

**A Guide for Tournament Refereeing in Kendô**

***(Kendô shiai/shinpan un'ei yôryô no tebiki)***

**All Japan Kendô Federation (AJKF)**

**Committee on Tournaments and Refereeing, 2002-03**

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## Preface to the Japanese Edition

One major goal of the All Japan Kendō Federation (AJKF) in 2002 was “to substantially enrich *kendō*, our nation’s martial art, by holding educational seminars to elevate levels of refereeing skills.” All kinds of situations arise in tournaments, and it inevitably falls upon referees to cope with these through judgments grounded in a sound knowledge of official regulations. Thus referees must constantly strive to raise their skills by keeping abreast of those regulations; this will allow them to manage tournaments in a proactive, proper manner. To that end, the AJKF has striven to train instructors who can conduct referee seminars, and has compiled the present *Guide to Tournament Refereeing*. It contains key pertinent regulations plus illustrative situational examples in FAQ form to clarify ambiguities in the main text. We hope that readers will make profitable use of this document.

Committee on Tournaments and Refereeing, 2002-03

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## I. Regulations and Refereeing

### A. Regulations

Article 1 of the AJKF's *Kendô shiai/shinpan kisoku* (Regulations for Tournaments and Refereeing in Kendô (cited throughout as "RTRK") declares as its purpose the following: "to conduct tournaments impartially and to referee properly and fairly while fulfilling the principles of *kendô*," one of which holds that "*kendô* is a Way to mold human character through training in principles of the sword." Article 1, then, is premised on "molding human character" by conducting tournaments in accordance with those principles to carry on *kendô* correctly as a Japanese cultural tradition. We compiled the RTRK to deal with tournament situations and to manifest the general and universal social ideals informing *kendô*, its character, and pedagogic values. Hence refereeing must adhere to Article 1 in RTRK, subject to conditions and procedures determined at tournaments.

### B. The Purpose of Refereeing

The purpose of refereeing is to implement tournament rules and regulations correctly, so as to "arrive at decisions through an accurate judgment of all facts in matches."

### C. Duties of Referees

Referees have a duty to run tournaments in a proper and speedy manner. They must at all times be earnestly cognizant of their mission, duties, and qualifications. Their decisions hold absolute authority and thus must not be dogmatic or subjective. Instead, these must be based on valid, objective criteria. To that end, referees must enhance their own *kendô* skills through on-going practice while striving to raise their level of refereeing.

#### D. What Referees Must Take to Heart

- i. General Issues. Referees must be fair and impartial, well-versed in tournament rules and regulations, familiar with the principles of *kendô*, accomplished in refereeing techniques, physically healthy, and energetic.
- ii. Points of Special Note. Referees must be neat in attire, stern in bearing, attitude, and action; loud and clear in voice; rich in refereeing experience; self-reflective in learning from past mistakes; and eager to profit by observing good refereeing in others.

### **II. Basic Points of Note in Refereeing**

#### A. Effective Hits (*yûkô datotsu* or *Ippon*)

Article 12 in the *RTRK* stipulates necessary conditions for a player to score an effective hit (*yûkô datotsu* or *ippon*): a) fullness of spirit, b) proper posture, c) hits to the stipulated areas (*men*, *kote*, *do*, or *tsuki*); d) with the top-most part of the *shinai* above the *nakayui*; e) with the *tsuru* on top and blade portion down; and f) with *zanshin* or follow-through and readiness against a counter-attack. The special nature of *kendô* as our national martial art—or that which makes *kendô*—is manifest only when these conditions come together in sync. (See Attachment 1, p. 20.) If referees are to bequeath this special nature of *kendô* to future generations, they must be able to recognize an effective hit when they see one. If they make flippant or ill-informed decisions, they debase the true value of effective hits as *ippon*, and thus lose sight of what makes *kendô* the martial art that it is. This is why referees must appreciate how crucially important their judgmental ability is.

Note also that hits manifesting “subtleness of technique” count as *ippon* even if delivered softly, so referees must be able to discern this “subtleness of technique” and not dismiss a hit as inadequate just for being soft. Moreover, they should start from the assumption that, in general there are no *aiuchi* (both players hit at the same time so neither gets *ippon*); i.e., they must not take the easy way out by not making the call.<sup>1</sup>

### B. Interpreting and Discerning *Zanshin*

“*Zanshin*” (follow-through and readiness against a counter-attack) is a general term that denotes mental and physical *kamae* after a hit. Even if a player scores an effective hit for *ippon*, referees may take it away if momentum carries him/her too far across the court or if he/she makes an unseemly victory pose. It is crucial for referees to observe his/her attitude and bearing after the hit, and to make a comprehensive judgment as to whether it should count as *ippon*. Also, the type of *zanshin* shown after preemptive techniques (*sen*) differs from that shown after countering techniques (*ôji waza*) when, for example, *zanshin* may be adopted instantaneously. Referees must know this difference.

### C. Interpreting and Applying Selected Regulations

#### i. Determining Infractions (*hansoku*)

Referees must correctly differentiate “illegal” (*ihô*), “wrongful,” (*futô*), “legal” (*tekihô*), and “appropriate” (*tekisei*) actions in matches. The *RTRK* stipulates certain “prohibited acts” (*kinshi kôji jikô*). These include definitely “illegal” infractions plus “wrongful” acts that, although transcending the limits of acceptability imposed by normal common sense,

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<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: that is, referees should have the skill to determine, as much as possible, whose hit was first, and not just let the match continue by assuming that the hits were simultaneous.

are not illegal. If referees fail to differentiate “illegal” from merely “wrongful” acts, they will be unable to make correct judgments.<sup>2</sup> In cases of infraction (*hansoku*), referees must not jump to a hasty conclusion based on a superficial observation of some action by itself; instead, they should observe the whole sequence of events leading to it so as to determine if an underlying cause produced this action, and then make a proper decision based on the regulations.<sup>3</sup> If there is confusion or doubt about a difficult judgment call, a conference (*gōgi*) is needed, but if an indisputable infraction takes place, such as the dropping of a *shinai*, no conference is needed, and referees should just flag their signals. Referees must be very strict in discerning “wrongful acts,” for these will grow in number and severity if ignored without admonition.

#### ii. About *Tsubazeriai*

*Tsubazeriai* refers to the closest, most intense distance (*maai*) where *tsuba* meets *tsuba* and players scrimmage offensively and defensively to create advantageous openings for striking. Players must either actively try to attack or actively try to disengage when in *tsubazeriai*. If it goes on for long, referees must make a decision based on 3 criteria: Is it a proper *tsubazeriai*? Do the players really intend to attack? Do they really intend to disengage?<sup>4</sup> Referees will make a stage-by-stage judgment call, as noted below, based on what they observe and perceive to be the players’ motives.

a) If the referees’ general observations disclose “abnormal” tactics—as proscribed in the *RTRK* Article 1—this constitutes a “wrongful” (*futō*) action. Also, they must objectively

<sup>2</sup> Translator’s note: In other words, “illegal” (*ihō*) and “wrongful” (*futō*) acts are both “prohibited” (*kinshi*), but only “illegal” acts constitute “infractions” (*hansoku*), two of which entail a penalty of *ippon*, whereas “wrongful” actions may call simply for a warning.

<sup>3</sup> Translator’s note: For example, if one player pushed another out of bounds, referees must decide who should get the *hansoku*—the person who stepped out or the one did the pushing—based on a judgment as to whether the pushing was “wrongful” in the sense of stemming from unnecessary roughness and/or being unrelated to an attempt to attack.

<sup>4</sup> Translator’s note: In other words, are they just staying in *tsubazeriai* to kill time or to catch their breath?

and comprehensively consider the players' movements plus the duration of the *tsubazeriai*, and decide what measures to take, in a conference (*gôgi*) if need be.

b) If a player's fists are constantly pressing against the blade portion of the other's *shinai*, this is clearly an improper *tsubazeriai* and a "wrongful" action.

c) Even if there is a momentary break in the *tsubazeriai* by one player to make a strike, referees should deem the situation "abnormal" if it goes on for too long.

d) If referees deem that a momentary break in *tsubazeriai* is made to initiate a technique or will lead to a technique, the situation is not problematic.

e) A player make momentarily cross the *shinai* in converse fashion as a means to make a strike.<sup>5</sup>

f) If a player becomes violent, intentionally provokes the opponent, or displays other "abnormal" kinds of behavior, these constitute "prohibited" (*kinshi*) acts.

g) Referees must not make light of stalemated *tsubazeriai*; if they call for "*wakare*" too readily, players will take advantage of this by relying on calls for disengagement and not take the initiative themselves.

h) All three referees have an equal voice in making decisions, but those concerning improper or overly long *tsubazeriai* affect the running of matches and thus fall under the head referee's sole prerogative. Assistant referees, therefore, may not call "*yame*."

#### D. Positioning and Repositioning of Referees during a Match

##### i. General Principles

a) Each referee will adjust to movements by the players amid the flow of the match so as

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<sup>5</sup> Translator's note: That is, a player in *tsubazeriai* normally holds the *shinai* tilted upward and to the right in an "X" with the opponent's, but may temporarily reverse this by crossing to the left side before initiating a strike.



to assume the best possible viewing angle while maintaining a balanced distance relative to the other two referees.

b) The head referee stands at the apex of an isosceles triangle with the two assistant referees, and they move as a group to maintain this symmetrical layout.

c) The movement of referees is not limited to set areas of the court.

## ii. Interpreting the General Principles and Other Points

Figure 1

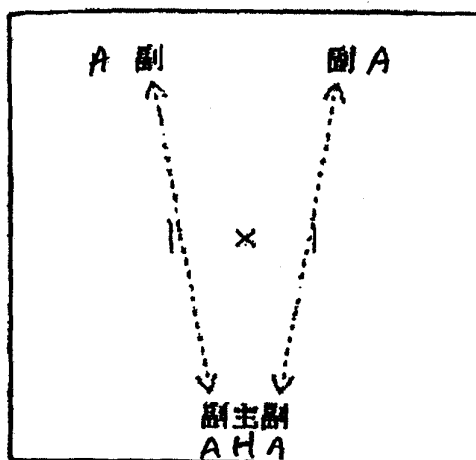
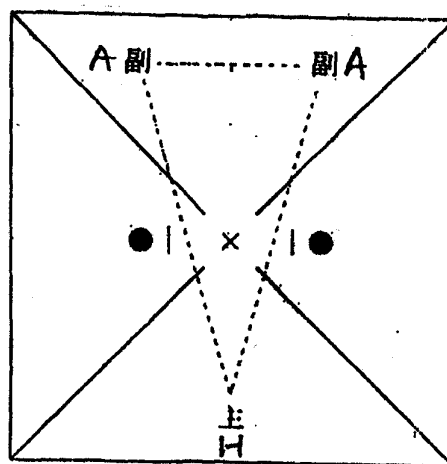


Figure 2



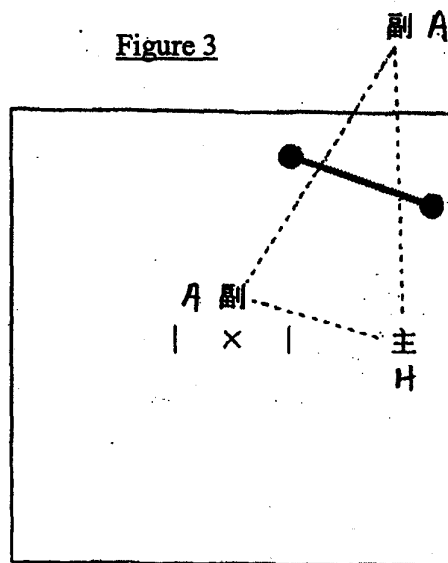
a) As shown in Figure 1, at the start and end of the tournament, the head and assistant referees line up three abreast. In assuming their set positions opposite the head referee, assistant referees walk just past the players' start lines.

b) As shown in Figure 2, the assistant referees' set positions are roughly one meter inside the boundary line facing the head referee. This ideal positioning is not set out in the regulations, for such rigidity would needlessly constrict their movement. Referees are not strictly confined to set sections of the court, but they are not free to move anywhere they please either. The head referee quickly takes the lead in positioning him/herself as the

match develops, and the two assistant referees follow accordingly, each keeping in mind where the others are. The three must adjust their positions symmetrically in a spirit of cooperation, always cognizant of need to view players from the best possible angle.

iii. Atypical Positioning.

a) Depending on how the match flows and where the players move, atypical positioning may be called for such as shown in Figure 3. However, referees should not step outside the court unless it is necessary.



b) In the case of players who adopt *jōdan*, referees should position themselves at the best angle and distance to get a good view.

c) If, by some remote chance, all three referees should find themselves on the same side of the players, the head referee should call “*yame*” immediately. Such a situation should never be allowed to develop, however.

### III. Remarks on How to Manage Matches

#### A. Matches

i. Equipment and apparel (*RTRK* Article 4). There is no stipulation as to gloves worn inside the palms of the *kote*. Regulations prohibit players without a *tare* name-marker from competition. For reasons of fairness and safety, equipment other than that stipulated

in *RTRK* Article 3 will be banned at officially sponsored tournaments.

ii) Match Time (*RTRK* Article 6). As stipulated in Regulation 9, any hit made just as time expires will count as an *ippon* if so judged.

iii) The *Shinai* Striking Area (*RTRK* Article 13). The “*monouchi*” (top-most part of the *shinai* that must be used to get an *ippon*) is that area stipulated in *RTRK* Diagram 2, “Parts of the *Shinai*.”

### B. Refereeing

i) Accidents and Injuries (*RTRK* Article 30). If a player becomes injured during a match, referees will arrive at an objective and comprehensive decision as to his/her ability to continue based on the advice of a doctor and in consultation with the coach responsible for that player in the tournament.

ii) For a 2-sword player, an *ippon* with the short *shinai* can be scored only when he/she restrains the opponent with the long *shinai*, hits with a fully extended arm holding the short *shinai*, and fulfills all conditions for a full and proper hit; but as a rule, hits with the short *shinai* from *tsubazeriai* will not count as *ippon*. Referees will inform the player that a proper *tsubazeriai* entails crossing the two *shinai* with the long one on top and the short one beneath. If either of the *shinai* breaks, and the player lacks a replacement, he/she is deemed unable to continue and will lose the match.

### C. Principles of Management

i) Referees should hold flags and adopt a natural gait when walking before the start of matches. They will roll up flags in a natural and careful way rather than in an unseemly

manner. Rotation of referees will take place as agreed upon by tournament organizers. Likewise, the bow (*rei*) by the referee-in-chief at the *shômen*—in response to bows from court referees and players—should take place as agreed upon by tournament organizers. If a referee signals a mistaken call, he/she needs not signal a retraction, but instead will just make the correct signal.

ii) Miscellaneous issues. There is no formal regulation stipulating which bar in the *men* a player must attach the *men*-strings to, so this cannot be an infraction. If a player's strings seem attached in an abnormal manner, referees will instruct him/her how to attach these properly based on *Principles on How to Teach Kendô to Children (Yôshônen kendô shidô yôryô)*. For safety reasons, players must replace any torn *kote*. The item stipulating that “the tied *men* strings must be 40 centimeters or less measured from the knot,” is an item agreed upon for purposes of facilitating the running of tournaments; it is not a formal regulation. Hence referees may instruct a player to that effect and request cooperation, but may not force compliance. The *nakayui* should be tied securely at a spot roughly one-fourth of the way from the tip of the *shinai* to the tip of the *tsuka*. If there is a problem with the *nakayui*, referees should make a player replace it in order to avoid injuries. Players who do not follow the set order of appearance in matches shall be dealt with as agreed upon by tournament organizers.

#### IV. Major Illustrative Examples with Explanations (FAQ)

##### A. Matches

i. Effective Hits for *Ippon* (*RTRK* Article 12)

Q) Red goes for *men*, but White tries to avoid it by raising his/her right *kote*; as a result,

Red hits White's *kote*. How do we interpret this?

A) Red's intention was to hit *men*, and the *kote* got hit accidentally; so, as a general rule, this would not count as *ippon*. But circumstances may differ, so judges should come to a comprehensive decision after determining the specific facts in each case.

Q) Red is judged to have gotten an effective hit (*yûkô datotsu*), but in the next instant White makes a *tsuki* so that Red's posture collapses or he/she falls down. Does Red still get *ippon* for this *men*?

A) If Red's collapsed posture or fall stemmed an external cause, the *tsuki*, the effective hit to *men* should count, but judges must take into account relative factors such as White's *zanshin* (or follow-through and readiness against a counter-attack), whether Red lost his/her posture or fell owing to White's *tsuki* or if Red did this on his/her own, and the preemptive or reactive (*sen/go*) nature of the *men* and *tsuki*; i.e., whether White's *tsuki* was intended as such from the start or just a reaction to Red's *men* strike.

Q) One-handed hits must be "good and solid" if these are to count, but how do judges determined what "good and solid" is?

A) If it is an "effective hit," it is *ippon*. There is no set stipulation as to what constitutes "good and solid." Judges must rely on their experience and knowledge of the regulations, and even if there is some disagreement, the system of having 3 judges allows for an objective decision to be reached.

Q) If Red gets hit by White but maintains fighting spirit and good posture and keeps his *shinai* tip pressed against White's upper body, White's does not score an effective hit.

But are there some clues to help referees make this decision?

A) One cannot make a case in such highly abstract, theoretical terms. Judges must make a

comprehensive decision after fully observing relative conditions and factors such as *zanshin*, and the relationship between *sen* and *go*; i.e., if Red intended from the start to parry the hit by keeping White at bay with his/her own *shinai* tip. Hence judges must train themselves about crucial aspects to watch out for in difficult calls such as this.

Q) A hit by Red made on White immediately after White has fallen down counts as *ippon*.

But how do judges define “immediately”?

A) Judges must not look only at the one hit in isolation from other factors such as the process leading to it and actions by White to combat Red after having fallen down. In general, “immediately” is defined as “in a single breath,” but this concept too falls to the observation and judgment of the judges.

Q) The hits by a 2-sword player that count are limited in nature. Why is this so?

A) From the standpoint of Japanese *kendô* culture, 2-sword playing is permitted; but for reasons of fairness and safety, it comes under various constraints.

Q) How should judges deal with a player who shifts into a position to block with his/her *shinai* immediately after hitting the opponent?

A) Because such a hit lack *zanshin*, or follow-through, it does not fulfill the conditions for an effective hit and thus does not count as *ippon*.

## ii. Prohibited Actions (*RTRK* Article 17)

Q) How do judges deal with a player who commits two infractions simultaneously?

A) It is hard to think of a situation where two simultaneous infractions take place, so judges must decide which took place first and assign a penalty for it; or if these were indeed simultaneous, the more major infraction counts for a penalty.

Q) Red hits a backward-moving *men* (*hikimen*) but White pursue him/her with *tsuki*.

How do judges deal with this *tsuki*?

A) If it is not a correct *tsuki*, it is an infraction; i.e., judges must determine whether White made the *tsuki* intending to follow it with a hit, and whether it was executed properly (*seitô*) or wrongfully (*futô*).

Q) Red makes White drop his/her *shinai* by striking it with great force. Who receives the penalty, White for dropping the *shinai* or Red for striking it so forcefully?

A) If Red struck White's *shinai* as part of normal offensive and defensive maneuvering, that is not a "wrongful" (*futô*) action and hence is not an infraction, but if Red did this in an unseemly manner, it does constitute an infraction according to *RTRK* Article 1.

Q) If, for some reason, a portion of Red's *bôgu* comes off, does this count as an infraction in the sense of improper "attire and wearing of equipment"?

A) It is not an infraction according to the regulations. "Attire and Wearing of Equipment" calls merely for a warning as being unsafe as well as instructions as to how to proceed. But if the situation is serious enough to make continuing the match impossible, this does constitute an infraction.

Q) Are there some criteria to differentiate *tai-atari* from shoving the opponent out of bounds?

A) Judges must fully observe whether the action was "proper" (*seitô*) or "wrongful" (*futô*) as well as determine the real cause of, or intention behind, the resulting action.

Q) A judge has assigned Red a penalty, in the sense of a stern warning, for having engaged in "wrongful" *tsubazeriai*. Is this a valid decision?

A) The judge must decide if the *tsubazeriai* was in fact wrongful in nature; if so, there is

no need for “in the sense of a stern warning.”

Q) If the players are not engaged in a stalemated *tsubazeriai*, but rather are entangled with each other, is this an infraction carrying a penalty?

A) Yes, because this is a “wrongful” *tsubazeriai*; the entanglement results from not doing *tsubazeriai* properly. Logically speaking, players must be in a position to hit easily if they are to use any techniques, but they got entangled because they are not. Hence they only seem to be stalemated for not being able to use any technique.

Q) When should judges deem that “disengagement” from *tsubazeriai* has occurred?

A) This is when one of the players moves to hit from *tsubazeriai*; or, “disengagement” begins when one begins to make a movement from it.

## B. Refereeing

### i. On Methods of Refereeing (*RTRK* Article 29)

Q) Two of the referees signal an effective hit for a player, and thus it became established, but the third referee made no signal. In this case, is it OK simply to let the match proceed after the *ippon* is established, or should the third referee be told to give a signal?

A) Don’t just let the match proceed; have the third referee flag his/her signal. Although the *ippon* is established, according to *RTRK* Article 29 (Methods of Refereeing), the last referee must flag a signal immediately after deciding. If you just proceed normally, the third referee will inevitably conclude there is no need to flag a signal.

Q) When three referees are positioned on opposite sides of the players, should the referee in a poorer position to view a hit just go along with referee(s) in the better position?



A) Each referee should observe the hit and make his/her own decision. The referees in a better position to see do not always make correct judgments.

Q) When one player's *tsuki* seems violent and is deemed to be dangerous, is it proper to call "yame"?

A) It is proper to call "yame," and a penalty is warranted as well if the infraction is judged to be a dangerous action not intended to produce an attempt at hitting.

Q) May an assistant referee call "yame" when *tsubazeriai* goes on for a long time?

A) In general, he/she may not do so, because sole decision-making power for matters related to the running of matches lies with the head referee.

Q) If assistant referees have doubts about or disagreements with the head referee about how he/she is handling the *tsubazeriai*, may they call "yame"?

A) They may not do so. Cooperation and unity of will between the three referees is called for before and after each judgment call. If this is lacking beforehand, the referee-in-chief should issue advice, directions, and/or warnings after judgment calls are made.

Q) The 3 referees deem that a "wrongful" *tsubazeriai* is taking place and call for a conference. Are the assistant referees obligated to determine that one or the other player warrants a penalty?

A) The assistant referees may decide that one or both of the players does not deserve a penalty. Whether or not to call a conference about a "wrongful" *tsubazeriai* is a matter that concerns the running of matches, which falls under the sole prerogative of the head referee, but all 3 have a right to decide whether a penalty is warranted.

Q) When an infraction has indisputably occurred, but the head referee has not noticed it or could not view it, may the assistant referees call "yame"?

A) In such a case, assistant referees may call “*yame*.” There are times when the head referee has not noticed or could not see an infraction when an emergency occurs so that continuing the match is impossible or when dangers lurk beneath the surface.

Q) What should assistant referees do when they, but not the head referee, have noticed that one player’s *shinai* has rotated so that the *tsuru* is upward and the blade portion is not in a position to cut?

A) Assistant referees should inform the head referee of that fact at some convenient point in the match when action has stopped after a “*wakare*” or “*yame*.” After the head referee calls “*yame*,” clearly instruct the player one time that the *shinai* has rotated, and if he/she later fails to correct the problem and makes an otherwise effective hit, this will not count as *ippon*.

Q) Two referees say that a player has stepped out of bounds, but the third referee—who is in the closest and best position to see—strongly insists that this did not happen. How should this situation be dealt with?

A) Go by the facts and let that decision stand; just being in the closest position does not guarantee that one referee has seen, or was able to see, the action better than the others.

Q) When the two players are entangled with each other near the boundary line, should judges wait until one or the other of them goes out of bounds before doing something?

A) They should not. Unlike with effective hits, referees should not wait for infractions to happen. For reasons of fairness and safety, make an appropriate judgment based on the situation.

Q) When the two players hit each other almost at the same time, the 2 assistant referees signal that Red got *ippon* whereas the head referee signals that White got it and then calls

for a conference. Is the head referee right in doing this?

A) It is not right for the head referee to call for such a conference.

Q) After a conference to discuss whether an infraction or effective hit has occurred, only the head referee signals the decision; but when the conference reaches a divided decision, 2 vs. 1, this method does not allow the audience to tell which referee dissented. Should all 3 signal their decisions separately in order to make this clear?

A) Once a conference has been called and a collective decision reached, only the head referee need signal what it is. This is based on the idea that, when there is disagreement, "the head referee signals the final decision representing all three."

## Attachment 1 – Discerning an Effective Hit

**(*Kiai*, *shinai*, and body movement all in sync [*Ki-ken-tai itchi*])**

### **Principles of Proper Kendô (*Riai*)—Cognition (Visibly, Audibly Discernable)**

#### I. Necessary Conditions for an Effective Hit (*ippon*)

- a. Proper posture (visible)
- b. Forceful spirit (visible) loud *kiai* (audible)
- c. Hit areas—*men*, *kote*, *dô*, *tsuki* (visible, audible)
- d. Using top-most part of the *shinai* above *nakayui* (visible)
- e. *Tsuru* on top, blade portion on the bottom (visible)

#### II. Contributing Factors for an Effective Hit (*ippon*)

- a. Proper distance (visible)
- b. Timing, seizing of opportunities to hit (visible)
- c. Body movement (visible)
- d. Snap of wrists, use of palms (visible)
- e. Power + crispness of hits (visible, audible)

***Zanshin* + (spiritual and physical) *kamae***