Why You Shouldn’t Take a Break from Fencing Training

It is easy for life to get busy. When this occurs, it can feel like there's too much on our plate, causing us to feel overwhelmed. Kids are subject to this nature frequently. They can get overscheduled with school, family, extracurricular activities, friends, etc. Not only does this take up their time but mental energy. When kids reach a breaking point, they may look for a simple solution: a way out. They think the answer is "temporary" relief for just a couple of months until the pressure passes, so they cut their fencing classes by taking time off. This results in missing things in the hope of getting more free time, only to find themselves in a more stressful situation.

Cutting out fencing classes causes more problems! Instead of giving fencers a solution, taking a break from training causes them to struggle further down the road. Here are five reasons why your fencer shouldn't take time off.

**1. Loss of momentum**

It's hard to come back from a break. When you're training regularly in fencing, you get in a groove. Your body and mind adjust to a pattern of coming in and completing your workout. As any fencer knows, muscle memory and mental focus are the most crucial aspects of fencing. Getting the momentum back when you stop coming to the fencing club is much more complex than keeping up with training. Even if you scale back to less training due to other obligations, you'll still allow the momentum to continue flowing.

**2. Loss of skill**

That old saying of "use it or lose it" applies to fencing! When you stop doing something, you lose some of the skills that you had built up. Whether it's footwork, blade, or point control, when you don't exercise the skills you've practiced, you tend to lose them. If a fencer doesn't practice fencing for two months, they will have to put significantly more effort into matching their previous skill level.

**3. Loss of muscle**

Just like the mental stamina lost when you stop fencing, you'll also lose muscle mass. A particular set of muscles is used in fencing. As you train, those muscles get built up through repeated use. If training stops, the muscles are no longer utilized and start shrinking! Again, it's possible to scale back fencing training without stopping completely, which keeps this from being a more substantial problem.

**4. Loss of progress**

The social aspect of the sport, especially for young fencers, is essential to keep in mind. When a fencer takes an extended break, they'll find that their peers move forward without them—psychologically speaking, young fencers may get discouraged if they return only to find that their friends have surpassed them. They might be embarrassed and no longer want to continue. We want to avoid this at all costs.

**5. Risk of quitting**

If a young fencer takes time off from fencing to play another sport or to focus on other obligations, they can forget how much they enjoyed it and why fencing entranced them in the first place. We've all seen this in kids! They get distracted, and then getting them back into it can be a challenge. It is crucial to work on keeping your young fencer engaged in the sport rather than allowing them to take time off completely.

**Different Perspective**

Burnout is a genuine concern for any activity, but training doesn't have to be all-or-nothing. Rather than taking time off from fencing training, think about scaling back. Find a balance in which a fencer doesn't have to step back but doesn't feel overwhelmed with external commitments. Often what's needed isn't time off, but rather to change the schedule, the level of expectation, the perspective that a fencer has, or video devices and social media time. Fencing is a healthy, productive outlet that builds both the body and the mind, allowing fencers to cope more effectively with life's challenges.

It is easy to feel like there's too much going on and to say, "I'm just going to stop fencing for a while, so I'll feel less stretched." What we see time and again is that fencing isn't usually the problem. It's the expectations, prioritization, discipline, and mindset. For most young and adult fencers, fencing offers an escape and a positive part of life! Fencing is a fun sport, so we want to encourage less pressure on the individual while also promoting them to focus on the true goal of training: enrichment and personal development through swordsmanship.

Talk to your coach about what you're experiencing and get their advice. DON'T allow yourself to get to the point where you're completely burned out. It's crucial for fencers to be honest with their coaches about their stress level with the sport and their commitments in general. The worst thing is to let that stress overpower you causing you to quit.

Another powerful way to get perspective is to talk to other parents in your club. Nearly every parent has a kid that is super competitive on the strip and very successful in academics. Observe how they train and ask for advice about their time management. Pay attention to how many successful fencers are on the USFA All-Academic Team. This means they excel in both fencing and school! It is possible to find a time for everything. I believe the more available time we have, the less we do. Due to skewed priorities, poor time management, and an incorrect perspective, feeling overwhelmed can overpower us. Don't let this happen to your child. If others can succeed in balancing sport and academics, so can your fencer. In most cases, it is simply a matter of desire.

Before taking a break from fencing, step back and consider these reasons not to. We can help you develop a solution that works best for you.