

Changes and Corrections to the Interpretation Handbook

Page 2: After NYSPHSAA change “4 full-length bouts” to 5 full-length bouts. Also two lines down from there change “22 points” to 20 points.

Page 3: In paragraph a, change ALL “22 points” to 20 points.

Page 4: Item 3, change “22 point” to 20 point.

Page 5: 3-1-1 Should read An American flag patch, approximately 2 ½ x 3 ½ inches.

Page 11: Weigh-in procedure for Dual Meets change “? hour“ to ½ hour

At the business meeting October 5, 2009 a motion was made to eliminate wrestlers post match hand shake with opposing coach because of flu concerns etc.

NYSPHAA office does not want to mandate sport specific hand shaking procedures at this time. It is suggested to have both coaches agree on procedure that will be used prior to the start of the dual meet, I would therefore assume that tournament directors would have the same latitude in determining handshake procedure for their tournament.

Five new rules changes for the 2009-10 wrestling season were approved by the National Federation of state High school Associations (NFHS) Wrestling Rules Committee at its annual meeting this past April in Indianapolis. The NFHS Board of Directors subsequently approved those changes.

Representation Rule Addressed

Rule 1-2-1: In individually bracketed tournaments, the contestant representing a school shall be named by weight class prior to the conclusion of the weigh-in and no substitution is allowed after the conclusion of the weigh-in.

The change eliminates a scenario in which Team A sent Wrestler A to the scales to be weighed in Team A's found out that after Wrestler A weighed in, Team C was sending in the past year's state champion at that weight class, Team Ns coach attempted to substitute a different wrestler in that class. As is already stated in Rule 4-5-6, the named wrestler has to be named before the conclusion of the weigh-in. The rule now also reads the same as 10-2-1. The originally scheduled Wrestler A must participate or forfeit.

Situation 1: After the weigh-in period for an individually bracketed tournament (but before any wrestling), Team A's 130pound wrestler becomes ill. Team A's coach wants to move the 125-pound wrestler up to the 130-pound weight class. Is that permitted?

Ruling 1: No. Once the weigh-ins are complete, the contestants are set.

In NY a contestant is considered to be on the bracket when making weight at the weigh-in. (NY Handbook page 27)

Doctor's Ruling May Come Before or After Weigh-in

Rule 4-2-3: In a relatively minor change, the designated, on-site meet physician now has the flexibility to look at a wrestler's skin condition either immediately prior to or immediately after weighing in. As it was written, the physician could only examine the wrestler after he or she stepped off the scales.

In a related change, the designated, on-site meet physician now has the flexibility to allow or to deny a wrestler's participation based on skin condition. Previously, a physician could only allow a wrestler to participate if a physician's release form denied participation. Now, if the form says the wrestler may participate but the examining physician feels there is a danger, the designated, onsite meet physician may deny participation. That is consistent with previous interpretations.

Changes Address Weigh-Ins

Rule 4-5-3: Tournament weigh-ins can be chaotic or run smoothly. A large 32-team tournament, with four scales, can easily weigh in four teams simultaneously. To give the Tournament Director the desired flexibility, tournament weigh-in may proceed by team(s) with the lowest weight class to the highest and end immediately upon the completion of the highest weight class.

One head coach gathers his entire squad, they know to line up by weight class, their names follow each other on the team roster and as fast as they can get on the scale and let it settle, the administrators can skip down one line and record the weight.

Situation 1: Thirteen of the 14 Team A wrestlers report on time to the weigh-in room at the start of weigh-ins. The 140-pound wrestler comes in to the weigh-in room as the 135-pound wrestler steps on the scale.

Ruling 1: That 140-pound wrestler would be ineligible for that tournament (Rule 4-5-3).

A contestant may wrestle at a higher weight class depending on where his/her actual weight qualifies the contestant. An additional weigh-in is neither required nor allowed (Rule 4-5-8).

If a wrestler weighs in at 120.3 pounds, of course, that wrestler is not eligible to participate in the 119-pound weight class. But that wrestler could participate at 125 or 130 pounds. The wording of last year's rule seemed to indicate the wrestler had to re-weigh when those weight classes open up. Everyone knows the wrestler's weight is 120.3. Rules 4-5-3 and 4-5-8 are now compatible.

In NYS all tournaments will follow the weigh-in procedures described in the NYS Interpretation Handbook, page 11.

Offensive Starting Procedure Modified

Rule 5-20-5: Referees have always tried to strive for consistent starts when a wrestler moves into the offensive starting position. "Rolling" starts have plagued the sport for too long. So, via a change to the mechanics manual (Section 3, number 1 and 9), everything will slow down in an effort to get it right.

In an on-going battle to make restarts from the referee's position more equal, changes were made in the offensive starting position (5-20-5 NOTE). The offensive wrestler is now obligated to place his or her head on or above the midline of the opponent's back. A second change in that same sub-paragraph dictates a more specific hand position on the elbow - on or over the back of the opponent's near elbow. Many wrestlers were gaining an advantage by hooking the side and front of the arm.

Thus, the process begins with the defensive wrestler obtaining a legal starting position. Next, the offensive wrestler assumes a legal starting position. Both wrestlers shall become stationary. Starting this year, the referee will give a verbal command of "set," notifying both wrestlers that there is a proper starting position of the top wrestler. That builds in the requirement that "the referee shall pause momentarily before starting wrestling" as called for in 5-20-5 NOTE 6. If both wrestlers are properly positioned, the referee restarts the match.

Misconduct Helps Determine Winner in Tied Meets

In dual-meet competition, if teams have identical scores, there will be a greater emphasis on personal conduct to determine team tie-breaking systems. The verbiage can be found in Rule 9-2-2b and c.

"One of the changes also dealt with improving sportsmanship, which is always a high priority with all NFHS rules," said Bob Colgate, NFHS Assistant Director and Liaison to the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee. Colgate said the change eliminates the possibility of a team that has been penalized the greater number of points for coaches' misconduct or any kind of unsportsmanlike conduct winning a dual meet in the event of a tie.

Sportsmanship is taking an increasing emphasis. Of course, wrestlers winning by falls and technical falls should always determine the outcome of all matches, including dual meets. But when things are close - in fact, when they are tied there has to be some premium on winning with good sportsmanship.

Situation 1: Team A won seven decisions. Team B has one major decision, six decisions and a team-point deduction for a second coach misconduct. Thus, both teams have 21 points.

Ruling 1: Team A is declared the winner of the meet. The new rules punish those teams whose wrestlers, coaches or team personnel were penalized the most for unsportsmanlike conduct during a match. In the past, Team B would have been declared the winner because the rules did not penalize the team that had misconduct beyond the loss of match points.

Situation 2: At the end of a dual meet, both teams have an equal number of team points. Wrestler A (130) was disqualified for unsportsmanlike conduct.

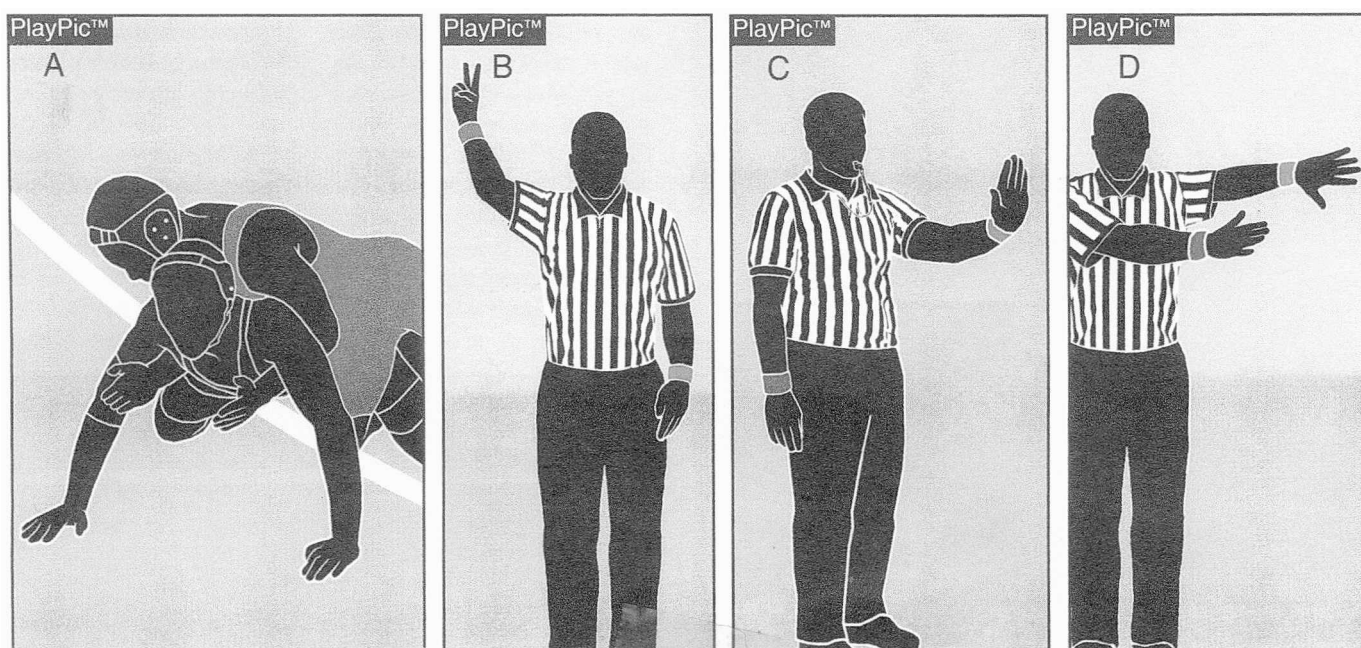
Situation 3: At the end of a dual meet, both teams have an equal number of team points. At different times during the match, both head coaches had a team point deducted for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Ruling 1: Using the criteria in Rule 9-2-2a, the teams remain tied. The results of individual bouts within the match would determine a team winner.

Editorial Changes

Reminder: Use Proper Hand Signals

In an editorial change to Rule 3-1-7, the Committee wanted to emphasize the proper use of hand signals. In PlayPic A, we see two wrestlers who are now out-of-bounds. In PlayPic B, the referee awards two points for the take down (Play Pic B). Then the referee blows the whistle and gives the hand signal to stop the match (PlayPic C), and finally, in PlayPic D, shows the reason for stopping the match by giving signal 10, out-of-bounds.



Team Scoring Errors Must Be Corrected Within 30 Minutes

Errors involving the recording or computation of team scores must be corrected within 30 minutes of the conclusion of the tournament or official posting of team scores (Rule 6-6-5b 1).

There are some contentious scoring situations that determine an overall winner or team placement in a meet. Sometimes, those situations take more than 30 minutes for the tournament staff to reach a consensus and declare the final points allocation. Before this editorial change, some head coaches would point to the rule book and try to garner an undeserved victory by stressing that wrestling ended more than 30 minutes ago, so their team was the winner.

With the change, now the 30-minute clock starts running with the "official posting of team scores." That might be an announcement over the public address system. If the system has

been taken down to allow the staff to leave, then it might be when the Tournament Director says to the head coaches involved in the scoring controversy, "Here are the final results."

Rule 8-2-1 exception g: Rule now reads "if the second injury time-out occurs at the conclusion of the second 30-second tie breaker. *Unless an opponent has received an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty at any time during the match*".

Rule 3-1-4a: Deleted: "Visit each team dressing room to"

Rule 4-5-3: Added the words "or by team(s)" so it now relates to the new rule change in 4-5-3 for 2009-10.

Rule 5-1-3: Added the word "maneuvers" to illegal holds.

Rule 5-14-1, 2: Added the word "maneuvers" to holds.

Photo #10: Added the word "maneuver".

Photo #32-33: Revised the description under each photo with regard to the change to Rule 5-20-5 Note.

Photo #59: Added the word "straight" before scissors in the photo description for clarification.

Photo#77: New photo and description showing the overscissors as an illegal hold/maneuver.

Points of Emphasis

In addition to rule changes, the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee identified several areas of rules needing special attention. Those areas comprise the 2009-10 Points of Emphasis.

Communicable skin conditions are a major concern in wrestling and with the emergence of MRSA infections, the concern is greater than ever. If a participant has a suspect skin condition, NFHS rules require current, written documentation from a physician stating the athlete's participation would not be harmful to an opponent

The NFHS has developed a form that can be used for that documentation and several state associations have adopted that form for use in their state. Regardless of the form used, it is imperative that all coaches perform routine skin checks of their wrestlers and require any wrestlers with a suspect condition to seek medical attention and treatment. It is also imperative that all referees perform skin checks as part of their pre-meet duties prior to every meet. If there is a suspect condition, the wrestler, or coach, must present the proper clearance form if the wrestler is to be allowed to compete.

One of the keys in preventing the spread of communicable skin conditions are coaches and referees fulfilling their responsibilities professionally. It is, however, only one of the keys.

Awarding Near-Fall Points

Wrestlers are very good at creating quick near-fall situations. Before awarding points to the offensive wrestler, the referee must make certain that the defensive wrestler has been released to the extent that permits the possibility of self-defense. A good example is the cradle. Using that concept, when the defensive wrestler comes out of criteria in a near-fall situation, the referee should make sure that the hands have been broken and the defensive wrestler has the possibility of self-defense before awarding any near-fall points.

Another example is tips or tilts. When the defensive wrestler comes out of criteria in a near-fall situation, the referee should make sure that the arm that has been trapped is released and the defensive wrestler has the possibility of self-defense before awarding any near-fall points.

If the tilt is one that has the arm trapped to the hip, such as a two on one, the offensive wrestler does not have to completely let go of the defensive wrestler's wrist. However the defensive man must be able to get back to a recovery position.

Legalities of the Scissors, draping Scissors and Figure 4

The straight body scissors is a legal hold. If excessive pressure is applied, it can become dangerous and cause injury. The straight body scissors is a legal hold when it is used to simply control the opponent, but when it is used with excessive force it becomes a submission hold and is illegal at that point.

Because of the possible dangers, referees need to watch that hold closely and stop it prior to the situation becoming illegal and possibly causing injury.

The straight head scissors (even though an arm is included) is illegal.

A draping head scissors is legal. It can be defined as one that includes the head but also extends below the shoulder or under the armpit. It is considered legal because it does not apply pressure on the head or neck.

Note: Under photo #87 it says “and the arm is included”, it is not necessary to have the arm included for a draping head scissors to be considered legal.

The figure 4 is illegal if applied around the body or both legs. It is a technical violation if applied on the head from the neutral position with or without the arm included. It is legal on the head from both the offensive and defensive positions. The figure 4 is also legal on one leg. The referee must be aware of the over-scissors in that situation and not allow pressure against the joint, which would make the hold illegal. A draping figure 4 on the body is illegal.

Excessive Celebrations

Post-match celebrations are becoming more demonstrative and staged. Not only does the excessive celebration reflect badly on the sport, it increases the likelihood of retaliatory actions by the losing wrestler.

Referees should move quickly after a match to get in proximity to the wrestlers, especially the winner, to discourage excessive celebrations.

Referees should also be well versed in the rules pertaining to unsportsmanlike conduct in such situations. Coaches should emphasize to their athletes that good sportsmanship is expected from all and that excessive celebrations will not be tolerated.

Beginning 2009-10 season front or back flips will be considered unsportsmanlike conduct when done in celebration.

Flashback: 2008-09 Changes

In addition to studying the new rules for 2009-10, referees should take a look at the changes made for the 2008-09 season.

The time sequence for the offensive wrestler to assume the offensive starting position was standardized via a Note to Rule 5-20-5.

The rule change intended to provide consistency for coaches, wrestlers and referees.

An addition to Rule 6-7-1c 6 states that an unsportsmanlike act that occurs at any time during the match shall take precedence over the first points scored in the regulation match in determining choice of position in the ultimate tiebreaker. If both have been penalized an equal number of points revert back to first points scored. If both wrestlers have been penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct not an equal number of points, the wrestler with the fewest unsportsmanlike penalty points will have choice of position

A change to Rule 5-31-1 removed the penalty for coaches whose wrestlers report to the scorer's table not in proper uniform, not properly groomed, not properly equipped or not ready to wrestle.

The addition of Rule 7-1-5w makes a back flip from a standing position an illegal maneuver.

A revision to Rule 4-2-3 allows a designated, on-site meet physician to examine a wrestler with a particular skin condition without a physician's release form.

A new Rule 4-2-5 allows a physician's release form for a non-communicable skin condition, such as psoriasis, eczema or a birthmark, to be valid for the duration of the season, with some stipulations.

A change to Rule 2-2-2 clarifies the boundary for the restricted zone for coaches.

A revision to Rule 4-1-5 requires the wrestler's uniform to be worn as intended/ designed by the manufacturer.

Rule 4-2-1 stated that a wrestler's hair in the front, in its natural state, shall not extend below the eyebrows.

A change in Rule 4-5-5 allows for a one-pound weight allowance when a competition is postponed for one calendar day or more due to inclement weather or unforeseen circumstances. The head coach, principal or athletic director of the opponent must be notified in advance to be granted the one-pound weight allowance.

A change to Rule 5-15-3 gives referees the option to stop a match if there is no action at the edge of the mat and to restart wrestling in the center of the mat.

A new addition to Rules 5-25-6c and 7-6-6c provides rules support for the interpretation of stalling as "repeatedly creates a stalemate situation to prevent an opponent from scoring."

In Rule 6-6-1, when the wrong wrestler is given choice of position at the start of the first 30-second tiebreaker in overtime, the opponent will be given the choice at the start of the second 30-second tiebreaker.

Previously, that would have been considered bad time.

In Rule 7-4-1, the Committee further defined unnecessary roughness by including " .a forceful slap to the head or face, and/ or gouging or poking the eyes."

The Committee approved a new signal for referees to indicate when to start recovery time during a match.

The Committee adopted four points of emphasis for the 2008-09 season, including grooming and medical checks, reporting to the scorer's table ready to wrestle, going out of the wrestling area and referees' signals and mechanics.

Concentrate on Maintaining Your Focus

What's the proper mindset for a referee? Is it total concentration, staring straight at the action, ready to make the call as everything slows down and fractions of seconds seem like full minutes? Sounds like that referee is focused! Too bad the referee is looking at the match on an adjacent mat that has the crowd hollering. Oh, and by the way, the wrestler on your mat that was on the bottom is now on top. What happened?

Referees' jobs are hard enough, given a multitude of rules to remember, extensive mechanics to perfect, diversity of personalities with which to interact and the challenge of judgment calls that they're faced with every time they walk onto the mat. Regardless of how good you are at what you do, your performance will be diminished if you are not able to maintain your concentration.

The importance of focus

"As soon as you lose focus, that's when something happens that calls for such concentration." That's a common admonition, challenging you to maintain your concentration constantly during a match. You're cautioned that, if you allow your attention to wander for an instant, something will happen in the match to exploit your lapse.

The truth is, those types of "happenings" occur throughout most matches. The reason it seems that they happen only at bad times is because the other occurrences aren't noticed due to your readiness to deal with them. There is no magical force that is "out to get you" as a referee (even though it may seem that way sometimes!).

Maintaining your concentration is important because, when you lose that focus, common match circumstances lead to uncommon mistakes.

Additionally, a lapse in concentration can cause you to be in poor position for a call. It can cause you to interpret a rule improperly. It can make you more irritable than you normally would be when dealing with tension during a meet.

Concentration is foundational in that way because if it is lacking, other aspects of your assignment will likewise suffer.

The ability to put all other matter aside and focus entirely on your job is often what separates the elite referees from the rest. The better referees' concentration ability is at a different level. They are never in the wrong place, never surprised at a bad time and never unprepared to deal with any situation that may arise. They are at ease with the flow of the match, even in the most tense circumstances.

Focus on the task at hand

Outside pressures or personal-life issues are a reality for all of us and can certainly affect anyone's mindset during a match. What are some common things to be aware of during a

match that can cause a lapse in concentration?

A referee often relaxes with the rhythm of a smooth contest and loses the edge that is necessary when a tense moment arises.

A loss of concentration often starts with a simple, small-scale lapse, then snowballs from there. For instance, you might allow your mind to wander for a moment, causing you to be out of position for a call. Even if you get the call right, you know you were out of position. That knowledge causes you to think too much about your lapse, leading to a loss of concentration for a future call. The bottom line is not to allow your concentration to be affected by anything that has occurred in the past.

A coach or participant constantly questioning a call might distract the assertive referee. The perfectionist might lose focus due to dwelling on a missed call. The social referee might be too concerned with being liked and lose sight of the task at hand. The key is to begin to understand what kind of personality type you are, and seek to know what buttons get pushed in certain situations.

Then turn your focus to keeping your focus. It will do you a lot of good over the long haul.

Your Image Really Is Everything

Image and presentation are perhaps your greatest tools in controlling a match. There is a lot of truth behind the old saying, "Actions speak louder than words." You want to *exude* confidence but not arrogance through body language. Your body language says more to coaches and wrestlers about your experience and abilities than you might think. You will be judged on your appearance first and your decisions second. It is important to convey the message that you have the situation under control through appearance, manner and voice. Arrogance has absolutely no place in officiating.

Arriving early for a meet shows the coaches, wrestlers and fellow referees that you are mentally prepared for the task at hand. You are ready for the meet and have given yourself enough time to put yourself in the proper mind set for the meet.

Showing up late will kill your credibility. It shows you aren't ready to officiate the meet and you have a cavalier attitude.

The same is true for a referee's dress and appearance. It's like a first date - the first impression is the most lasting. Your impression on the head coach will be made before the match actually starts. If you show up in ripped jeans and a t-shirt the head coach is going to remember that when you're wearing the stripes. Your appearance will directly affect your credibility and respect. It can make the difference between a smoothly run meet with few arguments, or getting questioned after every call. Referees who are neatly dressed convey the message that they are ready to officiate the match and that they pay attention to details.

The slovenly referee with the stained, untucked shirt screams inexperience. It's like blood in the water. The minute head coaches have a question with that referee, head coaches will approach the sloppy referee differently than they would the tidy referee. Slouching and yawning are also big giveaways that you have something other than the meet on your mind. You're there to officiate, so look alive and look neat.

While giving proper signals you are not only communicating an infraction or ruling on a maneuver, but also sending out a much more detailed message. Your confidence and officiating experience will be the first things a head coach will read when watching you give proper signals.

Give the signals with crisp hand movements. Try to stay relaxed and not tense up your body. Keep your head up and maintain eye contact with the person you are communicating with. More importantly, use the proper signals for the proper call. Incorrectly using the hand signals is a telling gaffe that will immediately jeopardize your credibility.

Establishing good communication starts with head coaches more than any other person. They will set the tone for what is and is not acceptable behavior toward referees. That has a direct effect on the attitude of fans and wrestlers. When the head coach remains calm on the bench, the fans and wrestlers are more inclined to accept referees' decisions without comment. When

the head coach objects to a referee's decision, the fans and wrestlers believe they are given license to follow that lead.

Complicating matters is a society that accepts and indirectly promotes disdain, even violence towards sports referees. Take the professional athlete who routinely complains and insults referees on nationally broadcast events. The professional athlete is regarded as a hero by most young athletes, and kids will follow their every move. What sort of example is set when an athlete head-butts or spits on a referee?

While societal factors act as stumbling blocks to clear communication, coaches' caustic attitudes toward referees can drag down their own wrestlers' attitudes. The head coach who is constantly berating referees and indicating dissatisfaction with their decisions will soon find his or her wrestlers acting in a similar manner. Whenever that occurs, the wrestlers become more concerned with the officiating than performing. Such an attitude provides wrestlers with a built-in excuse for poor performance. Suddenly, the referee becomes the scapegoat for poor performance.

By contrast, the head coach who accepts even questionable decisions and maintains composure will find his or her wrestlers concentrating on outperforming their opponents.

The reality of the matter is this: Head coaches usually aren't as familiar with the rules as they should be. Complicating most head coaches' lack of rules knowledge is their naturally biased view of the match. A good referee should take the head coach's state of mind into account during a match. The head coach's sole purpose and desire is to win the match. Any penalty against his or her team can be tantamount to threatening his or her career. In short, he or she can be a highly volatile individual if the match doesn't proceed the way he or she wants it to.

Establishing clear, effective communication requires little more than common sense. Sports are fraught with highly charged emotions that can quickly turn on the referee. Keeping your emotions out of the match and responding to legitimate questions and concerns will not only let you know where the head coach is coming from, but also give him or her a chance to voice his or her questions and concerns.

Communication also involves presenting a good image. A neat appearance and confident air will eliminate any doubts regarding your experience or ability to make the right calls. The rewards for good communication are obvious. A match without arguments and battles between referees, head coaches and wrestlers puts the focus of the meet on the wrestlers and their abilities, allowing you to rule on action instead of behavior.

Referee, Assistant Pre-match Conferences

The use of an assistant referee is recommended. When more than one person is officiating, they can do a better job observing action on the mat. With the strength, speed and agility of today's wrestlers, it is often necessary to have another set of eyes on the action. However, typically, referees work with assistant referees in three instances during the state championship series, helping train newer referees and in the finals of large regular-season tournaments. If the use of an assistant referee is to be beneficial, communication between the two referees is essential. That communication starts with the pre-match conference between the referee and the assistant referee.

Create a bond

The pre-match conference has to create a bond between the two referees. It is imperative that they conclude the conference "on the same page." Thus, the conference should be a warm and positive discussion designed to create a team effort for the next couple of hours. In order to be a successful team, both referees will have to work together as one. Both referees have to feel that they have equal authority - but the referee is the only official with a whistle. The referee has a 51% edge in breaking split decisions.

Clock

Specific assistant referee duties include watching to make sure the clock starts and stops. If the clock does not start on time, the assistant referee should begin a non-verbal count and let the referee know at the first break in wrestling action. The referee will stop the match when there is no significant action and is counting on the assistant referee to inform the referee and the timer how much time elapsed. The assistant referee also needs to watch the clock at the end of each period to determine if points were scored before time elapsed. Speaking of points, the assistant referee should keep any eye on the scoreboard to make sure the displayed score is accurate. Finally, the assistant referee should oversee that injury, blood and recovery time are kept accurately and inform the referee as those time allotments are running out.

Starting Positions

When starting the wrestlers down on the mat, both referees' positioning is critical if everything is to be observed. The two referees should be positioned 180-degrees opposite from each other. Most referees will take a position between two and three o'clock (wrestler's heads are at 12:00) which allows them to see the location of the back foot, the hand on the waist, the hand on the near elbow and head placement on or above the spine. Thus, the assistant referee should take a position between seven and eight o'clock - providing the opposite view as that of the referee. If the assistant referee observes anything illegal, the assistant referee should move immediately toward the center of the mat with hands raised unless a different mechanic was discussed in the pre-match conference.

Neutral

While the wrestlers are in the neutral position, the referee and assistant referee should also work opposite from each other. As the wrestlers move toward the boundary, both referees will move to the edge of the mat to a position that allows them to look directly at each other through the wrestlers. One of the big advantages of using two referees occurs when one wrestler uses a lateral drop (or some other kind of throw) away from the referee, often taking the opponent directly to their back.

Circle

The assistant referee should work out-of-bounds, outside the circle, until it is necessary to get a better view. If the assistant referee wishes to communicate with the referee, the assistant referee should circle the mat toward the referee and the referee should back to the edge of the mat - thus enabling a brief verbal exchange. At that point, the referee can stop the match for a brief conference or signify that the referee is comfortable with the decisions made so far. The assistant referee, after commenting, should continue around the mat to the appropriate position. Agree on those signals during the pre-match discussion.

One call

The referee always makes the call. If the assistant referee disagrees, he/she can notify the referee. The referee should not look at the assistant referee for an opinion prior to making the call. If it becomes necessary for the referee and assistant referee to confer, the assistant referee has two choices. Choice one is to agree with the call made; choice two is to disagree with the call and to explain briefly why - using rule-book criteria as support. For example, he might say, "I did not have a takedown because Wrestler A had one foot out-of-bounds and Wrestler B also had one foot out." If the assistant referee does not have an opinion, that often indicates a lack of concentration by the assistant referee. By default, that means the assistant referee does not disagree with the call made by the referee.

Scorer's Table

If the referee has to go to the scorer's table, the assistant referee is responsible for keeping the two wrestlers near the center of the mat. During the match, the assistant referee should not talk to the coaches in the corner or at mat side. When the match is over, the assistant referee should go to the head of the circle and watch the wrestlers leave the mat.

As stated earlier, it is very important that both referees conclude the pre-match conference on the same page. They should be confident they are going to do a good job with the upcoming matches because sometime during the match, the input, the location and the assistant referee's opinion will help get the correct call made. Work as a team and you will enjoy the competition.

Stalling: One New Look

Stalling has been the key unresolved issue for wrestling coaches and referees for many years. A lot has been written about it. But still, stalling is a key topic of discussion.

Reading the words in Rule 5-25 in the *NFHS Wrestling Rules Book*, it seems very easy to officiate. "Each wrestler is required to make an honest attempt to stay within the 10-foot circle and wrestle aggressively, regardless of position or the time or score of the match. Action is to be maintained throughout the match by the contestants wrestling aggressively."

Understand the tradition

You've heard the history and traditions about stalling - only the heaviest weight classes are ever penalized; can't call stalling in the first period; if you penalize one wrestler, you have to penalize the opponent shortly thereafter. Except none of those statements is true!

To emphasize, consider a tale told by a coach about a far-distant match during a dual meet. Wrestler A was much superior to Wrestler B, but Team A and Team B were locked in a close battle. Each team point was critical to the outcome. Wrestler A had built up a 13-0 lead over two periods. Wrestler A wrapped up Wrestler B to consider a new offensive strategy and the referee formally warned Wrestler A for stalling. (And gee, the Team A head coach thought the referee was being inconsistent!)

Wrestler B finished the last minute of the match by stalemating several opportunities. As the head coach and referee discussed the match much later, the referee said, "Well, he was just trying to avoid getting pinned!"

That true story exemplifies why stalling exists. Wrestler B used unfair tactics to "steal" two team points from Team A (four for a major decision versus six for a fall). The common refrain from referees is, "I don't want to effect the outcome of the match." In that case, the referee did - by not having the courage to call the needed stalling.

Advice

A veteran referee's advice to referees in all sports is to take care of a small problem while it is still small. If you see stalling in the first 30 seconds, try some preventive officiating. "Let's go," or "Action," or some short phrase to incite them to act.

Failing that generic admonition, a formal warning comes next. Now, we all know the coach of the warned wrestler is going to have something to say you've broken the unwritten rule that stalling isn't called in the first period. He's now the aggrieved party but you've set the tone that his wrestler better start to wrestle more aggressively, and you've done it in a way that doesn't hurt, not deep in the third period when there is no chance to recover.

Expectations

Also, you had best prepare for his next comment. At the very next opportunity when the opponent slows down to take a breath, the coach is going to cry out, "That's stalling. You called it against us, you've got to call it against them." Knowing that comment is coming helps you. Ignoring it is perhaps not the best advice. The coach will feel you aren't listening to him and are not being consistent. If the action is not intense, you might say, "Thank you" or "That's enough." If you need to focus on the wrestling action, you might simply hold up a hand as a "stop sign" to the coach. Another such comment might easily be considered unsportsmanlike conduct.

Calling stalling is a decades-old challenge in the sport. If you will call it early, the first time you see it, you won't see much more of it during your matches. Gain the reputation in your area - "Gee, here comes the referee who calls stalling a lot." Far better to gain that reputation with a couple first-period calls than giving in to the coaches' old wives' tale that referees wait until the last minute of a close match to call stalling.

Stalling should be called anytime in the match that one wrestler is being put at a disadvantage because of inactivity by the other wrestler. As a referee, every call you make or do not make affects the outcome of the match for one wrestler or the other. If you call stalling, it has one effect if you do not call stalling, it has another effect. So, as the referee, it is important that you affect the match according to the *NFHS Wrestling Rules Book*.