



# HEMA Tournaments Refereeing and Judging

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This article contains description of the roles and responsibilities of the referee, judges, and scorekeeper in a Historical European Martial Arts tournament.<sup>1</sup>

Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) tournaments are an excellent opportunity for competitors to challenge themselves by sparring others outside of their club. Tournaments are possible with the support of a referee and judges that observe the match to ensure fair play and award points. These people need to have a keen eye, be quick on their feet, and check any biases they may have. For each match there are four judges, one referee, a scorekeeper, and two competitors. The match takes place in a “ring” that is usually square shaped. The competitors enter the ring at opposite corners (diagram 1). Each judge is responsible for viewing the match and making calls along one side of the ring.

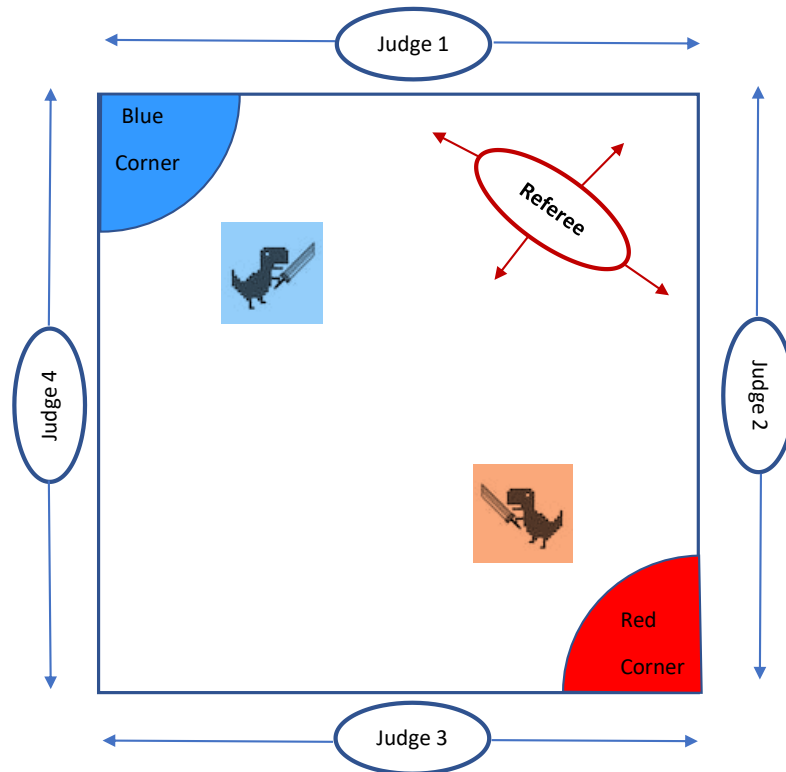


Diagram 1: Positions of the referee and judges during a match.

The referee starts the match, asks the judges for their calls, and calls out the points awarded to the competitors. The referee will ask the judges these questions in the following order:

<sup>1</sup> Note these are not universal HEMA rules. These are the set of rules used in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada during a tournament in October 2022.

1. **Contact** – *did one competitor make contact with the other competitor with the tip or the edge (not the flat) of the sword or a shield? Did one competitor mime a hit with their pommel to the head of the other competitor?*
2. **Quality** – *was it a hit that would have caused some level of harm if the competitors were not wearing equipment? Contact with the flat of the blade is not considered a quality strike.*
3. **Target** – *Did one competitor hit the other on the head or torso?*
4. **Control** – *Did one competitor strike the other with enough control that the other competitor had no opportunity to defend themselves, strike back, or recover?*




Judges are not to raise their batons/indicate their score(s) until the referee calls for them. After each of the questions, the referee will call out the number of points awarded, and the scorekeeper will track the points. The scorekeeper is also responsible for timing the match.



The judges stand at each of the four sides of the ring. The judges must stay on their side of the ring during a match and move as needed along the side to maintain a clear view of the competitors, except when it may compromise safety in any manner. The referee usually stands somewhere inside the ring but may move anywhere for safety or to better see what is happening between the competitors. If any of the judges or the referee sees a hit, they call out "Halt!", and the competitors must immediately stop sparring and return to their corners. Judges must look down when the referee asks for their calls to ensure they are not biased by the other judges. The referee uses the information from the judges to make a final call for each of the points or can call in the judges to discuss what happened. The final call for points is from the referee.

Each judge has two batons: one red and one blue. The judge uses these batons to signal to the referee, as illustrated in the following pictures.

After a match is over and before the start of the next one, the judges are to switch to a new side of the ring, e.g., all move clockwise to the next judging position.

Explanation of judge's baton signals in a HEMA match.

Signal	Description	Illustration
<b>Award Point</b>	<p>As the referee goes through the list of questions, the judge will hold up a baton for the fighter, in their judgement, that is to be awarded the point.</p>	<p>Red is to be awarded a point.</p> 
<b>Doubling</b>	<p>Doubling is when both competitors hit each other at the same time, or within the timeframe of one heartbeat.</p> <p>The judge holds up both batons at equal height.</p>	<p>The competitors have doubled.</p> 
<b>Afterblow</b>	<p>If the competitors hit each other in short succession but within a timeframe longer than a "double", the judge will signal an afterblow.</p> <p>The judge signals with the raised arm which competitor did the afterblow, and with the lower arm, which competitor should receive a point.</p>	<p>Blue had afterblow on red.</p> 

Signal	Description	Illustration
<p><b>No Call (No contact seen, no points)</b></p>	<p>The judge has not seen a hit or believes no points are to be given.</p> <p>The judge holds the baton in an “X” in front of themselves.</p>	<p>No points to be awarded/no call.</p> 
<p><b>Ring Out</b></p>	<p>One competitor has stepped out of the ring.</p> <p>The judge holds down the coloured baton for the competitor that stepped out, and baton in front for the competitor that gets the point.</p>	<p>Blue stepped out of the ring and red is awarded a point</p> 
<p><b>Takedown</b></p>	<p>One competitor takes the other competitor to the ground in a controlled and safe manner.</p> <p>The judge signals with one baton in front and the other pointing down.</p>	<p>Red was taken down and blue should be awarded point(s).</p> 