

TOURNEY ETIQUETTE

I saw two people fight a battle armed with swords...

“WELCOME TO THE CURRENT MIDDLE AGES”

Baldwin of Erebor

The tournament was the major sporting event and pageant in the Middle Ages. There was competition in many areas, not always all martial. There was pageantry. Often there was other entertainment as well.

Society tournaments cannot go as far as those in the old days, but I believe it is the duty of everyone at a tourney to keep the spirit of the occasion. A tournament is, or should be, more than simply an athletic contest.

Some people lament the lack of entertainment during a tournament, but others maintain that the tournament is the entertainment. One does not go to a football game, a boxing match, or the like and lament that there is no other entertainment (though some people go to football games just to see the half-time show... or the cheerleaders!).

Purely for ease of reference here, a conventional view referring to fighters as male and consorts as female is used. This is to avoid expressions as he/she or him/her. The fighter/consort mix can encompass all of the permutations of gender.

Spectators

To some extent, everyone at a tournament is a participant. There are a few things to remember as you watch a tourney.

STAY BACK FROM THE LISTS

The fighting area, generally called the Lists, is marked off in various ways but rarely is it completely enclosed. In the Original Middle Ages, the Lists often were enclosed in two rows of fencing, about four feet apart. This created a buffer zone, so that spectators would be less likely to be hit by dropped or broken weapons or by falling competitors. Some tourneys, especially major ones, will have barrier marshals to remind the spectators to keep a safe distance from the borders of the Lists. This distance is usually about six feet.

DON'T BLOCK THE VIEW

At most tourneys, the Lists are surrounded by pavilions and the like. If you're watching the fighting, glance back over your shoulder to see that you're not blocking the view of people sitting under those shades. Occupants rarely take up the entire width of the shade.

There are two areas in which you should not sit or stand:

The area in front of the Minister of the Lists (MoL) table. The MoL has to be aware of the proceedings in order to keep proper records. No one should block the view from their position, which usually is under a small pavilion.

The area in front of the Royal or Baronial Pavilion. If any Royals or the Baron/Baroness are present, usually there will be a pavilion or shade or the like reserved to them. You should not sit in front of this pavilion and should avoid standing in front of it, even if the Royals or Excellencies are not present.

RESPECT THE COMPETITORS

The competitors will be moving to and from the Lists during the proceedings. Sometimes they're a little less than attentive about who's around them, and also, of course, their weapons and armour make it a little harder for them to dodge through a crowd. Make way for them as they pass.

When a herald announces the competitors in an upcoming match, be quiet so that the people being announced can hear. The announcements are mostly to tell the competitors that their turn is coming up.

When a match is announced, and the herald calls on the competitors to salute the crowd, return the salute. Noisily. Their hearing is impeded somewhat by their helms, so let them know of your support.

While they are actually fighting, keep the noise down. It is not necessary to keep silent, but avoid loud shouts that can be mistaken for a marshal's call.

When the match ends, by all means cheer and applaud. Even if the one for whom you were rooting loses, you still ought to cheer. Applause is not just for victory, but for the effort and skill and courtesy and fortitude which the fighters have displayed. To be sure, you might not cheer as loudly for the other fighter, but still you ought to cheer.

Never boo or hiss or make other derisive sounds. Such actions have no place on or around a field of honour. If for some reason you disapprove of how someone conducted himself, simply remain silent. That silence can resonate loudly in contrast to the usual cheers.

Competitors

When you compete in a tourney, you become part of the show. Embrace that.

Wear garb. All too many fighters put on mundane clothes under their armour. The problem is that although it's hidden while you're in armour, it shows up while you're arming or disarming. Sometimes it is visible under your armour as well.

Remember that when you're in the Lists or on your way to or from, many eyes are upon you. Maintain a dignified and courteous demeanor. Be aware that in armour, you take more space than you do otherwise and ASK people to give way for you in narrow places.

If you're going to pass in front of the Royal Pavilion, check as you approach to see if any of the Royals are in it. If They are, be sure to give a reverence as you pass. Better still to plan your passage so as not to pass between the Royal Pavilion and the Lists.

Remember that a tourney is about courtesy as well as prowess. You may have your game face on, but that does not relieve you of the need to be courteous – outside as well as inside the Lists.

If your consort is there to cheer you on, take leave of her with grace when you go into the Lists, and make a point of knowing where she is, if she intends to stay more or less in one place as you prepare to fight; so that when the herald calls on the fighters to “salute the one that inspires you,” you can make your reverence in her direction.

Forget trash-talking. Such speech has no place on a field of honour. You should, if anything, compliment your opponent before you commence trading blows.

Respect the marshals. Address them as “my lord Marshal” or “Sir Marshal” if one is a knight. And maintain a respectful demeanour toward them. Remember, virtually all marshals are also fighters; they are likely giving up the pleasure of fighting so that you and others may fight. You should appreciate that.

If you win the match, assist your opponent to rise and say something positive. Be polite even if you think your opponent didn't fight well. If you think he broke a rule, complain privily to a marshal.

Consorts

When your fighter competes, you have a duty to support him (or her).

This does NOT mean you must watch each and every bout that he fights, although that's an ideal. You should, however, watch his first one or two matches; and if he gets into the quarter-or semi-finals in an elimination tourney, you should be there to encourage him. The sight of one's consort standing by the List-field has inspired many a fighter to greater prowess and honour than he might otherwise attain.

Ideally, of course, the consorts should be watching in rapt adoration as their noble fighters enter the Lists (that almost made my fillings hurt from all the sweetness!). Understanding that not all consorts are so inclined, it will suffice to mention some of the things you can do to assist and encourage him. I strongly recommend the first; the others are at your option.

Be there for the first fight at the very least. Be in a place where he can see you easily to give the “salute to the one for whom you fight.” Acknowledge the gesture with a curtsy or a blown kiss or the like.

If you do stay to watch the tourney, try to be visible to him at the beginning of each fight, to take and return his salute.

Make some small gesture of assisting him to arm, if he doesn't have a squire or a valet – or even if he does. It can be as simple as handing him his gauntlets or his weapon. There is historical validity in this. I have seen illuminations of a knight's wife and daughters handing him his gear.

Give him a kiss (if he already has his helm on, it can be a "Zen" kiss) as he goes to enter the lists.

Have a cooling drink ready for him when he returns from the Lists. You need not carry it to him; in fact it's probably better not to do so because he's burdened with weapon, helm, and the like. But have it ready when he gets back to your "base."

Another thing that will increase his fondness for you is to have some other light refreshment for him, such as apple or orange slices or grapes. Not all fighters like this but some *really do!*

Make sure he has enough to drink! If there are water bearers, their efforts may be enough, but if there are not, be sure he stays hydrated. It's hard to drink too much at a tourney or *melee*.

Unless you're a fighter yourself, or even if you are, don't be too technically critical of his fighting. At least not during the tourney – unless you can see one specific thing that will make a big difference. A consort's role, during the event, is mostly to provide moral support.

In the same spirit: If he wins the tournament, congratulate him. If he does not win, tell him he fought well, if he did; but if he didn't, just hug him.

Give him a favour. There is increasing awareness that the kind of favours that were popular through much of Society history are not historical, so if you can, make it something historically based, such as a glove (or at least in the shape of a glove) or a symbolic sleeve (a common sort of favor from the original Middle Ages).

No one could be expected to do all of these things, but any of them will endear you that much more to your fighter, and make him more devoted to you; at least, they will if he has any sense of chivalry!

JEB RAITT is a former naval officer and for the last 25 years or so has worked as a technical writer. He lives in Norfolk, Virginia with his wife Catherine, their two teenaged sons, and a cat who adopted them.

DONAL Mac RUISEART (Baron) spent his first dozen years in a monastery, then ran off to go to sea. After a successful career as a mariner, he met the lady he would wed, and they settled in the area that became the Barony of Marinus. He served in several local offices and in time became founding Baron. He is a fighter, a marshal, a Herald, a singer, and dabbles in leatherworking and woodworking.