

## CHAPTER 9:

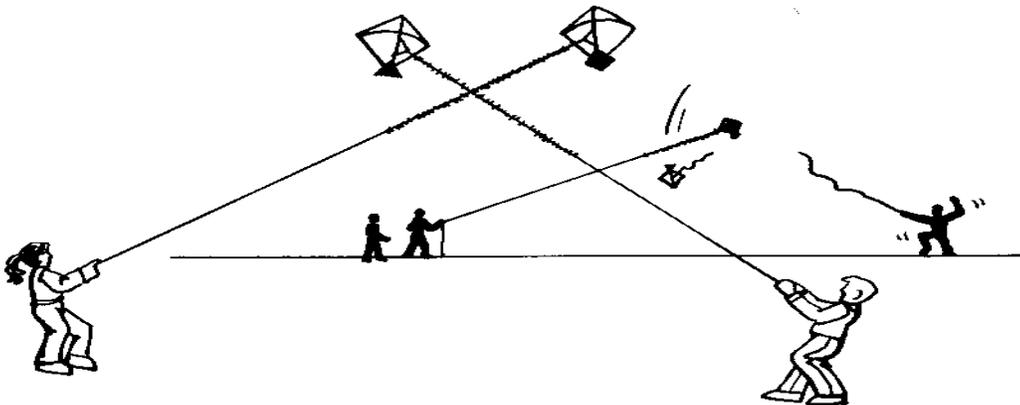
# FIGHTER CONTESTS

Ready to see how your flying skills shape up against the competition??

Depending on where you live or travel, fighter contests are either commonplace or fairly unusual. The good news is that more and more kite events are beginning to incorporate competitions specifically for fighters. And even if they aren't on the event schedule, some type of informal contest will often result whenever two or more fliers gather together.

After all, your kite was made and designed, in part, to “engage” others. We don't call them “fighters” for nothing...

In this chapter, we're going to talk about four different types of contests — Cutting Line Fights, Line Contact Contests, Non-Contact Precision, and Freestyle. We'll also share some hints that may help you improve your performance.



If you are ready for these types of contests, you're ready for anything. Your self-confidence, practice, and ability will prepare you for almost any kind of flying. Besides, contests are fun, and fun is what fighter flying should really be focusing on anyway.

*A standardized rule book for Fighter and Rokkaku contests is now available from the American Kitefliers Association. This rule book will also be used by the AKA at nationally ranked events.*

*For a copy of the rule book, send \$5 to the American Kitefliers Association at 1559 Rockville Pike, Rockville Maryland 20852, USA.*

## General Competition Suggestions

No matter what type of contest you enter, there are some basic tips that will help you do better and have more fun.

- Practice in as many different wind conditions as possible. Remember, it's never the winds fault.
- Check your equipment and tuning before you compete. Don't rely on new or unfamiliar kites and line.
- Watch the contestants ahead of you to see what the wind is doing or what new tricks they are using.
- Remember that kites perform differently in different winds. Practice with a variety of sizes and designs. Compete with the best one for the conditions.
- Make sure that whoever is controlling the contestant order knows who you are and where you are. Don't make them come looking for you.
- Be ready to go when it's your turn. Never keep the judges waiting.
- If relaunches are allowed, recruit a good relaunch crew. No one plans to crash. Remember to brief your crew so they know what you want done.
- Think positive! Don't be nervous. If you say, "I'm gonna crash!", you probably will. Fly to please yourself and you'll always do your best.
- Accept bad breaks graciously. Be a good sport. Congratulate the people that beat you and always thank the judges and field crew.
- Learn from everything - good and bad - that happens on the field.
- Enjoy yourself! Enjoy yourself! Enjoy yourself!

Competitive flying is an excellent way to test your skill and improve your ability. The best advice we can give you is to PRACTICE. Get to know your equipment, study the rules, and watch the other fliers for new ideas. Then PRACTICE MORE.

Finesse, precision, and delicacy of control are the hallmark of an expert fighter kite flier. Good luck!

*Before you can become a good fighter, you must become a good flier. Concentrated practice in launching and flying will give you a "feel" for your kite. When you know what your kite can do and you are able to make it perform as you want it to perform, then you are ready to try kite fighting.*

**Dinesh Bahadur  
Pacific Grove, California**

## Types of Competitions

The rules for fighter kite contests often vary from event to event. Sometimes, the rules are simply whatever the players agree on before the match. While that imposes a certain amount of uncertainty on the process, it also allows for a great deal of creativity. And that's good!

*Rules are stuffy! Too much structure is counter to what I think fighters are all about. The idea is to be flexible, creative and to have fun. Make up the "rules" when the fliers get to the field.*

**Mel Govig**  
**Randallstown, Maryland**

So now that we've told you that there are no "standard" kinds of contests, let's talk about four of the "most standard" events you may encounter.

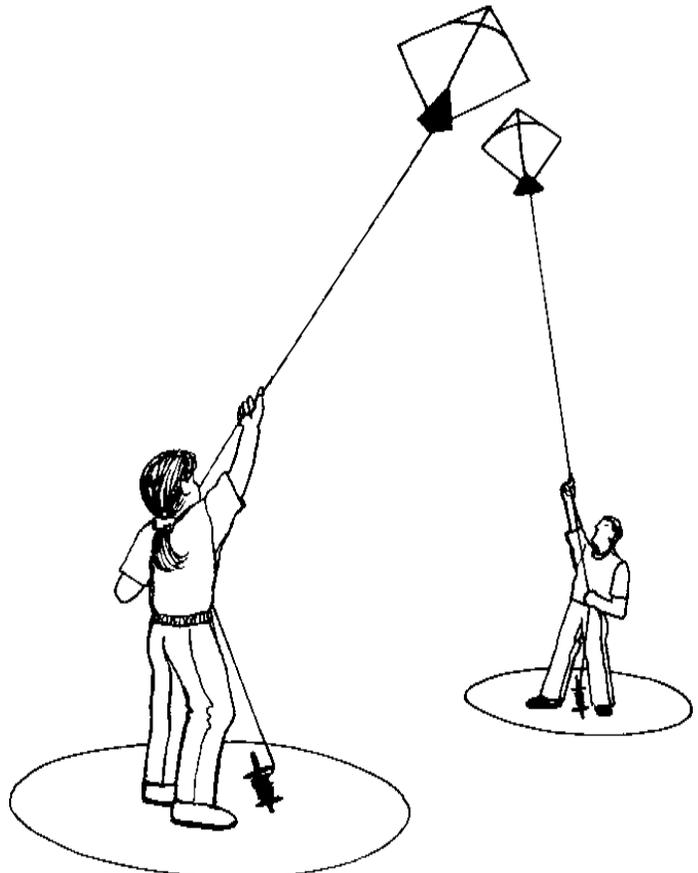
**Cutting Line Fights:** There are three types of contests you can enter with cutting line: one-on-one matches, group-against-group, or an open-air free-for-all. In all cases, the object is to cut down opponents. Contestants maneuver their fighters so the lines cross. Then they either let out line to cut by force, or pull in to try and slice the opposing line. Usually, the line moving fastest wins.

In a one-on-one match, contestants stand in separate circles which are spaced several feet apart. This prevents the fliers from moving around each other and focuses the contest on maneuvering the kites.

Contestants launch and fly from within their circles for the duration of the fight. The loser is the first person cut down or grounded.

Winners continue to advance into matches against other winners until an overall victor emerges.

Another alternative is to compete with a number of kites for a set amount of time. Contestants keep putting up kites until the allotted time runs out. Then the flier who has cut the most kites is declared the winner.



*In many traditional Asian contests, a kite which is cut loose becomes the property of the contest victor or the first person to catch it. Children will often gather downwind of the field waiting for prizes. Remember this tradition if you travel overseas. Don't enter your favorite kite in a contest unless you are prepared to lose it.*

**Makoto Ohashi**  
**Tokyo, Japan**

Remember that cutting line wears out or loses abrasiveness after contact with other lines. This means that you must either replace portions of your line after each match, or concentrate on attacking opponents with different sections of your line.

Remember also, that cutting line can cut you or anyone else it comes into contact with. Make sure that no one is in the flying area during a cutting line contest.

Sometimes, contests will limit the amount of cutting line to just a few feet up near the kite. Not only does this require more skill, it also has the added benefit of not making the contestants handle the glass line and cut themselves.

**Line Contact Contests:** Line contact games are very similar to one-on-one cutting contests except that glass line is not used. The object isn't to sever an opponent's line, but instead, to touch it in a certain way.

Sometimes, points will be awarded for a touch from underneath or below. Sometimes, the opposite will apply and the goal will be contact from above. The focus of these contests then becomes maneuvering for position rather than quickly making contact and working for a clean slice.

Contact games also last longer because the fighters stay in the air and time is not taken to retrieve the losers.

*I like to stay on the move. If you are on the offensive, your opponent will be on the defensive. They will be forced to think and respond to your movements. Of course, thinking takes time. When they hesitate, that's when you hit them.*

**Robert Loera**  
**Honolulu, Hawaii**

**Non-Contact Precision:** Precision fighter flying is much different than contact or cutting contests. The goal is controlled flight rather than "combat".

In most precision games, a paper cup or other target is placed on a pole in the middle of the flying field. Fliers stand behind a line upwind. The object is to knock the target down with your kite or flying line. Winners are either the flier to hit the target fastest, or the flier to make the most hits in a set amount of time.

For a real show, all the fliers compete at the same time with many poles set on the field. Each contestant has their own target and judge. They all launch together and compete in an entertaining frenzy of maneuvers, tangles, and hits.

*Speed and balance are critical in competition. Spend some time tuning before the match, and once you have the kite ready, put it down. Don't risk a knock before your heat which will "ruin your tune".*

**Joel Scholtz**  
**Austin, Texas**

**Freestyle:** Freestyle contests are more subjective than those events where hits, line contacts, or cuts can easily be counted. The object of a freestyle show is artistry and style. Contestants perform one at a time and panels of judges are asked to score performances for their entertainment value.

Types of performance might include flying trains of fighters or two independent kites at once. Some contestants perform specific patterns in the sky or interpret music in a choreographed "ballet". Balloon popping with kites is also real popular.

Just about anything is possible in a freestyle event. The kite, the line, and the flier all become part of an integrated program that has great crowd appeal. Some of these events have even been held indoors with the flier's movements and line handling skills generating the lift needed to keep the fighter airborne.

## **Fighting Techniques**

Earlier, we said that finesse, precision, and delicacy of control are the skills that will make you most successful in a fighter contest. Perhaps we should have added quick reactions and experience to the list. The experienced competitor will almost always have an advantage because they have honed their skills and know what to expect. But you can overcome that advantage if you practice.

Holding and handling the flying line is probably the most important factor in improving competition performance.

*Always be careful about your line handling in a contest or match. The silliest way to lose points is to let your line get tangled or hung-up on your shoes and shirt buttons.*

**Robert Loera**  
**Honolulu, Hawaii**

The line should be held so that the thumb presses against the underside of the forefinger about three quarters of an inch from the tip. This part of the forefinger is very sensitive. With practice, you can feel the difference in pressure when another line contacts or crosses your own.

Practice line handling until you get really good at



moving the fighter where you want it to go. You want to be able to climb, dive, or move horizontally quite quickly to avoid an opponent's line. In extremes, you may need to let the line go entirely slack.

*Practicing for a match is important, but the biggest problem people have is practicing without a partner. Start out by just maneuvering your kite left and then right. Then try flying under the branch of a tree. Use any kind of stationary "target" available. Just make sure your target isn't too tall to climb if it catches you first.*

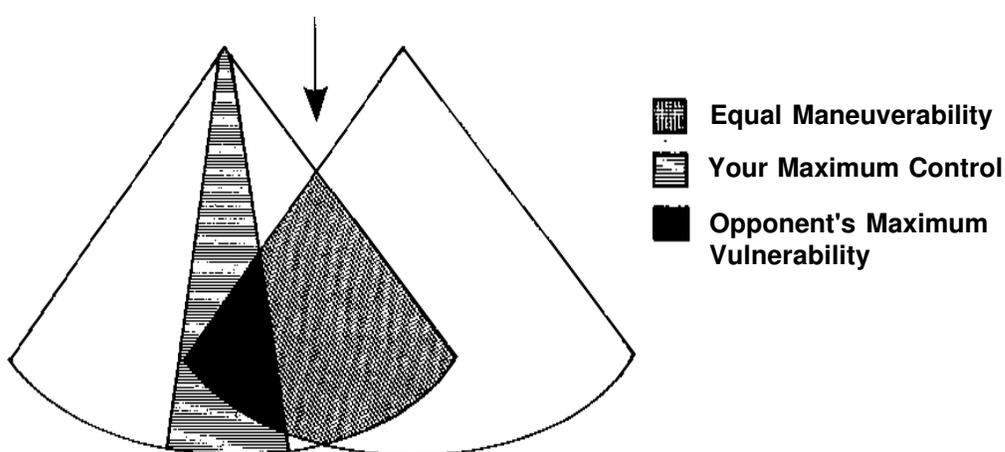
**Robert Loera**  
**Honolulu, Hawaii**

As many kites will be lost in a contest to ground touches as to actual contact or cutting. Remember what we learned earlier about how the wind changes as it nears the ground and about flying line stretch and drag.

- Long line means the kite will move slower.
- Short line allows the kite to move faster.
- Long line provides more maneuverability and height.
- Short line offers a smaller target to attack but are also more vulnerable to a ground touch.

Most maneuvering of fighters occurs at 5 to 10 degrees off center and above or below the natural angle of flight. At a natural angle, a fighter is usually very stable and it will take exceptional action on your part to put it in motion. Immobility is vulnerability in a kite fight.

The length of line used by both fliers determines the size of the "engagement zone". If your line is longer, your fighter will need to fly a further distance in order to bring your line into striking distance.



Another thing to remember is that most fighters perform at their best in a limited area directly downwind called the "power zone". Enticing an opponent out of their power zone and into your's gives you a decided advantage.

*Often in a fight, one contestant will "hang" in the far side of their maneuverable zone. Excited by the prospect of an opponent "just sitting around", the opposing flier will cross out of their optimal maneuverable zone to attack. Who's the "sitting duck"? The attacker who through impatience has swung out of the wind.*

*Don't follow the bear into their own den! Be patient. Make the bear come out to meet you in the middle ground.*

**Ric Merry  
Seattle, Washington**

Beware an opponent who is accelerating up as well as to the right or left. Each kite has a limited flying area which is based on the line length and the wind speed. At the end of every skyward dash of a fighter, there has to be a turn. Which direction it will take, and how soon, is the stuff of which great kite battles are made.

With practice and experience, you will learn about angles of opposition, wind effects, and anticipating an opponent's moves. After that, it's simply a matter of reaction time and split-second decisions.