

16 ways to win the 14-14 bout

THE BIG POINT

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Is it "la belle," the beautiful, or "schrecklich," the terrible? How you approach the fifteenth touch will determine the answer.

Because it may be the most important touch of the day, it merits forethought and special preparation. Clearly, there is no short cut, no hidden secret to coming out on top. You can't win them all, but you can work to win your share. The ideas that follow offer a mix of metaphor, practical advice and philosophic perspective as a guide to approaching that critical touch.

1 Starting with the fundamentals: Seize the initiative. Make the touch happen on your action.

2 Fencing smart: The last touch of the bout is when fencers have the most information about their opponent's game on that day. Use this information to your advantage.

3 Implementing the fundamentals: Get down on your legs and pick an action you are comfortable doing under pressure. Actively lead the tempo and footwork. Then make it happen.

4 Leaving it all there: Fence with everything you have. It doesn't matter if you collapse afterward, like a warrior dying in ritual combat.

5 A metaphor for action: "Like playing poker, Put your best hand together and go with it." Prepare to act without looking back.

6 Taking the metaphor another step: Sometimes you need to "Kick the table over!" by seeking the creative solution, one that draws from the uniqueness of the situation and capitalizes on the element of surprise.

7 Coming from behind: Maintain your momentum. Do not try to reinvent yourself in the critical moment. Trust what got you there to begin with.

8 Being caught when ahead: It is a whole new bout. All you need is that one touch. A win is a win.

9 Studying your opponent: Be ready to capitalize on your opponent's mistakes or rashness.

10 Risking losing in order to win: Come to terms with the possibility of defeat. Accept the risks inherent in taking action, knowing that the risk of inaction is greater.

11 Keeping perspective: If you lose the touch, learn from it; If you win the touch, learn from it.

12 Weighing an ounce of prevention: The best way to assure victory is to avoid letting the bout get to 14-14. When you have a lead, maintain your intensity, and fight to the finish. If at all possible don't let the bout get to the point where it is in the hands of the official, of your opponent, or of luck.

13 Fencing the overtime minute: Never expect time to elapse if

you have priority. Look for the touch. Don't allow yourself to be passive or reactive.

14 Getting the mind-set: Fence with a light heart and an iron will, and what comes next will take care of itself.

15 Facing the greater challenge: Stare with confidence into the faces of success and failure. Let it bring out the best in you.

16 Keeping it simple: Calculated Choice + Decisive Execution = Best Result

However, being prepared for a critical touch is a challenge that resists simple description. As an idea of endless depth and complexity, it lies close to the heart of the sport. Let these thoughts serve as touchstones to guide you in your personal quest for excellence. Let your awareness of the next critical touch motivate you and give fuller meaning and richness to your training. — AF

This article is a collective effort of the coaches and athletes of the U.S. Men's Epee Squad, and is completed as part of the of the USOC Sport Science Performance Enhancement Team program. The authors of this article would like to express their appreciation to those who have helped them prepare for the 14-14 bout.

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