face thrusts have touch calibration

Keep a copy of the Society and Kingdom regulations with you so you can double-check any issues and answer questions from parents and fighters. Be sure to consult the rules before building armor or weapons, to avoid making mistakes that could be costly or time-consuming to fix.

Anyone working with minors in the SCA is also required to follow the "Two Deep" rule. This means that there must always be at least two unrelated adults present for SCA-sponsored youth activities to occur. If you find yourself the only adult at a youth combat practice, then the activity must be suspended until another adult arrives.

Recommended Marshal's Equipment

You should make or acquire the following:

- A marshal's staff. Any long, sturdy wood or plastic stick will do. Paint or tape spiral stripes in alternating black and yellow, as shown. An ideal staff is a piece of 1" diameter PVC pipe that is 6' long, since you can use it to verify the diameters of weapons and helmet openings, as well as the length of great weapons. You will use the staff to protect yourself, spectators, and other youth fighters during bouts and melees.
- A clipboard, folder, or briefcase in which you can store paperwork.
- Forms (contact your Kingdom YC Marshal for the current approved forms):
 - SCA and Kingdom YC rules
 - Minor's Waivers for youth fighters' parents to sign
 - Sign-in sheets for tourneys and practices, with standard SCA waiver text on them.
 - Authorization forms
 - Incident reports in case a fighter is injured
 - Medical release forms, which allow non-parents to authorize treatment in emergencies
 - A basic information sheet on SCA fighting to give to new parents. You can point them to the Society's web page on youth combat at <http://www.sca.org/officers/marshal/youthcombat/index.html>
- Optional: Marshal's tabard, using the SCA Youth Marshalate badge shown here.
- Basic weapon repair kit: duct tape, camp or pipe foam, leather scraps, electrical tape, a Leatherman or other all-in-one tool, and cording for tying armor or adding lanyards to weapons.
- First Aid kit
- A whistle if you expect to marshal battles with a large number of fighters.
- Loaner equipment, if possible



Loaner Armor and Weapons

If you or your local group has the resources, try to acquire and/or build loaner armor and weapons. Loaner gear is vital to getting kids started. Parents are understandably unwilling to purchase or build armor and weapons until they are sure that their kids are really interested in fighting. The best way to build your program is to get every kid into armor as quickly and easily as possible.

Thrift stores frequently have elbow and knee pads available cheaply. Hockey gloves and hockey or lacrosse helmets are harder to obtain second-hand, and expensive to buy new, but here are some suggestions for ways to get them inexpensively:

- Haunt the thrift shops on a regular basis, and grab the gloves and helmets that do become available, but inspect them carefully for defects, especially helmets.

- Ask adults in your area if they have helmets or gloves that they used as kids and are willing to donate.
- If you live in a place with hockey rinks, ask if they have used gear for sale
- Check rummage sales or eBay
- As kids outgrow their equipment or age out of the program, ask them to donate their outgrown armor to the loaner gear.
- Ask your local Knight Marshal if any of their adult loaner gear is small enough that older kids could use it.
- Contact your Kingdom YC Marshal to see if loaner gear or funds to purchase it are available from the Kingdom or other groups.



Used hockey and lacrosse helmets *must* be inspected carefully to ensure that they are safe. It's important to know the characteristics of good and bad helmets. For a great set of guidelines on how to buy and maintain safe, appropriate helmets, see the [SCA Youth Combat Hockey Helmet Buying Guide](#) on the SCA.org website.

Body armor and gorgets (neck protection) are the hardest equipment to find from mundane sources. For Division 1 fighters, wrestling belts are sufficient. For older youth fighters, you can make body armor and gorgets from leather, plastic, or thickly quilted cloth like moving pads. The SCA's Youth Combat website has [several articles](#) on how to make various types of body armor and gorgets.

Finally, loaner groin protection needs to be part of every loaner kit. Cups for boys or some sort of skirting for girls are required. When loaning cups, have the kids wear them on the OUTSIDE of their clothes, and wash the jock straps after every practice. Encourage parents of new fighters to buy at least that one item right away; they're not that expensive, can be used for other sports, and are available at any sporting goods or discount store like K-Mart or Wal-Mart.

You will have to make loaner weapons and shields. Guidelines for building them are available in articles on the [SCA's YC web page](#). Try to have a variety of sizes and styles of swords, polearms, and maces or daggers available so each fighter can find something suited to them. Check the Society and Kingdom rules to verify maximum lengths and other requirements.



Guiding Parents in Acquiring Armor

It's important that parents of new fighters who wish to buy or make their own equipment clearly understand what the armor and weapons requirements are. Point them to the resources on the SCA.org YC web pages and to your Kingdom's rules. In particular, there is a link to an article that lists the [basic armor requirements](#) for various divisions. This article was designed for a specific Kingdom, but can be customized if your own Kingdom's rules differ. Contact the author at Ariannawyn@gmail.com if you would like a version in Microsoft Word that you can modify.

Alternative Marshals

In addition to standard group Marshals and Marshals-At-Large, there are two other types of YC Marshals that your Kingdom may warrant. Check with your Kingdom YC Marshal to determine whether these marshal roles are available in your Kingdom:

- **Sparring Marshals:** experienced adult fighters who are authorized to fight against youth fighters using youth weapons and youth calibrations. Sparring marshals are especially valuable in groups with very few youth fighters, since they ensure that the youth fighters have someone to fight against. Sparring marshals can help your youth fighters improve their skills, and make practices more interesting. Having a sparring marshal means you can have an effective youth combat program even if you have only one or two youth fighters. Sparring marshals are most effective with D2 and D3 fighters. Sparring marshals should be closely supervised by the group YC Marshal to ensure that they understand youth combat rules and use appropriate calibration levels when fighting kids.
- **Limited Marshals:** these are adults who are willing to serve as assistants to the group YC Marshal from time to time, but do not wish the responsibility of being a full marshal. They are useful when running tournament lists, because they can allow you to run multiple lists even if you only have one regular YC Marshal or Marshal-at-Large. Limited Marshals cannot inspect weapons and armor or authorize fighters. They are sometimes called Constables when working with adult fighters.

Marshal Commands

Use the following commands and train your youth fighters to understand and follow them:

- **Hold** – fighters must stop immediately and look to the marshal for instructions. In a melee, fighters must take a knee. Call a hold when an unsafe situation happens – a weapon is broken, a fighter's armor has come unfastened or fallen off, the combatants are getting too close to spectators or obstacles. Anyone can call hold if they see something unsafe, including the fighters themselves, but they need to explain why they called the hold.
- **On guard** – alerts the fighters to be ready to fight. Fighters who are *not* ready should let the marshal know immediately, before the marshal starts the bout.
- **Lay on** – lets the fighters know that they can begin fighting, or resume fighting after a hold has been resolved.

First Aid Training

It's a good idea for youth marshals to acquire first aid training, usually available through the local Red Cross. Although they are rare in youth combat, you should also make sure you know the signs of concussion; a free course is available through the CDC at http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/headsup/online_training.html. If you suspect a youth fighter may have sustained a concussion or other injury, inform the parents immediately and also bring it to the attention of the surgeon on duty (if at an event). *You are required to file an Incident Report if a youth fighter is injured at your tourney or practice.*

Reporting

Check with your Kingdom Youth Marshal or Earl Marshal regarding the reporting requirements in your Kingdom. Group marshals are typically required to file an activity report once per quarter. At-large marshals may have to report less often. It's courteous to send copies of your quarterly reports to your local Knight Marshal and Seneschal as well.

Armor and Weapons Inspections

Inspecting Armor

Verify that the fighter has all required elements on correctly and securely. For younger fighters we sometimes use a variant on the "head, shoulders, knees, and toes" rhyme to remind them of what they need to wear by adding "elbows, belly, and 'those'" where "those" means groin protection, and "shoulders" means the gorget.

Specific armor items to look for that are sometimes deficient:

- **Helmet:** Check that helmet padding compresses appropriately, that the helmet has a chin strap as well as straps securing the grill to the sides of the helmet, that the helmet's screws are tight, that it has no cracks or other damage, that it has a stiff piece (leather or plastic) attached to the bottom of the back to cover any gap along the spine between the helmet and gorget, and that the helmet fits snugly enough that it cannot be accidentally pulled off or yanked up to expose the chin. Give the helm a tug upwards from the front of the faceplate to verify the fit. Helmets that become too small as kids grow may be adjusted by loosening the screws, spreading the segments of the helmet farther apart, and then tightening the screws back up. For more detailed information, see the [SCA Youth Combat Hockey Helmet Buying Guide](#) on the SCA.org website.
- **Gorget:** must be wide enough to protect all exposed areas of the throat and have no gaps around the circumference of the neck. Kids, especially boys, outgrow gorgets quickly as they reach adolescence, so check these regularly.
- **Body armor:** must cover the kidneys and sternum, though a gorget with a piece that hangs down far enough to cover the sternum is also acceptable as long as the body armor covers the kidneys. For D2 and D3, they must be leather, plastic, quilted cloth, or some other padded or rigid material.
- **Elbow and knee pads:** hard plastic is preferable for divisions 2 and 3. These sometimes fit poorly, especially as the Velcro ages; keep an eye on them during fights as Velcro can come undone easily or the pads may slide out of place.
- **Gloves:** Any gloves are acceptable for D1; for D2 and D3, hockey gloves are optimal. Some kids prefer lacrosse gloves because they are lighter and more flexible; these are not

recommended for D3 because they have less padding than hockey gloves. Lacrosse gloves can be reinforced with leather or plastic plates to improve protection.

- **Groin protection:** Ask the fighter if they have “personal protection” or a cup. You should *not* attempt to physically verify this armor.
- **Shoes:** must be closed-toe shoes like sneakers or boots. Sandals are not permitted.

Inspecting Weapons

Weapon cores can be made of PEX, Siloflex, or rattan. PVC is no longer permitted. Here are some common issues to check for:

- Poorly constructed or worn thrusting tips are often a problem.
 - Thrusting tips that can fold over such that the end of the core material could come in direct contact with the fighter’s body on a thrust.
 - Thrusting tips that do not have enough padding beyond the end of the core material or are not wide enough to prevent them from passing through helmet grills. Thrusting tips must extend at least 2” beyond the end of the core material and have a diameter of at least 2.5”.
 - Thrusting tips that have broken off on one side during use. These should *not* be repaired with duct tape as the integrity of the pipe foam has been compromised. Instead, the sword should be completely repadded. Alternatively, the thrusting tip can be removed and replaced with a layer of foam and tape, in which case the weapon *cannot* be used for thrusting.
- Cuts or dents in the foam padding. These can be repaired with additional foam and/or duct tape.
- Single-handed weapons without lanyards. Keep some twine or shoelaces and duct tape in your repair kit to quickly add lanyards to swords.
- Pipe foam that has compressed or degraded over time. If you can easily feel the core material through the foam, then the weapon needs to be repadded. SCA youth weapons typically need to be repadded after 3-6 months of regular weekly use, or more often with hard use.
- Weapons that are too long or too heavy for the fighter. Single-handed swords should be short enough that they do not quite touch the ground when the fighter holds them dangling by their side with their arm straight down. Great weapons (great sword and polearm) should be proportional to the fighter. As a general rule of thumb, polearms for Div. 1 and smaller Div.2 fighters should be between 4-1/2’ and 5’ in length including thrusting tip and butt spike. Polearms for taller Div.2 and Div. 3 fighters should be between 5-1/2’ and 6’ in length.



Inspecting Shields

Here are some common problems to look for on shields:

- Edging that is worn, especially at the corners of a heater shield, exposing the underlying material in a way that could damage weapons. Apply foam and duct tape for a temporary repair.



- Straps and handles that have exposed bolts. No wires, bolts, screws, or other objects may project more than ¼ inch without padding or tape covering them. If the bolts project from the shield far enough to be a hazard, then the shank of the bolt that extends past the nut should be cut off with a hacksaw and then padded.
- Loose bolts on strapping.

Basic Training Techniques

While you do not have to be an experienced fighter to train youth fighters, if you've never fought, you may want to enlist an adult fighter to train you and the youth fighters in the basics.

Dying Defensively

Fighters who are defeated must fall down and “die” in a safe manner called “dying defensively.” Teach your fighters this position and make sure they use it every time they die, especially in a melee. This position keeps them safe in case another fighter falls or steps on them while they are dead. Key features of the position are:

- Lying on the *SIDE*, *not* the back or stomach, to protect the clavicle and inner organs.
- Head down on the ground to protect the neck
- Knees nested together, *not* on top of each other.
- Weapons and/or shield held across the body and the head.

This division 2 fighter is demonstrating how to die defensively with sword and shield.



First-Time Fighters

All brand new fighters, regardless of age or division, need the following basic instructions:

- Marshal commands (On Your Guard, Lay On, Hold)
- Legal target areas (torso, neck, head, 1” above the wrist on the arms, 1” above the knees on the legs)
- Calibration levels by division
- Losing arms and legs – fighting from your knees or with an arm behind your back
- Striking with the edge of the weapon rather than the “flat”
- Basic guard positions by weapon type (see below)

- Face thrusts – not permitted in D1, touch calibration only in D2 and D3
- Acknowledgement during melees – fighters must have eye contact before striking an opponent
- Dying defensively
- Chivalry and honor
 - Taking blows honorably, not “rhino-hiding”
 - Being a good sport
 - Never hitting a fighter who has fallen down
 - Points of honor (giving up your limb after taking your opponent’s limb)

General recommendations for bringing new fighters up to speed:

- Let the fighter choose their first weapon – sword and shield, single sword, or polearm – and then make sure they have a weapon suited to their size. Two-sword is not recommended for new fighters.
- Begin with pell work (a large tree, a telephone pole, basketball post, or your marshal’s staff can substitute for an actual pell) to ensure that they can control the weapon and strike the target accurately
 - Single forehand strikes to head, body, and leg heights
 - Single backhand strikes to head, body, and leg heights
 - Combination strikes – forehand head rebounding to backhand leg, etc.
 - Thrusting to the body and face
- After pell work, have an experienced youth fighter strike calibration blows on the new fighter’s head and body. Then have the new fighter do the same to the experienced youth fighter, to confirm that calibration levels are correct. If the fighter is anxious about being hit, explain that the armor is there to protect them and the calibration levels ensure that they won’t get hurt as long as everyone follows the rules.
- Begin fighting against a more experienced youth fighter. Teach your experienced youth fighters to go easy and give the newcomers some success by letting the newbies kill them every now and then!
- Keep the fighters moving - lots of action, not too much talking
- After explaining a concept, immediately have the fighters repeat it back to you: “When I call Hold, you stop, look at the marshal, and wait for instructions. Now, what do you do when I call Hold?”
- Encourage timid fighters to be more aggressive, and to close on their opponents. Timid fighters often swing at opponents who are out of range. Remind them that it didn’t really hurt when they got hit, so it’s ok to close in.
- Remind overly aggressive fighters of the calibration level for their division, and that we’re all friends here and don’t want to hurt each other.
- The single most common problem with new fighters of all ages is that they attack their opponent’s weapon instead of their body. Remind them that they need to be in range and aim for the body, limbs, or head, not the weapon or shield. Most kids take a while to internalize this.
- Some brand new fighters may try to transfer skills from other martial arts. Keep an eye out for kids who try to kick or do other inappropriate maneuvers, and understand that they may have some habits to unlearn as they acclimate to SCA fighting.

Fighter Communications

Encourage youth fighters to talk to each other while fighting. Experienced youth fighters don't have to fall down and die when they are killed during practice sparring, but they do need to communicate when a killing blow is struck by saying something like "good head" or "good body." Similarly, if a blow isn't accepted, it can help for the fighters to say things like "glancing," "knee," or "flat."

Youth fighters should be discouraged from asking their opponents if a blow was a kill. "Was that a good shot?" is a not-so-subtle way of saying "Why aren't you taking my blows?" If you see a youth fighter consistently failing to take blows, discuss the problem with them privately. It could be due to new armor, unfamiliarity with calibration levels that may differ from their local area, or just a misunderstanding. With younger kids, they sometimes get so excited that they don't realize they've been hit. A quick, private comment by the marshal saying "Do you think that head blow Joey gave you might have been a kill?" will often get the fighter back in line.

Basic Guard Positions

Each weapons form has a few standard stances that new fighters should use, and methods for efficiently throwing and blocking blows. "Guard" position is the defensive resting position of the weapon and/or shield during a bout. After striking a blow, always bring the weapon back immediately to guard position. Adult fighters may use different styles, but these are good starting stances for kids:

- **Sword and shield**

- Heater shields should be held fairly close to the body with the top edge of the shield just below the fighter's eyes. To block a head shot, raise the shield arm up. To block a body shot, move the shield outward toward the weapon. To block a leg shot, move the shield arm down. Always immediately return to guard position once the blow is blocked.
- Round shields should be held a little way out from the body, with the top edge just below the fighter's eyes. Blocking can be done by "punching" the shield toward the weapon as well as by the methods described above for heater shields. Always immediately return to guard position once the blow is blocked.
- Swords should be held in one of two basic guard positions:
 - Upright at the fighter's side, with the hilt at chest level and the sword parallel to the fighter's body.
 - In a "hanging guard" where the sword arm up is up above the head and the sword is held over the head, parallel to the ground or at an angle hanging over the shield. This position is good for using the sword to block headshots as well as throw blows, though it opens up the fighter's torso on the sword side, so they need to be prepared to block offside shots with their shield.
- Swords can be used to block blows as well as to strike the opponent.



- **Great sword / “Hand-and-a-half” sword**

- Two-handed swords should be held with the hands at hip level, with the sword vertical and angled toward the opponent. Fighters often raise the sword ever higher as a bout progresses, thus exposing the torso to the opponent. Remind the fighters to keep the sword low for best defense.
- When blocking, keep the tip of the weapon at the same spot roughly centered on the body, while moving the hands left or right as appropriate to block. This maintains the greatest protection from combination shots.
- When striking, treat the handle like a lever to impart some snap into the blow. The top hand should push the weapon down while the bottom hand pulls the hilt toward the user. Use the smallest motion possible – swinging in a wide arc only slows you down and leaves your body open to the opponent.
- Do not permit fighters to swing great weapons in an arc of more than 180°. Larger arcs can result in excessive force and potential injury to opponents.



- **Polearm / Glaive**

- Basic polearm stance is similar to a great sword, but with the hands farther apart. Keep the lower hand at hip level, with the polearm upright and angled toward the opponent.
- When blocking, keep the tip of the weapon at the same spot roughly centered on the body, while moving the hands left or right as appropriate to block. This maintains the greatest protection from combination shots. Use the smallest motion possible to block the opponent's weapon; this will be faster and also keep your body protected if the opponent does a combination shot.
- When striking, treat the handle like a lever to impart some snap into the blow. The top hand should push the weapon down while the bottom hand pulls the hilt toward the user. Use the smallest motion possible – swinging in a wide arc only slows you down and leaves your body open to the opponent.
- Do not permit fighters to swing polearms in an arc of more than 180°. Larger arcs can result in excessive force and potential injury to opponents.
- Most polearms have buttspikes, which are back ends padded for use as a thrusting tip. Remind fighters that they can use both ends of a polearm that has a buttspike. Buttspikes may not be used for slashing.



- One common error kids make with polearms is to hold them horizontally, parallel to the ground. This leaves virtually their entire body open to attack.
- Another common mistake kids make with polearms is hitting with the haft of the weapon, which is not permitted. This is usually a control issue. If the fighter hits others with the polearm's haft frequently, have them do additional pell work until they learn better control.
- **Two-Sword (aka Florentine)**
 - Two-sword is an advanced form that requires a good deal of coordination and flexibility. It is not recommended for new fighters, especially in D2 and D3.
 - There are several basic stances Florentine fighters may use:
 - Both swords held vertically in front of the fighter, slightly angled toward the opponent.
 - Both swords held in front of the fighter, angled toward each other to form a triangle, but *not overlapping*. If the swords overlap, the one closest to the fighter is blocked by the one in front of it and cannot be used to strike or block quickly.
 - One sword high and one sword low, both held in front of the fighter. This allows for maximal offensive striking opportunities. Usually the lower sword is on the fighter's left side to guard against leg blows from the opponent.
 - One sword over the head in a hanging guard and the other vertically in front, angled toward the opponent.
 - Two-sword is a very active, aggressive weapons form. It is most effective when both weapons are kept in motion, making it difficult for the opponent to guess where the strike is going to originate.
 - Two-sword requires that the fighter be adept at blocking with swords, using either hand.
 - One effective two-sword attack is to use the off-hand weapon (left-hand sword for a right-handed fighter) to sweep the opponent's weapon aside and immediately follow up with a strike from the second weapon.
- **Other weapons**
 - Youth fighters can also use daggers, spears, axes, and other types of weapons. These are not standard tournament weapons, but they add fun to combat.



General Single Combat Concepts

- Always try to fight at the distance from your opponent that gives you the greatest advantage. If you have sword and shield and are fighting against a great sword, you want to close in on the great swordsman. All kids have a hard time with this concept; it's scary to get that close to someone with a large weapon, but that's the only way to win.

Similarly, if you have a polearm and are fighting an opponent with two swords, you want to fight at a distance where you can hit them but are out of range of their swords. This may require backing up a lot.

- If a fighter using sword and shield loses their sword arm, they can ask their opponent if they may switch hands. If the opponent agrees, then the sword and shield man can put the shield behind his or her back and continue fighting with the sword in his or her dominant hand.
- If a fighter loses both arms, they are effectively dead. Their opponent can give them a symbolic, gentle bop on the head to signal the victory.
- Fighters who lose a leg may stay standing on one foot and hop around. However, the moment the foot on the leg that was taken touches the ground, they must go down on their knees.
- Teach your youth fighters to “work the angles.” Most kids instinctively go for straight-on frontal attacks. If they instead move diagonally to come at their opponent from the side (especially the opponent’s off-side), they will have a greater choice of targets and better angles from which to strike.

Training Methods by Division

Each division of fighters has their own challenges and approaches. Here are some recommendations for training by division.

Training Division 1 Fighters (ages 6-9)

Division 1 fighters are fun and sometimes a little goofy. They have short attention spans and would rather be active than listen to instructions. They are long on enthusiasm and short on control and technique.

- **Accepting blows:** Sometimes D1s get excited and stop taking blows. Ask if they felt a blow you observed and remind them that any blow to a legal target area is good.
- **Weapon control:** D1 fighters tend to flail aimlessly. Have them do pell work or ask them to aim for a specific part of the opponent’s body. A fun game that helps teach control is to declare everyone a zombie! Zombies can only be killed with a head shot, which forces the fighters to aim for that part of the body.
- **Targeting the weapon/shield instead of the body:** All beginning fighters do this, but D1s are especially prone to it. Keep on reminding them to aim for the body, not the weapon.
- **Spinning:** Some D1s love to spin in a circle like superheroes or Musketeers. Explain that this only works in the movies; in real combat, they are likely to get hit in the back or lose their balance and get disoriented. Remind them to never turn their back on an opponent.
- **Meltdowns:** Some D1s can get over-excited from fighting, or frustrated if they don’t do well. Have parents remove a kid who is having a meltdown from the list, and encourage the other kids to ignore the problem kid until he or she has regained control.
- **Use plenty of praise.** D1s really want to hear that they did a good job. Praise what they do right, correct what they do wrong, and remind them that they’re having fun!

Training Division 2 Fighters (ages 10-13)

Division 2 fighters are starting to take fighting seriously. They can be highly competitive, especially among the boys. This is also the age when kids are most prone to bullying and issues with sportsmanship. They have the coordination and control to begin learning more subtle and advanced techniques.

- **Working on Form:** D2s are ready to refine their technique. While they may not have the patience for much pell work, they should start to think more about where their arms and legs are, how their weight is balanced, and how they might be telegraphing their blows by looking at the target spot on their opponent's body. An adult fighter can help diagnose these kinds of issues and advise them. If your group has sparring marshals, have them fight the D2s and critique their style, form, stance, etc. as well as teach them intermediate techniques like footwork, advanced blows, and working angles.
- **Advanced techniques:** D2s can begin learning more advanced fighting moves, like:
 - **Snap:** A snap is a sword blow that is delivered using a twist of the wrist. Any adult fighter in your group can probably demonstrate a snap. Snaps allow the blow to be delivered with greater speed. **WARNING:** when adults deliver a snap, they close their fingers on the hilt of the sword as they strike the opponent. This multiplies the force on the blow. To prevent excessive calibration levels, youth fighters should NOT close their hands when delivering a snap. Leaving the fingers loose on the sword hilt when executing a snap will let youth fighters deliver a fast blow while maintaining appropriate calibration levels. You may need to educate your adult fighters on this issue.
 - **Wraps:** A wrap blow is a type of snap that is delivered to the back of the opponent's head or body. Mastering the wrap gives the youth fighter additional targets that are not available with normal blows. Have an adult fighter demonstrate this technique for your kids.
 - **Fakes:** By moving as if to hit one areas of the body, and then delivering the blow to a different part of the body, the fighter can cause the opponent to guard the wrong area and leave an opening at the intended target.
- **Accepting blows:** With D2s, it's not that they don't realize they've been hit, but rather that they are so competitive, they sometimes don't want to accept being killed or injured. Ask if they felt a blow you observed and remind them that any blow of sufficient force to a legal target area is good.
- **Sportsmanship:** D2 fighters can get into the football cheering "kill 'em!" mentality very easily. When that happens, stop the fighting, remind the fighters that we are all friends here, and that it's not about who wins as much as it is about honor, chivalry, and prowess in the sense of skill. Teach them to root for each other's successes and take defeat gracefully. Do not let them argue over whether blows were good.
- **Wrestling matches:** sometimes D2s will end up locking weapons and pushing each other around rather than disengaging and striking with their weapons. This is especially common when siblings fight each other, playing out their rivalries in the list. Some of this is hormones that increase



aggression, and some of it is the fighters not knowing how to disengage without leaving openings. Teach them to recognize when the fight has become a wrestling match and back out gracefully, respecting their opponent enough not to take a cheap shot.

- **Melee tactics:** D2s can plan and work cooperatively with teammates in melees, so they can do more than just rush at the opposing side and flail away. See the section on Melee Tactics for ideas you can teach kids to use in melees. Make sure that every D2 and D3 gets a chance to serve as team captain at least once per melee practice.
- **Boredom:** Especially with D2s who have been fighting for a while, they need something to mix it up so they continue to feel like they're learning.
 - Introduce melee games if you have enough kids to hold melees.
 - Use the D2s as mentors and trainers for the D1s, but make sure they get plenty of time against D2s and D3s who can challenge them as well.
 - Have them work with sparring marshals when possible.
- **Frustration:** This is common among kids who don't see their skill progressing, or who are newer, younger, or smaller than their buddies and have trouble keeping up. Kids in this age group can vary a lot in size as they're going through puberty. They'll have big growth spurts, so a kid who's the smallest in the fall can return 5" taller and 20 lbs. heavier the next spring. Remind them that they're not going to progress in a straight line, life goes in fits and starts, and in a few years they will be the "big kid" who wins all the bouts as long as they don't give up.
- **Service and Arts:** D2s are ready to become involved in other aspects of the SCA. Encourage them to serve as pages to nobility, assist with hauling gear and set up or clean up at events, and participate in arts. Many D2s get into making their own armor and weapons. They should also be encouraged to help you haul any loaner gear to and from your car at the start and end of practices.

Training Division 3 Fighters (ages 14-17)

Division 3 is the time to add strength, nuance, and strategy to the kids' fighting, as well as increasing responsibility.

- **Mentoring younger fighters:** Have your experienced D3s train new fighters in the basics. New fighters will sometimes respond better to an older kid than they do to an adult. While D3s cannot fight D1s in tournaments in some kingdoms, they can do so at practices as long as they have the self-control to use touch calibration. You can put a 15-year-old on his or her knees against a 6-year-old and have the D3 primarily defend, so the D1 gets the fun of beating on a "big kid" and the D3 has the experience of mentoring younger kids and controlling their calibration levels.
- **Analyzing opponents:** D3s can start to observe opponents to figure out what strategies they use and how to counter them. One fighter may have a combination they always throw, which your D3 can anticipate and counter. Encourage kids to be observant and exploit other fighters' weaknesses – once. But then, encourage them to also share with



their opponents the weaknesses and patterns they see, so their friends can also improve. D3s should mentor each other as well as younger kids.

- **Flexibility:** D3s should practice alternative skills, like developing their off-hand by fighting with the weapon in their non-dominant hand, or putting more practice time into the weapons form with which they have the least skill. Most kids develop one or two favorite forms, but it's helpful to be able to fight well with all forms.
- **Strength and agility training:** At this age, kids start to have the self-discipline and patience to put time and effort into overall fitness. Weight-lifting, pell work, and running can help kids improve their endurance and strength as well as maintain healthy exercise levels. Adult fighters who have similar regimens can advise youth fighters on good training techniques, and of course the kids can also go to their P.E. teachers for advice.
- **Calibration:** D3s should have the coordination and control to use appropriate calibration levels. However, some issues are common with this group:
 - Sometimes teens have big growth spurts where they gain a lot of weight and/or muscle, causing them to hit harder without realizing it. Keep an eye out for unintended increases in calibration level and bring it to their attention immediately.
 - D3s are the most likely to up their calibration levels if they face an unfamiliar opponent who they perceive as “rhino-hiding,” or not accepting blows. Be on the lookout for these issues in tournaments, especially with kids from different areas. Don't hesitate to step in to stop calibration levels from escalating to unsafe levels, and prevent tempers from fraying.
 - Teach your youth fighters that it is better to lose a fight than to hit an opponent so hard that you risk injuring them. There is no honor in giving someone a concussion, regardless of the other fighter's actions.
- **Melee tactics:** D3 fighters should be conversant with a variety of melee tactics and should be able to formulate a plan and organize a melee team. See the section on melee tactics for more information.
- **Service and Arts:** D3s should be encouraged to continue to be involved in other aspects of the SCA, most especially assisting with the running of practices and events. They should expect to help the marshals haul loaner gear to and from cars at the start and end of practices, and assist with cleaning up the site after practice is over.
- **Marshals-in-Training:** If your Kingdom allows youth fighters to become Marshals-in-Training, encourage eligible D3s to do so. It will help them to gain a better understanding of the rules and a greater perspective on the sport overall, as well as giving them valuable leadership experience. Check with your Kingdom YC Marshal regarding availability and requirements for such programs in your Kingdom.
- **Transitioning to adult fighting:** In some Kingdoms, kids can switch to adult combat as young as 16. All youth fighters must transition at 18 or else drop out of heavy fighting. Try to prepare the D3s who wish to transition to adult heavy weapon fighting if that is their goal, keeping in mind that not all youth fighters want to fight as adults.



- Encourage them to build their own weapons and armor rather than having parents or marshals do it for them. They will have to be responsible for this as adults, so they might as well learn to do it now.
- Encourage D3s who want to fight adults to start gradually upgrading their armor. This prevents them from incurring a lot of expenses on the day they transition. Typical upgrades include switching to adult-legal metal helmets, getting heavier body and joint armor, and armoring places that aren't usually armored for youth combat, like thighs and upper arms. Note that kids should not wear adult helmets until they are old enough and strong enough to support the weight of a metal helmet. They may find it helpful to transition gradually, wearing the metal helmet for the early part of practice and switching back to a hockey helmet as they tire. Another good upgrade is a shield suited for adult combat, typically made of metal.
- Have the kids spend more time working with adult sparring marshals if possible, while retaining youth calibration levels. The more technique they learn in D3, the better they will do as adults.

Working with Other Adult Fighters

Encourage the adult fighters in your group to work with youth fighters during your practices. Even if the adults aren't warranted as sparring marshals, they can give the kids pointers on improving their stance, throwing more effective blows, working as a team in melees, and generally becoming more skilled. Adults are not allowed to hit youth fighters if they aren't sparring marshals, but they can demonstrate techniques or let the kids hit them while they defend. Consider holding a youth combat schola at an event. Invite chivalry and other notable fighters – perhaps even your king or prince - to work with the kids on specific weapons forms. SCA kids look up to knights and royalty, and getting individual lessons from them can really make an impression on the youth fighters.

Authorizing Fighters

Youth fighters must authorize to fight in tournaments at SCA events. After their initial authorization, they must re-authorize at each division change. This means you must watch each youth combatants fight and verify that that they understand and follow the rules and are safe on the field. To authorize a youth fighter have them:

1. Identify the legal and illegal target areas on the body.
2. Demonstrate losing an arm or leg.
3. Demonstrate dying defensively.
4. Throw a calibration blow at another, more experienced fighter, and verify that the blow used appropriate force. If another youth fighter is not available, have the authorizing fighter strike your marshal's staff.



5. Spend several minutes sparring with an experienced youth fighter.
6. Fight a formal bout against an experienced youth fighter, including dying defensively if they are killed.
7. Fight separate bouts with each weapons form in which they wish to authorize: sword and shield, great weapon, or two-sword.

While observing the authorization bout, look for the following behaviors:

- Blows struck with appropriate calibration levels
- Acceptance of received blows of appropriate force
- Adherence to rules
- Confidence in the list; not running away from opponents or ducking in fear at incoming blows

Youth fighters do not have to be skilled to be authorized, they just need to be safe. Sometimes parents whose kids participate in other martial arts will be hesitant to let them authorize before they've gained proficiency because those martial arts may require a level of skill before competing. Emphasize to such parents that *all we are looking for is safety and an understanding of the rules.*

Youth fighters may authorize up a division before they reach the listed age if you believe that they are ready, based on their skill and size.

Make sure to sign the appropriate authorization forms and give them to the youth fighter's parents, explaining clearly to the parents what must be done to submit the authorization form and receive a permanent authorization card.

Encouraging Service and Chivalry



SCA Youth Combat emphasizes honor, courtesy, chivalry, and service. The purpose of our combat is to gain skill and form friendships, not merely to “kill” the opponent. Poor sportsmanship on the part of the fighters or parents should not be tolerated.

In addition, youth fighters are encouraged to engage in service activities within their local group. As a group YC marshal, you can encourage your youth fighters to serve by suggesting that they help clean up trash at your local practice site, offer to be list runners at Crown Tournament, and serve at feasts or on set up and clean up crews at local events. Incorporating youth into adult activities is the surest way to help them feel like valued members of the SCA community.

Running Tournaments

Tournaments are the reason our kids are doing all that practicing! As a YC Marshal, it's your job to run tournaments, and to ensure that the fighting is fun and safe for all of the fighters.

Handling Lists with D1s and D3s

In some kingdoms, D1s cannot fight D3s at official SCA events. There are a few ways to get around that:

- Divide the kids up by division. If there are enough kids in each division, you can run three separate tourneys. If not, you can combine D1 and D2 into one list with D3s in a separate list, or D2 and D3 into one list with D1s in a separate list. This means you will have two or even three parallel tourneys with two or three winners, so keep that in mind for ensuring enough marshals as well as prizes if you are offering them.
- Have the D1s compete against the D3s in an alternative way:
 - Play "Rock, Paper, Scissors," roll a set of dice, or use some other quick random chance game.
 - Have the D3 get down on their knees and defend only, while the D1 tries to get through the older fighter's guard. The D3 does not hit the D1. If the D1 can get a D1 calibration-level blow on the D3 within 30 seconds, the D1 wins. If the D3 has not been struck by the D1 after 30 seconds, the D3 wins. These have the additional value of being very funny to watch, and it's not unusual for D3s to let the D1s beat them. Older D1s actually have a very good chance of getting through the D3's guard and legitimately winning.

Even if your kingdom does permit D1s to fight D3s, the D3 must fight at D1 calibration, and the fight can be very unbalanced. One approach is to tell D2 and D3 fighters that their losses against D1s will not be counted against them in round robin fighting, especially at small events.

Encourage the older kids to offer a challenging defense, courteous combat, and a bit of humor in their bouts against much younger or smaller kids.

Tournament Types

While some groups are blessed with a large community of youth fighters, in many places, there are not enough kids to hold a double or single elimination tourney, which can make it hard to have a competitive tournament that lasts long enough to give the kids enough fighting. Here are some types of tournaments and how to make them work well.

- **Single elimination** – each fighter competes until they are defeated once. Only use this if you have a lot of fighters (more than 20) and are short on time. It can be very demoralizing to travel hours to an event only to be eliminated from the tourney in one fight.
- **Double elimination** – every fighter competes until they have been defeated twice. Good for tourneys with a lot of kids, at least 12-16, and when there is limited time. Works best with multiples of four. It still means that some kids will only get two bouts before being eliminated.
- **Round Robin** – every fighter must fight against every other fighter. This is great for tourneys of 8-12 kids. It ensures that everyone gets a lot of fighting. For smaller groups,

you can do multiple round robin tourneys, where each kid fights every other kid multiple times, possibly alternating weapons forms between bouts.

- **Bear Pit:** Kids line up at the entrance to the list. The first two kids fight. The winner stays in the list and fights the next person in line. The loser goes to the back of the line. Repeat. If there's a double-kill, both fighters go to the back of the line and the next two fighters fight each other. Continue until everyone is tired or you run out of time. The winner is the fighter who wins the most number of bouts. This rewards stamina as well as skill, and permits lots of fighting. To prevent a single really good fighter from dominating a bear pit list, you can stipulate that after a certain number of bouts, or after a fighter has won every bout against all of the other fighters once, subsequent fights become "wounds retained" for that winning fighter, meaning limbs lost in one bout are lost permanently until the fighter is defeated and then goes through the line to fight again.
- **Weapons Proficiency** – each fighter competes against every other fighter with each weapons form. This is good if you have very few fighters and/or a lot of time, and helps to encourage kids to diversify their weapons skills. Typically great sword and polearm are grouped together as "great weapon," with the other major forms being sword and shield and two sword, but you can have lists for kids to fight with daggers or spears for variety.
- **Warlord** – In the first round, bouts are fought one-on-one. In the second round, the winner of the first bout becomes team captain, with the kid he or she defeated in the first bout as the other member of their team, and they fight against another two-person team. As the rounds progress, defeated teams join the team that they lost to, until the final round when two large teams have a grand melee, with the captain of the winning team declared the "warlord." This keeps all of the kids fighting while still determining a single winner. It's good for medium to large groups, at least 10-12 kids.
- **Most Chivalrous** – This can be combined with any of the above. You can have notable adults, like the Queen, Princess, or Baroness, watch the tourney and name a "Most Chivalrous" fighter, or the marshals can confer and determine a winner by consensus. You can also encourage chivalrous behavior by having small tokens with you at every tourney that you give to kids who are particularly courteous, helpful, or gallant.

Collaborating with Other Officers

As the Youth Marshal-In-Charge (MiC) for an event, you will need to coordinate with other people to run your tournament.

- **Autocrat** – make sure the person in charge of the event knows exactly what you need to run your tourney. Ask the autocrat what the facility is like, how much space there is, and what equipment or other amenities will be in place vs. what you must bring, most especially tables, chairs, and water. If a prize is being offered to the tourney winner(s), find out if the event has a budget for a prize, if you need to buy it or if the autocrat will buy it, or if there is a scribe willing to do a scroll as a prize. Good prizes include toy knights and dragons for D1s, while D2s and D3s appreciate things like mugs, pouches, board games, weapons, or shields.
- **Minister of the Lists** - Your local group should have a Minister of the List (MOL) who can help you organize your tourney. Communicate with the MOL before the event where the tourney will be held. The MOL needs to know what type of tourney you plan to run, because there are different forms for each type of tourney and different methods of

organizing them. It's ok to have contingency plans – “we'll run a double elim unless we have fewer than 16 fighters, in which case we'll do a round robin” – but make sure to share that information with the MOL. The MOL typically provides the paperwork for recording the wins and losses in the tournament.

- **Youth Combat Marshals or Constables** - If there are other YC Marshals in your area, ask them to assist with marshaling the list. Tourneys often have more than one list, and every list must have a marshal. If you are the only marshal, you can only run one list at a time, and the tourney will run much more slowly. Kids who are sitting around waiting to fight will get bored, and you will get tired. If there are no other warranted YC Marshals available, you can ask an experienced adult member of the SCA (perhaps a current or former fighter) to run one of your lists, but you'll need to make sure that person is aware of issues to look out for, and keep tabs on how things in that list are going. People who run lists but are not marshals are called Constables.
- **Heralds** – nothing makes a kid feel important like a herald announcing his or her name as they enter the list and proclaiming their victories. If you can get a dedicated herald for the tourney, that's great. If not, have the marshals make the announcements. For the first round of fighting, youth fighters should do “honors” just as adults do. Typically these consist of salutes to the Crown and/or Coronet, the Baron/Baroness if appropriate, the one who inspires them (usually a parent, though D3s sometimes have girlfriends or boyfriends), and their opponent, as well as the crowd assembled to watch the tourney. It brings the pageantry to the kids, and emphasizes that what they are doing is just as important as the adults' tourneys.

Equipment and Planning for a Tourney

Here are some things you may want to bring or arrange for someone to provide for your tournament:

- Sign in sheets with waiver language included
- Table and chair for the MOL, chair for the marshal if needed
- Sunshade for outdoor tourneys
- Water jugs and paper cups for fighters and marshals
- Authorization forms
- Sunscreen for marshals and kids who forgot theirs
- List ropes, orange cones, or some other way to mark separate list areas
- Armor and weapon repair kit
- Loaner gear, especially weapons and shields
- Trash bags

If this is too much for you to transport, you can let kids know that if they need loaner armor, they'll have to get it from you at the last practice before the tourney and bring it to the event themselves, and then return it at the first practice after the tourney. However, you then run the risk of the loaner gear not being returned.

Anatomy of a Tournament

Here's a typical schedule for running a tournament:

1. Arrive at the site at least half an hour before the list opens, so you can locate the list, unload and set up any equipment including list ropes or markers, and get organized.
2. Instruct kids and parents on signing in, where they can put their armor, and when they need to be ready to fight.
3. Inspect armor and weapons as kids get armored up.
4. Determine whether any fighters need to be authorized, and choose experienced fighters to fight those authorization bouts with the new fighters.
5. Run any authorization bouts.
6. Confer with the MOL regarding the number of kids and the parameters of the tourney, including any changes you make once the number of fighters is known.
7. Gather the fighters and give them instructions about how the tourney will run, where they can get water, where bathrooms are located, etc.
8. Work with the MOL to organize the first pairings and get the tourney bouts started.
9. Marshal your own list and monitor the other lists as needed, doing honors (salutes to the Crown, Baron/Baroness, inspiration, and opponent) in the first round of bouts.
10. As the tourney progresses, confer with the MOL to determine how many rounds remain to be completed.
11. After the tourney ends, hold a few melees as a fun cap to the day.
12. Communicate the results of the tourney to the heralds if prizes are being given at a court, or else bestow the prizes on the winners at the end of the fighting.

Running Melees

A melee is a fight involving teams of combatants. Melees are a great way to encourage cooperation and strategizing in your youth fighters. Youth fighters often say that melees are the most fun part of combat!

Thrown Weapons

In melees, your youth fighters can use certain types of throwing weapons that are not permitted in a tournament list:

- **Javelins:** short throwing spears made of PEX or Siloflex with padded ends using the thrusting tip design. They are only effective at close range.
- **Axes:** throwing axes are made entirely out of foam. Pool noodles are the recommended material. Throwing axes tend to fly better than javelins, so they can be used from a greater distance.



The use of throwing weapons in a melee can cause fighters to spend all their time throwing things at each other and not engaging with their regular weapons. If this becomes a problem, the marshal can rule that any throwing weapon can be used once, and then as soon as it hits the ground, it is out of play.

Melees come in two main varieties: team melees and free-for-alls. Let's start with tactics for team melees. Unit cohesion is a very important concept for team melees. You'll have to remind your fighters over and over: Stay together and fight as a unit!

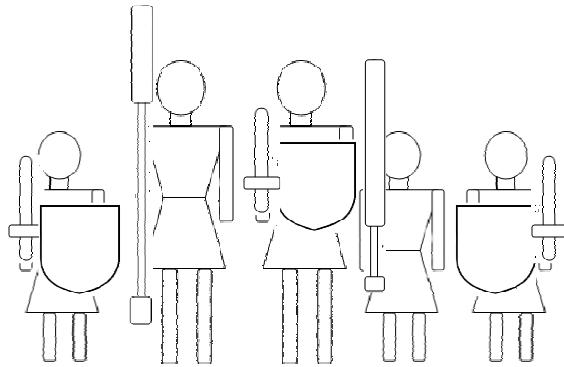
General Melee Rules

- **Engagement:** A fighter may not simply come up behind an opposing fighter and whack said fighter in the back. This is generally considered unchivalrous and dishonorable. In a melee, you can only attack someone who has acknowledged your presence with eye contact. However, if one fighter in a line engages a fighter in the opposing line, that fighter is automatically engaged with the rest of the line that is facing them. All this said, some kingdoms do have a "death from behind" rule allowing a fighter to come up behind an opponent, foul their weapon, and declare them dead. Verify your Kingdom's policy, and make sure your fighters know and follow the appropriate rule.
- **Acquiring Engagement:** If a fighter comes up behind an opponent, they can attempt to gain acknowledgement by calling the opponent's name. If the opponent is not already engaged, he or she must turn to acknowledge the combatant behind them. If the opponent is already engaged with another fighter, the opponent is *not* required to acknowledge the person behind them. At that point, the fighter seeking engagement has three options:
 1. Circle around the opponent to join the fighter already engaged with that opponent.
 2. Find another opponent.
 3. Foul the weapon or shield of the opponent. This does *not* mean hitting the opponent! The fighter can place his or her sword on top of the opponent's sword or shield, making it difficult for the opponent to strike their foe.
- **Quarter:** If a fighter is surrounded and the rest of his or her team has been killed, the lone fighter can request single combat from the remaining opponents. Honorable opponents will generally grant such a request. The opponents decide in what order they will fight the lone combatant from the other team, and if the lone combatant defeats everyone on the other team, he or she wins the melee for their team.
- **Dying Defensively:** It is vital that all fighters in a melee die defensively. A fighter who lies on their back or stomach can get badly hurt or other fighters trip over them or step on them. Make sure your fighters know to not only die defensively, but also to stay in that position until the marshal tells them it is safe to get up and exit the battlefield. It is permissible for fighters in a loosely grouped melee to simply call "dead" and walk out of the melee. **Marshal Note:** Dead youth fighters have a tendency to hang around the middle of the melee battlefield instead of exiting to the sidelines. They can then end up unintentionally interfering with the ongoing battle. Keep an eye out for lingering fighters and shoo them to the sidelines if needed.

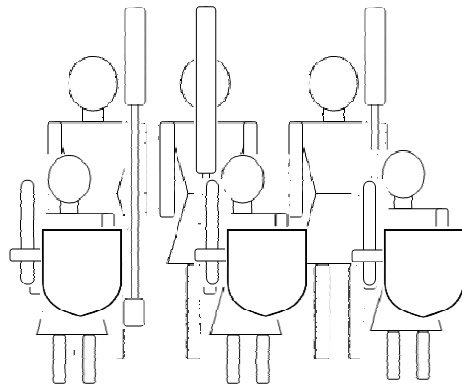


Team Formations

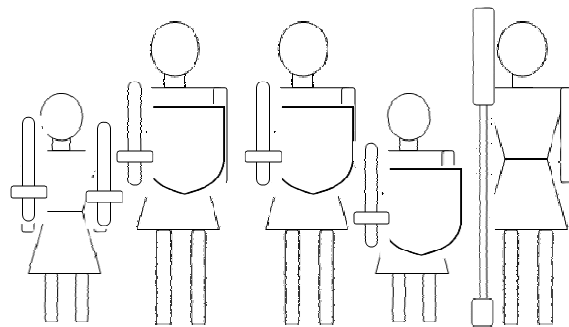
Teach your youth fighters to put some thought into their lineup during team melees. Different weapons types work well together, or in different arrangements. Here are some typical formations:



In this formation, the shields can help protect the fighters standing to their left with polearm and great sword. Notice that the left-handed sword and shield fighter is on the left side of the formation, so she can swing her sword freely without hitting her teammates.



This formation has a shield wall in front, and the great weapons in back. Since the fighters in the back are taller as well as having longer weapons, they can easily reach the opposing fighters while fighting from the back row, again protected by the shields.



In this formation, the shields are in the center and the more aggressive polearm and two-sword fighters are on the edges, where they can serve as harriers. Harriers' job is to perform quick hit-

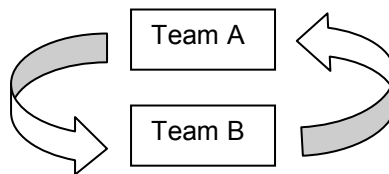
and-run attacks on the enemy's flanks or rear, distracting them or disrupting their formation. Harriers tend to fight with two weapons or great weapon, which are both good offensive styles. Harrier is a good position for a kid who does not have the discipline to stay in a line with his or her unit.

Many other formations are possible. Even if you have teams with only two fighters, they should think about various options: one rank or two? What weapons combination should they choose? Who should be on the left or right? Encourage them to experiment with combinations to see what works and what doesn't.

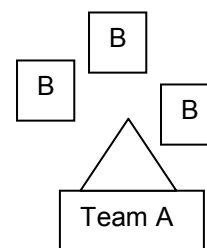
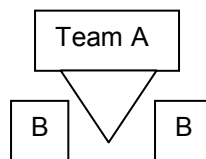
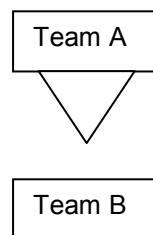
Team Strategies

Strategies originating with the Greeks and Romans can still be used in SCA melees today. Here are some common formations that you can teach your youth fighters.

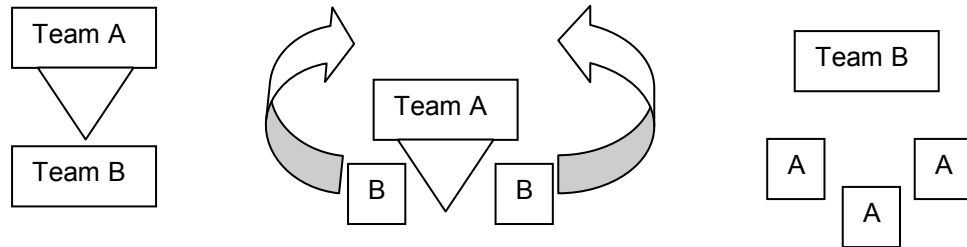
- **Flanking:** Most fights naturally devolve into flanking maneuvers, where the fighters as a team circle around each other so the whole battle rotates. This is sometimes jokingly called the "toilet bowl of death." Since the majority of fighters are right-handed, they'll tend to rotate to the right, or counter-clockwise, but a team can plan to switch directions on a pre-arranged signal and flank left instead, to confuse their opponents.



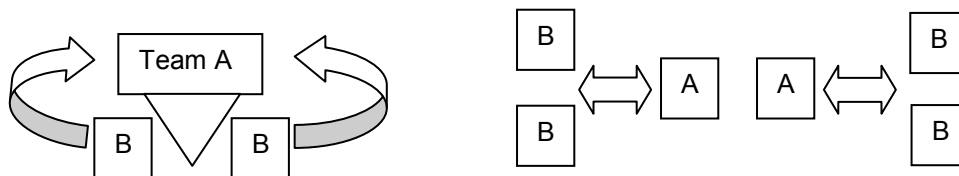
- **Boar's Snout:** One team forms a V with the point toward the opponents. When the marshals call Lay On, the team charges through their opponents. The goal is primarily to confuse the other team and cause them to lose unit cohesion, rather than to kill them in the course of the charge. Once Team A gets to the other side of Team B, Team A turns around as a unit and engages the now-disorganized Team B.



- **Weak Center:** This formation is the counter maneuver to a Boar's Snout. If Team B suspects that Team A is going to charge, they can counter by planning to split into two units and turn to strike Team A on their way through, then reform facing Team A before Team A can turn and reorganize.



- **Envelopment:** This works well if your team has either more fighters or more mobile fighters (fighters with great weapons or two-swords, rather than sword and shield) than the other team. As Team A moves forward to fight Team B, Team B deliberately splits and move around the edges of Team A, attempting to cause Team A to end up in two units fighting back to back. This can cause Team A to lose unit cohesion and also get in each other's way.



Free-for-All Melees

Also known as grand melees or Roman melees, these melees have no teams – it's every fighter for him or herself. The fighters usually start in a widely spread circle. When the marshals call lay on, the fighters can attack anyone they choose. Usually the fighters are not allowed to attack one of their immediate neighbors until after the first blow is struck. All the rules from team melees apply. The victor is the last fighter left alive.

Sometimes fighters in free-for-all melees will form temporary alliances; be on the lookout for any conflict that may arise when a temporary alliance dissolves. Remind fighters that they must be chivalrous – before striking an opponent with whom they have allied, they must announce that the alliance has ended so their erstwhile teammate has time to protect themselves,

Making Melees More Fun

It helps to mix things up so the kids don't get bored. Here are some ways you can liven up your melees:

- **Resurrections:** Choose a number of times fighters can resurrect (come back to life) and a place they have to go to get their life back. That can be a tree or other stationary object, or it can be touching the marshal's staff. Don't hesitate to give newer or younger fighters more lives than older, more experienced fighters.

- **Capture the Flag:** You'll need some large orange cones and flags on poles (which can be made from PVC pipe with cloth taped on the ends). Place the cones a reasonable distance apart for the space you have and the number of fighters. Then you'll need to set victory conditions. Usually the fighters must retrieve the opposing team's flag and bring it back to touch their own flag at their cone.



- **Boat Battles:** Boats can be made of a variety of materials. Simplest is cardboard – save the boxes from large appliances or furniture, and cut and staple/tape them into a rough rectangle. These actually last a surprisingly long time. PVC is more durable but heavier and harder to transport. Each boat should be big enough to hold two or three fighters. Add ropes as handles in the front and back. If you want to go all-out, you can spray paint them and even add paper flags. Boats work well combined with Capture the Flag scenarios, with a river or islands marked so the fighters know where the water and land are. Have the kids name their boats, use them in conjunction with “Talk Like a Pirate” Day, make it fun! The following rules work well:

1. Boats must be carried, not kicked (or the lifespan of the boats will be short).
2. Any fighter who steps off the boat into the water has drowned and is dead.
3. Fighters can “board” the opposing team’s boat and capture it.
4. Fighters who die and are resurrected restart on the shore. Their team-mates must return to shore to pick them up.



- **Angel of Mercy:** To make the melee last longer and to help even the odds when you have a mix of new and experienced fighters, the marshals can be “angels of mercy” who

resurrect dead fighters on the fly. But sometimes their mercy has limits – a fighter might be only partially resurrected, without their legs or missing an arm.

- **Grab-a-Weapon:** Have the fighters throw all of their weapons in a pile and then stand in a wide circle around the pile. When the marshal calls Lay On, the fighters must run and grab for a weapon as in the “Hunger Games.” This means that some fighters may not get their preferred weapon. This works best for free-for-all melees.
- **Pass Your Weapons:** After a few melees, to mix things up, have each fighter pass their weapons to the person to their left or right. This forces the kids to try different weapons and be adaptable. This also works best for free-for-all melees.
- **Bridge Battles:** You can set up a “bridge” of any width by laying marshal staves or polearms on the ground, or painting lines in the grass. In an indoor site, you can use folding chairs. The bridge should be narrow enough that the fighters are forced to be in multiple rows. As with boat battles, a fighter who steps off the bridge has fallen in the water and drowned. These are usually fought to the last man standing, though they can be combined with Capture the Flag.
- **Woods Battles:** These can work like adult woods battles, or be more like open field battles but in a wooded area. They should usually be done as team battles. Woods battles are some of the more dangerous types of battles because the terrain can be rough, but they can also be a lot of fun. Ideally, you should use a wooded area that is flat and free from brambles, poison ivy/oak, and heavy underbrush or fallen trees. Encourage kids to use the trees and other terrain to gain an advantage. Woods battles work well as Capture the Flag battles.
- **Sally Port:** A sally port is a small “back door” to a castle, used for sorties during sieges. In this melee, the defenders are trying to prevent the attackers from gaining entrance into the castle through the Sally Port. Use marshal staves, polearms, or folding chairs to simulate the walls of the castle, with a “door” only one or two people wide. The defenders win if the attackers die before gaining entry into the castle. The attackers win if at least one of them makes it all the way through the sally port into the castle, even if he dies shortly after entering. This game favors aggressive attackers who charge, forcing the defenders to cooperate. You may want to make the numbers uneven, with more defenders than attackers. This type of melee works well in limited space, such as a small indoor site.
- **Tavern Brawl:** If you have an area with multiple picnic tables, you can hold a tavern brawl. This is generally done as a free-for-all, with the winner being the last man standing. The fighters begin seated at the picnic tables. When the marshal calls Lay On, the battle begins. Tables can be used as obstacles or shields during the fighting.
- **3 or More Teams:** If you are running melees at a large event and have lots of kids, you can run multiple teams. Each team should have 3-5 people. These can work like a free for all with teams instead of individual fighters, or you can run a melee team tournament.

Last Words

Dealing with Problem Parents

Many youth fighters have parents who are tremendously supportive of their kids' fighting and are equally involved with the Society themselves. Unfortunately, some parents can pose problems for the YC marshals. Here are some typical issues and ways to deal with them.

- Some parents will think they can drop their kids off and leave, as if you were a babysitter or it was a soccer practice. This is not acceptable. Every youth fighter must have an adult present who is responsible for that child, preferably with a medical release form authorizing them to make treatment decisions if the child should become injured. Encourage the parents in your group to sign such forms designating each other as responsible parties, so if they are not involved in other SCA activities during the practice, they can take turns staying while the other parents go off-site.
- Some parents put pressure on their kids to do well or even verbally abuse them when they don't win. Remind these parents that our combat is about honor and chivalry. We want the kids to have fun and think more about improving their skills than about who wins or loses.
- Sometimes you will get a youth fighter whose parents are not interested in the SCA. Maybe the kid dragged the parents along to fighter practice because the youth has a friend in the SCA or found out about us online. Try to educate these parents about the other things that the SCA has to offer – arts, events, history – in hopes that they will become interested in participating. Even if they don't, try to view their presence in a positive light; the more kids you have at each practice, the more fun it is for everyone, and that kid could become a lifelong member of the SCA with or without the parents.

Being the Best Marshal You Can Be

There are many ways to run youth combat. As long as you and your fighters work within the framework of the Society and Kingdom rules, are safe and having fun, and their parents are happy, you're doing it right.

If you don't have a winter fighting site, you can keep some of the camaraderie of fighting season going until spring returns by having the youth fighters get together socially every now and then, with board gaming sessions, laser tag, bowling, movies, or whatever else they enjoy.

Recommend your youth fighters for awards as appropriate. Many kingdoms have youth awards for service or combat. Kids can benefit from recognition just as adults do, and it helps them feel that their participation in the SCA is valued.

Finally, remember to make it fun for *you* too. Joke around with the kids, get help and ideas from other adults and parents, recruit other parents as marshals, and don't over-extend yourself.



Arianna of Wynthrope joined the Society in 1977 and was a heavy weapons fighter for 6 years in the 1980s. She got involved in youth combat in 2004 when her older son authorized as a youth fighter, and became a Youth Combat Marshal in 2009. She runs youth combat for the Barony-Marche of the Debatable Lands in the Kingdom of Aethelmearc. When not working with youth fighters, she directs the baronial choir and makes award scrolls for her Crown and Baron.

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