

Updated Unwillingness to Fight (Non-Combativity) Rules Take Effect Jan. 1, 2023

The rule changes, which will be enacted at all Australian Fencing tournaments beginning Jan. 1, 2023, affects how P-Cards are awarded for unwillingness to fight, also known as non-combativity.

The update concerns Rule t.124 of the [FIE Technical Rule Book](#) and eliminates the second P-Red card within the progression of P-Cards. It also changes the rule so that P-Yellow and P-Red cards are always awarded to both fencers (or teams in team events) simultaneously, regardless of the score of the bout. (For example: If Fencer A has a 5-1 lead over Fencer B, and one minute of fencing occurs without a touch, both fencers will be sanctioned with a P-Yellow card for the first such offense).

Moreover, a P-Black in a team event ends the match immediately. (Previously, a team could sub in their reserve fencer to replace the fencer on the strip who received a P-Black.)

What Is Unwillingness to Fight (Non-Combativity)?

Unwillingness to fight, primarily seen in epee, occurs when there's one minute of fencing without a hit or without a hit scored off-target. "Unwillingness to Fight" rules apply only to Direct Elimination (DE) bouts — not poule bouts.

Some refer to this 60-second span as fencing's "shot clock." These actions reset the shot clock:

- Touch scored
- Touch off target (the floor, for example)
- Touch annulled
- Penalty hit
- Beginning of each period

What Is the Rule Beginning Jan. 1, 2023?

Beginning Jan. 1, 2023, referees will award P-Yellow, P-Red or P-Black cards after one minute of non-combativity to both fencers/teams simultaneously — regardless of the score.

Note that the P-Yellow (warning), P-Red (penalty hit) and P-Black (the possible losing of a bout or match) cards received during any one bout or match (during all 9 relays of a team match) are valid only for that bout or match. They are not transferable to the following bout or match.

Individual Events

- After the first minute of unwillingness to fight, both fencers are sanctioned with P-Yellow cards
- After the second minute of unwillingness to fight, both fencers are sanctioned with P-Red cards
- After the third minute of unwillingness to fight, both fencers are sanctioned with P-Black cards and the bout ends:
 - If the score is tied, the fencer with the higher initial seeding in the competition wins the bout.
 - If the score is not tied, the fencer with the higher score wins the bout.

P-Cards (of any colour) cannot be awarded when the score is 14-14 (in 15-touch bouts) or 9-9 (in 10-touch bouts).

Team Events

- After the first minute of unwillingness to fight, both teams are shown P-Yellow cards
- After the second minute of unwillingness to fight, both teams are shown P-Red cards
- After the third minute of unwillingness to fight, both teams are shown P-Black cards and the match ends. Teams are not permitted to sub in their reserve fencer.
 - If the score is tied, the team with the higher initial seeding in the competition wins the match.
 - If the score is not tied, the team with the higher score wins the match.

P-Cards (of any colour) cannot be awarded when the score is 44-44.

Unwillingness to Fight: Rule Changes

Condition	Until Dec. 31, 2022	Beginning Jan. 1, 2023
Progression of P-Cards	P-Yellow → P-Red → P-Red → P-Black	P- Yellow → P-Red → P-Black
Scores Equal	Both fencers are sanctioned w/ P-Card	Both fencers are sanctioned w/ P-Card
Scores Not Equal	Fencer with lesser score is sanctioned w/ P-Card	Both fencers are sanctioned w/ P-Card
P-Black Sanction	If scores are equal, the higher initial seed wins the bout. If scores are not equal, fencer with the higher score wins the bout	If scores are equal, the higher initial seed wins the bout. If scores are not equal, fencer with the higher score wins the bout
Team Events	In the event of a P-Black, a reserve/alternate may be used if available	In the event of a P-Black, the bout immediately ends, with the outcome contingent on the criteria for P-Blacks

P-Black Card Clarification

Rule t.124.1.c - Individual events – Direct elimination

When, for the third time, there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, a P-black card is awarded as follows:

i) If the scores of the two fencers are equal, the Referee sanctions the fencer with the lower initial seeding in the competition, which is based on the ranking used for the competition, with a P-Black card.

The fencer with the higher initial seeding in the competition which is based on the ranking used for the competition, wins the bout.

ii) If the scores of the two fencers are not equal, the Referee sanctions the fencer with the lower score with a P-Black card. The fencer with the higher score wins the bout.

Rule t.124.2.c - Team events

When, for the third time, there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, a P-Black card is awarded as follows:

i) If the scores for the two teams are equal, the Referee sanctions the team with the lower initial seeding in the competition, which is based on the ranking used for the competition, with a P-Black card.

The team with the higher initial seeding in the competition, which is based on the ranking used for the competition, wins the match.

ii) If the scores for the two teams are not equal, the Referee sanctions the team with the lower score with a P-Black card. The team with the higher score wins the match.

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About the Rule Change

Q: Does unwillingness to fight apply to all age groups and competition levels? Veterans and Youth events? Local events?

A: The updated unwillingness to fight rule applies to all Australian Fencing competitions at the local, regional, and national levels, effective Jan. 1, 2023. This includes all age categories (youth, cadet, junior, senior, veteran).

Unwillingness to fight applies to direct elimination bouts and team matches using the relay format. Unwillingness to fight does *not* apply in pool bouts.

Q: What happens if the fencers demonstrate unwillingness to fight during a poule bout?

A: Unwillingness to fight applies only to direct elimination bouts and team matches. The rule does not apply and should not be invoked during pool bouts.

Q: Rule t.124.3.a indicates that no P-card is awarded in individual competitions at 14-14 or in team matches at 44-44. Does this also apply in 10-touch DE bouts at 9-9?

A: Australian Fencing Federation has adopted an equivalent modification for domestic tournaments (Australian Fencing competitions) that no P-card (yellow, red, or black) may be awarded in individual competitions at 9-9 in 10-touch direct elimination bouts (i.e., direct elimination bouts in Y10 and Veteran categories).

As of this time, the FIE has not yet adopted a similar modification for 10-touch bouts.

Q: There is unwillingness to fight when there is one minute of fencing without a hit or without a hit scored off the target. Does this include hits not on the opponent?

A: As specified in t.124.3.d, the one minute starts again after each hit, each hit off the target, each hit annulled, each penalty hit, and at the beginning of each period or relay.

This includes touches on valid target (scored or annulled), touches on non-valid target (e.g., the arm in foil), touches entirely off target (e.g., the floor, scoring machine, table, etc.), or when touches are annulled.

If the machines register's a touch well after the "Halt!" and not part of the fencing action (e.g., as a fencer is returning to on guard after passing or leaving the strip), this does not restart the one-minute countdown.

The one-minute countdown additionally restarts after any change in score (i.e., due to a touch being scored via fencing or penalty) and at the beginning of each period.

Q: What happens if a fencer challenges the referee's determination of whether one minute of fencing without a hit has elapsed?

A: By rule, declaration of unwillingness to fight is a decision of fact and cannot be appealed.

Q: When, for the third time, there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, if the scores of the two fencers are equal, the referee sanctions the fencer with the lower initial seeding in the competition with a P-black card and the fencer with the higher initial seeding in the competition wins the bout. Who receives the P-black card when ratings are equal between the fencers?

A: Part of the initial seeding procedure for competitions is splitting ties based on equal classification by random drawing of lots, thus initial seeding is not equal. That random order within equal classification determines seeding priority and applies during direct elimination when a P-black card is awarded due to a third instance of unwillingness to fight within a bout.

Q: If a fencer has a yellow card for non-conforming equipment and then unwillingness to fight occurs for the first time, does that fencer get a red card?

A: P-cards (yellow, red, and black) are tracked separately from all other penalty cards and are not cumulative with any other sanction awarded. That is, a fencer may receive a yellow card for a first offence in the 1st group (e.g., non-conforming equipment) and also, receive a P-yellow card for a first offence of unwillingness to fight in the same bout.

Q: If a fencer received a P-yellow card and P-red card for unwillingness to fight in one direct elimination bout and again commits unwillingness to fight in the next round, what card is awarded?

A: P-cards are reset between bouts or matches so the first instance of unwillingness to fight within a direct elimination bout or team match is sanctioned with a P-yellow card (to both fencers or teams) regardless of any instances of unwillingness to fight in previous bouts or team matches.

Q: What if only one fencer is unwilling to fight and the other fencer is trying to score?

A: Unwillingness to fight applies to both fencers and is defined as when there is one minute of fencing without a hit or without a hit scored off the target. When unwillingness to fight occurs, both fencers are sanctioned as laid out in the revised t.124.

Q: Does unwillingness to fight apply only to the fencer who is trailing (i.e., has a lower score)?

A: Unwillingness to fight applies to both fencers. When for the first time there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, the referee sanctions both fencers (individual direct elimination bout) or teams (team events) with a P-yellow card regardless of score. When for the second time there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, the referee sanctions both fencers or teams with a P-red card and awards a point to each fencer or team regardless of score. When for the third time there is one minute of unwillingness to fight, relative score matters. If the scores of the two fencers or teams are equal, the referee sanctions the fencer or team with the lower initial seeding in the competition with a P-black card and the fencer or team with the higher initial seeding wins the bout or match. If the scores of the fencers or teams are not equal, the referee sanctions the fencer or team with the lower score with a P-black card and the fencer or team with the higher score wins the bout or match.

Q: Are fencers who receive a P-black card excluded from the event results the way they are for unsportsmanlike conduct?

A: P-black cards differ from other black cards in that fencers or teams receiving a P-black card lose the bout or match but retain the place normally earned and any corresponding medal or ranking points. In events where teams (or individual fencers) fence off for place, the team continues into the placement bouts/matches as usual.

Q: Does unwillingness to fight apply during the overtime minute if the final period of fencing ends with equal scores?

A: Unwillingness to fight does not apply during an extra minute after the end of regulation time. Before the extra time commences, the referee draws lots to decide who will be the winner if scores are still equal at the end of the extra minute (cf. t.40.3 and t.41.5).

Q: If a team receives a P-black card, can they substitute in their reserve fencer and continue the match?

A: No. A P-black card immediately ends a team match. The team that receives a P-black card (the trailing team if scores are not equal or the team with a lower initial seed if scores are equal) has lost the match.