

A Viewer's Guide to Crown Tourney

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Crown Tourney is a lot like Christmas. You never know what the day will bring. Someone is going to receive exactly what they had hoped for and others will be disappointed.. But regardless the outcome of the tournament, it will be a good day for the Kingdom.

Crown is much more than just another tournament ...

Have you ever actually **watched** what happens at Crown Tourney aside from the fighting? I have to admit, at the first tourneys I attended nothing else seemed to be happening but then I started to really **look** beyond what was going on inside the list. There is something to see everywhere! The King and Queen are in attendance with Their guards, retainers and full retinue. Their Heirs will be determined and thrust to the forefront. Spectators can expect to bear witness to the best that Our Kingdom has to offer in pageantry, heraldry, appearance, generosity, chivalry and nobility.

Before the Tourney even starts, it is obvious that this is not any average event by the increase in pomp and pageantry. There are heralds and fighters at many events, likely the same ones you will see at Crown, but Æthelmearc has grown to have a rich tradition of pulling out all of the stops for such a special occasion and heraldry abounds. Most Crown Tourneys are fought outside and since it will likely be a long hot day or a long soggy day, pavilions surround the list on all sides. The pavilions themselves are often a reflection of those who seek relief from the elements beneath them. The numerous hand made furnishings rival those seen at a high level A&S competition... and not too terribly surprising since some of the items in use have been entries in some competition or another.

After the pavilions are erected and organized, but before the tourney starts the attendees will often walk around the list and greet each other. It is not uncommon at all to hear those about to compete for the richest prize in Æthelmearc wishing each other the best of luck in the tourney, laughing and giggling, telling each other how nice they look... and it's not just the gracious consorts doing all of the polite talking. There is true friendship, nobility and courtesy in the words they speak as they wish each other good fortune and safe combat.

Another sign of the pomp and pageantry is the clothing worn at Crown Tourney. It is without doubt not the usual tourney garb. Some combatants have special armor or fighting clothes that they wear only for high profile tourneys like Crown. Likewise the Consorts often debut new outfits for the occasion. As each couple is formally presented, one by one, to Their Majesties it is a rare chance to stand back and just look at different styles of clothing, armor and accessories.

This is also a good time to learn about different styles of court etiquette. A herald will announce each of the couples. Couples are sometimes required to have banners and banner bearers, but beyond that, occasionally armor bearers or an entourage will also be in the procession. All will bow or curtsy before the Crown. Most of the retinue will continue on and leave the Royal presence, as the couples remain unattended to exchange pleasantries. There is no set protocol, so some combatants and consorts will honor the Crown by kneeling before them, others will remain standing ... but how the couples approach and interact is a tutorial and model of appropriate courtly behavior.

There is a code of list field etiquette for observers as well as participants. Most of it is common sense, but in the excitement and wonder of the day it is easy for anyone to get caught up in the thrill and forget about manners. A few things to try to remember: Their Majesties view of the list and path (if they are walking somewhere) should never be blocked. The same courtesy is extended to fighters approaching and leaving the list. Interfering with a consort's view of their champion during a bout they are competing in is also considered discourteous. Pavilions are set back from the side of the list to make a walkway. Please do not stand in the walkway and prevent someone else from using it or blocking the view of someone beneath a pavilion. If you are on an uncrowded area and want to stop for a minute to watch something or take a picture, absolutely feel free to do so, but please look behind you to make sure you have not blocked someone else's view of something they are paying rapt attention to.

As the tourney progresses, the heralds will announce each bout and the one that will happen next so that the combatants have time to prepare themselves. The combatants will approach the list focused on the task at hand. The consorts, usually in the company of a close friend or two and often a man at arms or Squire as well, will follow closely behind. Both heralded groups approach – focused and hopeful. Once inside the list the marshals direct the fighters through the normal honors ... but watch carefully, many of the ladies do honor to the Crown and to each other as well. Some of the combatants will approach their inspiration at the side of the list and also take a moment to speak to their opponent's consort. Even if you can't hear the words you can see the honors being given in their gestures and reactions.

If you appreciate the nuances of heavy weapons combat, then the bouts themselves can be entertaining... if not, then it's mostly about someone winning and someone losing. If you aren't interested in the fight, try to position yourself to watch the consorts. It is obvious which ones are familiar with the art of combat... They may involuntarily begin moving their bodies as if they are the ones fighting the tourney. Many times I have noticed the killing blow thrown by combatant and consort in perfect unison. The responses of consorts and combatants after the final shot has been thrown are some of the most emotional moments of the tourney. Their reactions demonstrate a range of feelings ... elation, surprise, frustration, disappointment and it doesn't always fit the normal patterns. I have seen victors be disappointed because they have just knocked their best friend out of the tourney and the defeated smile, laugh and thank the victor for such an honorable and challenging fight.

The flow of groups to and from the list is something that many seasoned Crown observers enjoy watching. As the next combatants and consorts approach, they weave through the victorious and vanquished returning to their pavilions to accept the results of the previous bout and contemplate what lies ahead.

Thus goes the tourney until the semi final and final rounds. The list is reconfigured to give more room for the combat. The final two or four couples are often heralded once again into the list and presented to Their Majesties. The Heirs Coronets are brought out and Their Majesties speak directly to the small group of the joys and burdens that go with the honor they are seeking to claim. Since winning is a commitment of time, money and focus it is important for all who compete for the Crown to understand that they vie for a job as well as a title. The format for the remainder of the tourney is explained and the pairings announced. The couples go off to prepare. The area around the list becomes more congested with those who have come to witness the selection of the Heirs. Those closest to the list do get a better view, but they must pay attention to the happenings inside and outside the list. The final combatants, their consorts and Their Majesties will need to move about freely.

Once the bouts have begun it is important to remember that the ropes defining the borders are not solid. Weapons, pieces of armor and entire fighters can and do occasionally cross the ropes. Do not crowd in so closely that if there is a need for someone to move quickly that they cannot. This is a time for watching many directions at once... The fight, the consorts, Their Majesties, the marshals and other spectators. As soon as you realize the final blow has been struck, look at as much as you can possibly take in. I have learned more about human nature, grace, courtesy and true nobility from watching these brief moments than I have encountered in all of my years.

The Crowning of the new Heirs usually follows soon after the tourney ends. Since this is the theme of the event it is usually a focal point and what most people remember... but if you have paid attention you may have noticed that while there was only one prize, many have won acclaim and honor through their comportment, appearance, courtesy, skill or service. If you are fortunate enough, you may even see tokens of appreciation being given to those who have inspired or been inspired – from those who competed for the Crown and those who were just mere spectators. For while Æthelmearc gathered to witness the choosing of Heirs, the Kingdom has also draw together to relive the full pageantry, spectacle and nobility of the Middle Ages....and those who know what to look for can be caught up in the moment and feel as if they have been transported back for a brief second to what we try so hard to recreate.