



BY JEFF BUKANTZ

# In Search of the Gospel? Avoid the Cesspool!



Soon after returning from Beijing last summer, I received an email from a member in response to a post made in an internet chat room.

According to the post, the

FIE had eliminated the rule where left-handed fencers would hook up on the referee's left side. The post was unambiguous and treated as the gospel by many. Fortunately, an inquiring mind wanted to know if the post was accurate.

By chance, this inquisitive member had come to the right person, as I happened to be on the FIE Rules Commission at that time. In addition, I happened to be on the competition

is played when it comes to determining rules, rules changes, rules clarifications, and rules interpretations. Add to this game of telephone the vast expanses of the internet, and the misinformation increases exponentially.

Now, please don't misconstrue my point. The internet is an ideal place for discussion, opinion, inquiring, and venting. Heck, where else can people hide behind the cloak of anonymity and say whatever they please? While it is unfortunate that internet chat rooms are often a cesspool of negativity, that's tangential.

**The point is that, when it comes to rules and interpretations, the chat room threads are often misleading at best, and completely wrong at worst.**

The cesspool is further polluted when an occasional "expert," whether from the Fencing Officials Commission or not, chimes in with either incorrect information or a personal opinion contrary to the official stance of the FOC.

Professional wrestling is totally scripted. Yet, every now and then, a wrestler intention-

ally goes against the script. The term is called "going into business for yourself." Let's just say that certain FOC members have been guilty of the same, and have misled people both on the internet and elsewhere.

discussion of the FOC in order to determine a stance before responding to the inquiry. However, when the inquiries don't come to the FOC, it becomes open season on misinformation.

Over the last year or so, I have been dumbfounded to hear some real doozies resulting from games of telephone (internet should be the new name of this game) gone wrong. Referees, fencers, coaches, parents, and organizers have fallen prey to the misinformation.

Among the doozies were the following:

- **There is no simple corps-a-corps in epee.** (There is, it stops the phrase, it negates any touches scored after the body contact regardless of when the referee says halt, but it does not warrant a penalty.)
- **An attack which falls short and is then left in line or put in line automatically gains the right-of-way of a line.** (Wrong, as determined by both the FIE and FOC

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floor at the Olympics, where, in fact, the FIE did not enforce this rule.

So, I was able to clarify that the rule was not enforced at the Games, with the main reason being to avoid confusion for the television audience during team matches. After all, it would have been very confusing for the viewers to see teams and scores switching sides during a match.

However, the FIE most definitely had not changed the rule about lefties hooking up on the left! Yet, because some yo-yo saw the Olympics on the Internet, he incorrectly stated that the rule had been changed across the board.

He made the factually incorrect post, and many took it as the gospel. And, therein lays the problem.

Remember the game of "telephone?" One person would whisper something into the next person's ear and down the line it would go. By the time it reached the last person, it didn't come close to resembling the original comment.

Unfortunately, that harmless kids' game

ally goes against the script. The term is called "going into business for yourself." Let's just say that certain FOC members have been guilty of the same, and have misled people both on the internet and elsewhere.

So, the question is: Where do I go to get the official stance on rules, rules changes, rules clarifications, and rules interpretations?

**If you want the gospel, you must go directly to the FOC. Do not pass Go, collect \$200, or check the oft-misleading internet threads.**

Every member of the organization has the right to inquire directly to the gatekeeper of the gospel, which is the FOC. The FOC will provide a timely and accurate response, and ideally put an end to the game of telephone.

As a long time chair of the FOC's Rules Committee, I've been responsible for responding to the many inquiries from the membership. In some cases, a simple quoting of a rule would suffice. In other cases, a consensus view of the FOC would be espoused. Yet, in numerous instances, I would have to initiate an email

despite claims to the contrary by some persuasive and outspoken 'experts' who feel otherwise.)

- **The clashing of bells in epee is corps-a-corps and stops the action.** (Wrong, as there is nothing in the rules which supports this most misunderstood and misapplied action.)
- **In order to be guilty of covering target with the head, a fencer's head must be tilted at some specific degree or angle.** (Wrong, this is solely up to the referee or side judge's discretion, not a slide ruler's!)

These are actual examples of what happens when people rely on the cesspool instead of the gospel. So, when you're done with the internet discussions and want the official answer to anything regarding the rules, just drop an email to Christine Simmons ([christine.simmons@usfencing.org](mailto:christine.simmons@usfencing.org)).

It will be passed on to the FOC, and the gospel will be passed on to you. And, thankfully, the cesspool will be passed over. **AF**