

2025 WRESTLING PRESEASON GUIDE



PLAY.
PERFORM
COMPETE.
TOGETHER.

Cutting Out the Cut-Back

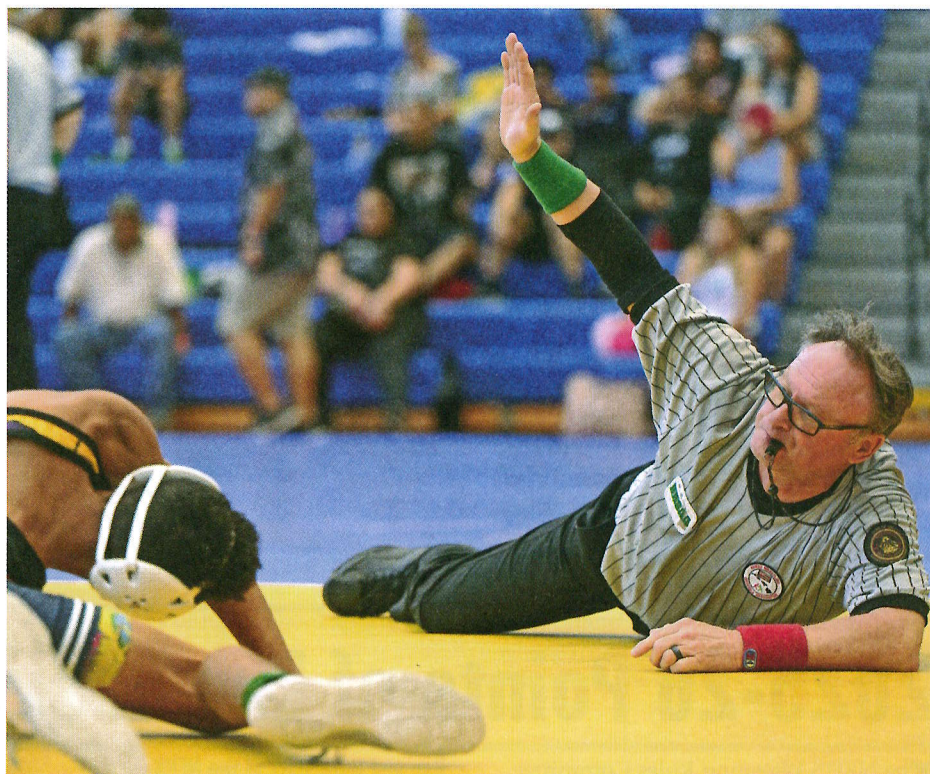
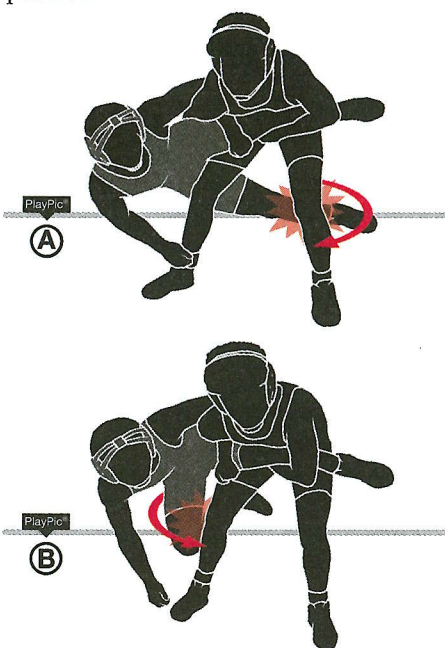
Rule Change Focuses on Reducing Injury Risk

In an effort to minimize the risk of injury in high school wrestling, a revision to the leg block, or cut-back maneuver, was approved by the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee during its April meeting in Indianapolis.

It is one of six rule changes, and three alterations to the officials' signal chart, that were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors and which will go into effect starting with the 2025-26 season.

Illegal Holds/Maneuvers (7-1-5n)

Although the leg block/cut-back maneuver already was an illegal move, the committee added language addressing "when leaving the feet using the foot or leg to 'cut out' an opponent's leg, to include from the rear-standing position."



Beginning with the 2025-26 season, when official Dan Gerber, Kailua, Hawaii, rules a near fall in a match that creates a 15-point advantage, the match shall continue until the near-fall criteria is no longer met.

According to Elliot Hopkins, the NFHS director of sports and student services and editor of the NFHS wrestling rules, the committee added the language about leaving the feet to help ensure that this move is not attempted because of the significant risk of injury.

Fall, Near Fall and Technical Fall (5-11-2c)

If a near fall creates a 15-point advantage, the match shall continue

until the near-fall criteria is no longer met. Conclusion of the near-fall criteria is immediate.

"This change defines when a technical fall shall be awarded and eliminate any confusion between a pinning situation and near-fall criteria," Hopkins said. "It also will make the technical fall consistent with the takedown or reversal that creates the 15-point advantage."

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Technical Violations (7-3-3)

In the language regarding interlocking or overlapping of the hands, the word "arm" has been replaced with "extremity." The committee noted that locking hands and including a leg in the clasp around the trunk of the body is the same as locking hands with an arm included.

Special Equipment (4-3-5)

While wrestlers cannot wear wristbands, sweatbands, bicep bands or arm sleeves that do not contain a pad, they now will be able to wear leg sleeves that do not contain one. Since wrestlers are allowed to wear tights on both legs,

the committee agreed that wearing leg sleeves would be no different.

Wrestlers' Uniform (4-1-2)

A school's name, nickname, logo, mascot, a wrestler's weight classification and/or name are permitted on the uniform top and/or bottom. Aside from the wrestling-specific terms, this is standard language now approved for all NFHS sports rules publications.

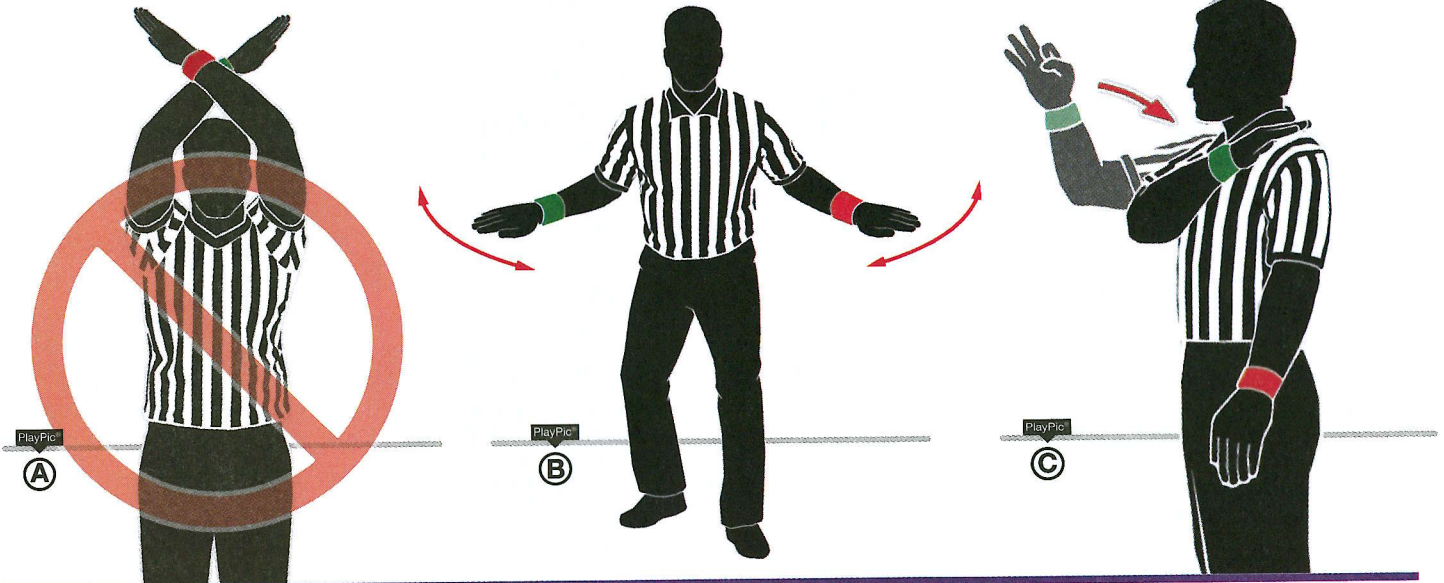
Dual Meet (1-2-2)

State associations now have two options for determining the starting weight in dual-meet competitions: a

random-draw start or from the lowest weight class to heavyweight. If using the random draw, that shall take place immediately preceding weigh-ins.

Official Wrestling Signals

The committee voted to remove one signal from the officials signal chart: the former signal No. 3 for an officials timeout has been removed. Signal No. 9 (no control) has been modified to move the hands left to right instead of circular, and signal No. 21 (near fall) has been modified so the number three is signaled as if making the "OK" sign. ■



2025-26 Points of Emphasis

The NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee and the NFHS Board of Directors believes there are areas of interscholastic wrestling that need to be addressed and given special attention. These areas of concern are often cyclical, some areas need more attention than others, and that is why they might appear in the rules book for consecutive editions. These concerns are identified as "Points of Emphasis."

For the 2025-26 high school wrestling season, attention is being called to the use and necessity of the NFHS skin lesion form, coach misconduct penalty consequences, and clarifying the out-of-bounds signal.

Use and Necessity of the NFHS Wrestling Skin Lesion Form

The NFHS Wrestling Skin Lesion Form is a critical document designed to promote student safety and prevent the spread of infectious skin diseases in wrestling. Given the high-contact nature of the sport, wrestlers are particularly vulnerable to conditions such as ringworm, impetigo and herpes simplex. This form provides standardized medical documentation that allows licensed medical professionals to evaluate skin lesions and determine whether an athlete is medically cleared to compete.

By requiring this form prior to participation, schools and state

associations can ensure consistent, evidence-based decision-making while minimizing health risks to all competitors. Its use is not only a matter of compliance with national guidelines but a crucial component of maintaining local public health and personal integrity within competitive wrestling.

The NFHS Skin Lesion form is a (.pdf) and is made available to the public for free on the NFHS website (www.nfhs.org) under the Wrestling Resources area.

Coach Misconduct Penalty -- Consequences

At face value, coach misconduct occurs when a coach improperly questions the referee at the scorer's table. Whether questioning a possible misapplication of a rule or the judgment of the referee it will result in the head coach receiving a misconduct penalty.

What the coach is not always aware of are the consequences of the penalty. The consequences are that whenever you improperly question the referee, you do so at your own peril because each offense has its own penalty ... and they are cumulative from a warning to a two team-point deduction and removal of the head coach for the remainder of the day. Beside the punitive effects of coaching misconduct, there are the environmental impacts such as affecting team morale and focus.

Team Morale

Wrestlers may become distracted or demoralized during a match if they see their coach penalized or ejected.

It can lead to a loss of composure among athletes who look to coaches for leadership and emotional regulation during intense moments.

1. Competitive Disadvantage

Misconduct penalties can accumulate and result in team point deductions, which can significantly affect dual meet or tournament outcomes.

In tight competitions, a single point deduction could be the difference between advancing or elimination.

2. Reputation and Credibility Loss

Coaches may develop a reputation for poor sportsmanship, which can impact parental respect and trust, collegial relationships with other coaches, and school and community trust.

3. Administrative and Disciplinary Ramifications

Repeat offenses may trigger school or state athletic association reviews, leading to suspension or formal reprimand.

It can affect job evaluations, or the potential for rehiring, especially if the coach is a teacher or staff member.

4. Negative Role Modeling

High school sports are education-based. A coach penalized for misconduct can inadvertently model poor behavior for their wrestlers.

This undermines core values like respect, accountability, and sportsmanship. Which are the very underpinnings of high school sports and activities.

NFHS Official Wrestling Signals – Out of Bounds

The role of the referee is an integral part of the sport of wrestling. They communicate all of the action on the mat and surrounding areas to the wrestlers, fans, coaches and team personnel. Using clear wrestling official signals is essential for ensuring consistent communication, maintaining the integrity of the match and enhancing the overall spectator experience.

Wrestling is a fast-paced and technical sport where split-second decisions by officials can significantly impact the outcome. When officials use standardized, visible and unmistakable signals, it reduces confusion among coaches, athletes, scorers and fans. Clear signals also promote fairness and transparency, allowing everyone to understand infractions, points awarded or match-ending calls in real-time.

The out-of-bounds signal is crucial because of the opportunity to score right before a wrestler has gone out of bounds. The correct mechanic is sounding the referee's whistle while using a sweeping motion of both arms to express that a wrestler has gone out of bounds. That motion alone does not require that the referee stopping action first then signaling out of bounds.

Consistent use of these and all the other official wrestling signals reinforces uniformity across all skill levels of high school competition, helping students and coaches to better understand expectations no matter where or with whom they compete against on the mat. ■

Flashback: 2024-25 Rule Changes

As of last season, high school wrestlers will be inbounds with only one point of contact of either wrestler on or inside the boundary line.

Previously, high school wrestlers were considered to be inbounds if a total of two supporting points of

either wrestler were inside or on the boundary line. The two supporting points could be two supporting points of one wrestler or one supporting point of each wrestler inside or on the boundary line.

“Without increasing risk, this change

eliminates the subjectivity of the out-of-bounds call,” said Elliot Hopkins, NFHS director of sports and student services and liaison to the Wrestling Rules Committee. “The change also helps officials to call ‘out of bounds’ more consistently, and it provides wrestlers, coaches and spectators a better understanding of out of bounds.”

Among the points of contact are a wrestler's head, shoulder, elbow, hand, hip, knee or foot.

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While the one point of contact change will be noted under the definition of Inbounds in Rule 5-15, it also impacts a number of other sections in Rule 5 on Definitions, as well as Rule 6-4-1 on Stopping and Starting the Match.

Fall, Near Fall and Technical Fall (5-11-3)

Wrestlers now earn more points for their efforts thanks to changes in scoring approved last season, as points awarded for a near-fall and takedown have been revised.

Regarding the near-fall, changes simplify the points awarded based on how long the defensive wrestler is held in near-fall criteria. The change in Rule 5-11-3 is as follows:

Two points will be awarded when near-fall criteria are held for two seconds, three points for three seconds, four points for four seconds and five points if the defensive wrestler is injured, indicates an injury or bleeding occurs after the four-point near-fall has been earned.

These changes will affect other rules including individual match scoring in Rule 9.



Prior to the 2024-25 season, referee Randy Grein, Bellevue, Wash., would be correct in stopping this match due to the wrestlers being out of bounds. But starting with last season, because one wrestler has part of his foot inbounds, the match will continue.

“The goal in wrestling is to pin the opponent,” Hopkins said. “Changing the near-fall points should motivate wrestlers to work for a fall.”

In the other change in scoring rules, opportunities to earn more points will

also be available when executing a takedown. A takedown will result in three points awarded to the offensive wrestler. That will also promote more scoring when wrestlers begin in the neutral position. ■

Recruiting and Retaining Wrestling Officials

In recent years, the ranks of wrestling referees have gradually dwindled. The sport needs to bring in new recruits and hang on to those who are just getting started.

Here are some tips that can be used in the recruitment and retention of wrestling referees.

Recruitment

- Attempt to recruit former wrestlers or wrestling enthusiasts who possess high ethical standards.
- Create programs in local official associations to encourage high school seniors and college students who wrestled to join the officiating ranks. Officiating is a very positive athletic-oriented endeavor for college wrestlers to earn extra money.

- Contact physical education departments of area colleges to see if they could incorporate a “wrestling officiating class” in their curriculum. Should this be possible, persuade the physical education professors to invite local experienced referees to present classroom lectures on the topic.

- Entice former wrestling coaches to join the corps of referees. We have witnessed many mat mentors who have demonstrated an innate talent for officiating the mat sport.

- Do not resist recruiting women. Especially with the growth of girls’ wrestling, this is an untapped market for bringing more officials into the fold.

- Assist in producing public service announcements regarding recruitment of wrestling officials on regional television

and radio stations as well as local newspapers.

- Conduct television or radio round-table discussions on recruiting (as well as retaining) officials in the sport of wrestling.

Retention

- See to it that coaches offer the new officials the chance to officiate pre-season open tournaments and practice room wrestle-offs. This gives the new officials exposure with the coaches they may work for in the future. Likewise, the coaches will undoubtedly express helpful suggestions of their own, having witnessed these young officials in action for the first time.

- Make a concerted effort to get young officials matches at the youth,

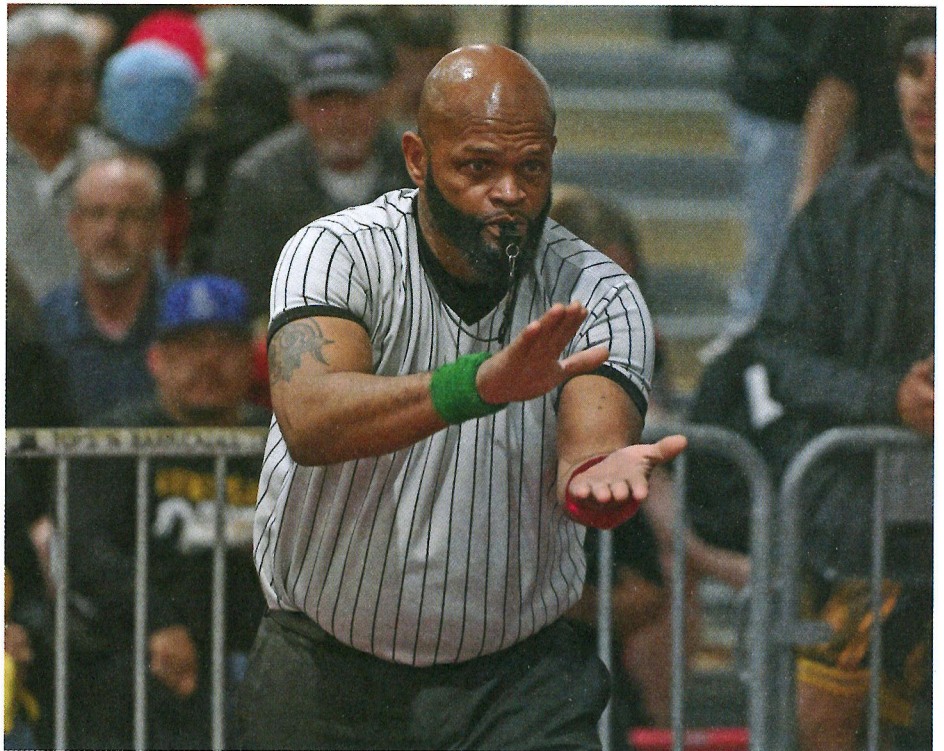
middle school, and junior varsity levels. This further allows novice officials to display their refereeing skills in front of wrestling coaches at various competitive levels.

- Create a “Mentor” or “Adopt a Referee” program. To begin with, the new officials should be allowed to assist veteran officials at dual, triangular, and quadrangular meets. Afterwards, the experienced referees could explain to the younger referees the reasons why they made the tough calls they did. Secondly, veteran officials should take the time to observe and critique the novice referees in action. Then later, the senior evaluators would tell the beginning officials where they excelled and what they needed to improve upon in terms of obviating mechanics.

- Suggest to local school districts that they schedule wrestling competitions later on weekdays, permitting officials who have jobs the opportunity to referee. We often lose officials because they cannot leave their place of employment to oversee matches during the week.

- Teach young officials techniques on how to handle irate coaches and how to react to unruly fans when close calls are made.

- Explain to your new officials that it is part of being human to make mistakes at times. In doing so, stress the important: of not being “defensive” on such occasions. When possible, correct your officiating mistakes during a match. Most coaches respect officials who “own up” to their errors and correct them. I once witnessed a wrestling official wipe off a “fall” when he realized that one shoulder was not even close to touching the mat. Neither



When trying to recruit or retain wrestling officials, it's important to tap into groups that have been historically less represented in the sport, such as minorities including officials of color or female officials. Darin Allen, Palm Springs, Calif.

coach said a word because they knew that it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

- Approach your state athletic associations and ask them to consider a “rotation system,” affording younger, highly-qualified wrestling officials the opportunity to referee state tournaments. This approach will give these officials a “goal” on which to set their sights. Unfortunately, too many younger officials leave the refereeing ranks out

of frustration, feeling they will never be selected to referee states.

Summary

Officiating is a noble avocation that can be both a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Likewise, it allows us to become an integral facet of scholastic and collegiate athletics. Hence, veteran wrestling officials must constantly pursue innovative avenues for recruiting and retaining new referees. ■

Nutrition and Weight Control

The keys to developing wrestling potential are a healthy, balanced diet, acquiring the needed wrestling skills, proper conditioning, and getting adequate rest. By following sound advice about wrestling nutrition and weight control, wrestlers can improve their performance on the mat and in the classroom. The benefits of proper

nutrition and weight control, to the mind and the body, have been well documented. Likewise, the hazards of extreme weight loss and poor nutritional habits are also well documented. Mood swings, irritability, decrease in academic performance, and loss of athletic performance can all result from extreme weight loss and poor nutritional habits.

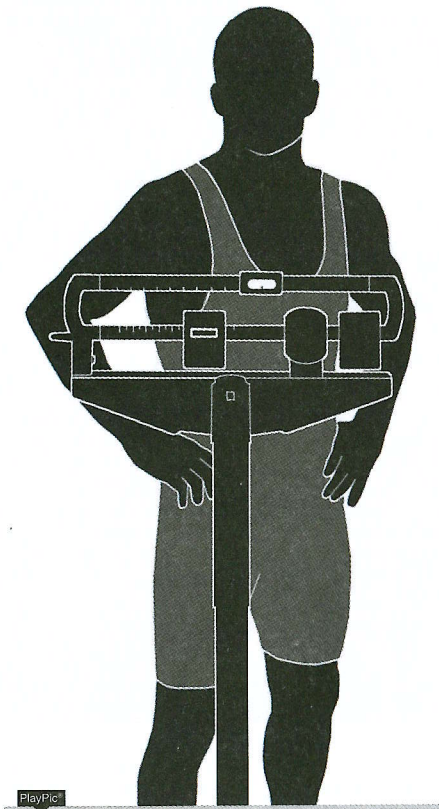
The best weight for wrestlers, or anyone for that matter, is one that is safe and can be comfortably maintained by eating a healthy, balanced diet. Wrestlers should be able to concentrate more on developing wrestling skills, than on maintaining, or losing, weight. Those who spend more time thinking about food, than wrestling, are probably trying

to lose too much weight and/or eating the wrong foods.

Appropriate wrestling weight is that weight which can be maintained by eating a healthy, balanced diet. Seven percent (7%) body fat for males, and 12% for females, has been established by many medical authorities across the country as the safe, minimal percent body fat for high school wrestlers. Body composition assessment is the only scientific method of predicting a safe, minimal wrestling weight. By losing weight too quickly, or going below their safe, minimal percent body fat, a wrestler risks losing muscle along with fat. This results in decreased muscular endurance and strength. Not every wrestler can, or should, attempt to reach their safe, minimal percent body fat. A wrestler's lowest certifiable weight is not necessarily the weight he should be trying to achieve, but it is the minimum, safe weight he could achieve under ideal circumstances. Most high school wrestlers will perform very well at a body fat percentage above their safe, minimal percent body fat. If a wrestler is above their safe, minimal percent body fat, there is no reason to believe that wrestling performance will improve simply by losing weight.

If a wrestler does decide to lose weight to reach their lowest, certifiable weight, they should lose no more than 1-1/2% of their body weight per week. The only way the body can lose more than 1-1/2% a week is through dehydration and/or excessively restricted food intake. Both of these practices cause the body to lose muscle and water along with the fat. Dehydration and excessively restricted food intake result in decreased strength, muscular endurance, stamina, and concentration. Dehydration is the most detrimental method of losing weight and causes the most rapid decrease in strength, endurance, and mental alertness. Research indicates that the loss of as little as 2% of one's body weight through dehydration can cause significant performance loss! A 2% weight loss for someone weighing 150 pounds is only 3 pounds!

To prevent dehydration, the use of rubber, vinyl, and plastic suits, saunas, whirlpools, diuretics, or other methods of quick weight loss must be eliminated. They are against the rules,



A wrestler should lose no more than 1 1/2 percent of their body weight per week in an effort to reach their lowest, certifiable weight.

hurt performance, and can prove to be dangerous to one's health.

A simple, effective method of determining adequate hydration is to check the color of one's urine! Yellow urine indicates dehydration. Pale, or clear urine, indicates adequate hydration. The following guidelines will also help ensure proper hydration: 1) drink at least 8, 8 ounce glasses of fluids a day, 2) drink 5-6 swallows of fluids every 15-20 minutes during exercise, 3) for each pound of weight lost during practice, drink 2, 8 ounce glasses of fluids, 4) thirst is a poor indicator of how much to drink; drink more than just enough to quench your thirst, 5) salt tablets increase the body's need for fluids. Do not use salt tablets!

Food choices wrestlers make during the season are going to determine how easy, or difficult, it is for them to lose, or maintain, weight. On a daily basis, most high school wrestlers should be consuming 8 servings of grain products,

3 servings of vegetables, 3 servings of fruit, 2 servings of low-fat milk products, and 2 servings of lean meat — depending upon body size and activity level. Limiting fatty, greasy foods and those foods high in refined sugars will help ease the burden of weight control and weight loss.

Carbohydrates are the body's primary source of energy for wrestling. Eating foods high in carbohydrates is important to provide the body with the constant and immediate energy necessary for wrestling. Complex carbohydrates, foods high in starch and low in simple sugars, are the best choice for your body's constant energy needs. Choose foods high in complex carbohydrates by selecting foods such as — breads, bagels, muffins, rolls, pancakes, waffles, pasta, rice, potatoes (not French fried), cereal, fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk, and juices. Avoid simple carbohydrates which are high in simple sugars. Foods high in simple sugars — candy, cookies, cake, pastries, and pop — provide only very intermittent, short-term energy and are not the best choice of fuel for sports.

Fats provide long-term energy for your body, but they are more difficult for the body to use for energy, and contribute more readily to weight gain, than carbohydrates. Wrestlers should limit their intake of fat by reducing the amount of pizzas topped with meat, hamburgers, French fries, bratwurst and other sausages, bacon, salad dressings, whole milk products, and high-fat gravies they eat.

Healthy snacks provide body with high amounts of complex carbohydrates and small amounts of fat and simple sugar. As healthy snack alternatives choose: pretzels, fig bars, air popped popcorn, fruits, vegetables, bagels, muffins, cereal, and low-fat yogurt — instead of chips, peanuts, ice cream, and pastries.

Adequate amounts of protein are needed to build and maintain body cells, help the body resist infection, and regulate body processes. Foods that provide the body with protein are: meat, milk and milk products, nuts, and dried beans and peas. Selecting foods with adequate amounts of protein which are low in fat is preferred to high-fat choices. Most athletes will not find it necessary to take protein

supplements. There is no scientific evidence available proving that athletes eating a healthy, balanced diet need protein supplements to build muscles and increase strength. Eating foods high in carbohydrates will provide the energy needed to participate in strength training which will result in muscle growth and strength increases. Increased protein intake can result in increased risk of dehydration and additional strain on the kidneys.

Vitamins and minerals are needed for the growth of all body tissues, and the control of all body processes. Wrestlers eating a healthy, balanced diet should not have any difficulty consuming enough vitamins and minerals. If a vitamin or mineral deficiency is suspected due to a reduced calorie diet and intense training, a multivitamin or mineral supplement may be appropriate. It is not necessary

for vitamin or mineral supplements to exceed 100% of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). Before taking any nutritional supplement, it is best to visit with a physician or sports nutritionist for advice. Remember, nutritional supplements are just that, supplements to, not substitutes for, a balanced diet.

To assist in keeping energy levels high and controlling weight, wrestlers should choose the following foods most often: breads, bagels, muffins, rolls, rice cakes, pita bread, pancakes, waffles, spaghetti, noodles, macaroni, rice, hot or cold cereals (except granola), fig bars, angel food cake, pretzels, graham and other low-fat snack crackers, air popped popcorn, low-fat milk, pudding made with low-fat milk, low-fat yogurt, sherbet, low-fat cottage cheese, fresh, frozen, or canned fruits or vegetables, dried fruit, fruit or vegetable juices,

lean meats (10% fat or less), skinless chicken or turkey, broiled fish, reduced calorie dressings, mayonnaise, butter, or margarine, and dried beans and peas.

Wrestlers should choose the following foods less often: pizza topped with meat or extra cheese, any fried foods such as French fries and fried chicken, barbecue ribs, hot dogs, bratwurst and other sausages, bacon, sauces and gravies made from butter, cream, cheese, or meat drippings, salad dressings, butter, mayonnaise, or margarine that is not reduced calorie, whole milk and whole milk products, ice cream, candy, cookies, donuts, sweet rolls, cakes, pies, potato chips, nuts, snack crackers, luncheon meats that are not low-fat, oils and shortenings, and buttered popcorn popped in oil. ■

Column courtesy of the Iowa High School Athletic Association.

Lock Down Headlock Safety

Front headlocks, as well as all headlocks, have been legal as long as an arm or leg is included. Referees have always been encouraged to look closely at all headlock situations.

However, there has been growing concern over the way some competitors have been using that particular hold that may temporarily cause loss of consciousness for their opponent.

Rule 7 speaks, in no uncertain terms, about cautioning competitors and instructing referees to be very cautious when utilizing and officiating those situations.

Wrestlers are admonished not to:

- Apply any hold or maneuver with pressure exerted over the opponent's mouth, nose, throat or neck that restricts breathing or circulation; and
- Turn a potentially dangerous hold or maneuver into an illegal hold or maneuver.

The rule also states that wrestlers should know the dangers of hold or maneuver. There is an obligation placed on the coach not to teach or condone a hold or move that may injure either wrestler.

Wrestling moves and maneuvers executed properly and legally increase



Dan Hillery, Harrisville, Utah, must understand whether this headlock is legal or in violation of Rule 7 of the NFHS Rules Book.

an athlete's chance at victory. It is not ethically acceptable to teach or use a hold/move that has a risk of injury, which sometimes may cause permanent damage. There is no place for that in wrestling.

Referees must:

- Recognize and anticipate any hold or maneuver, especially a front headlock, as it can become illegal — quickly;
- Stop any hold or maneuver that becomes illegal immediately;
- Utilize the potentially dangerous hold or maneuver call without hesitation to protect the wrestler. If a mistake is

made, it is far better to “err on the side of safety” when it comes to a wrestler’s health;

- In front headlock situations, move to a position where the pressure can be seen; and
- Not let the hold or maneuver run without additional action taking place. That only allows the offensive wrestler more time to tighten the hold or maneuver and greatly increase the potential for injury.

The following are clues that referees and coaches might use to evaluate the front headlock situation. If the defensive wrestler demonstrates:

- Redness in the face;
 - Being up on the toes to avoid pressure;
 - A trapped arm being limp.
- Any one of those clues should give rise to a concern that pressure is being applied and the action should more than likely cease.

Again, a front headlock situation is not a hold or maneuver that needs to run for a period of time. The offensive wrestler needs to continue with action beyond the lock up and progress with the attempt at a takedown or other control. ■

The Referee's Responsibility in Promoting Sportsmanship

In recent years, the importance of sportsmanship in athletes, coaches and fans has been stressed. We also should consider the same from referees as well.

Consider two different occurrences involving referees who did not conduct themselves in a professional manner. The first instance involved a professional referee who was very rude to a coach at an athletic clinic. He was quite condescending to a high school coach, who just asked some basic questions regarding the sport. And the coach did so in a very sincere manner.

This referee felt he was above such questions from a lowly scholastic coach, and attempted to embarrass the coach. He was unprofessional, and those in attendance knew it.

The second situation involved a professional competition in which the coach was removed from the premises. The coach's team won the meet handily. His comments to the press after the event were that he finally got fed up with the referee's “arrogance.”

Coaches deserve respect, too. Referees need to understand their place in sports. Their job is to interpret the rules to the best of their knowledge. And foremost in the minds and hearts of every referee should be the health



Officials such as Hector Garcia, Fontana, Calif., play an important role in promoting sportsmanship at the NFHS level.

and safety of the athletes. They should be the protectors of the sport's physical enjoyment and statutes.

Referees must strive to be firm when necessary. But at the same time, they must demonstrate a respectful attitude toward the coaches and athletes. Most referees agree that any time a coach

asks a legitimate question, he deserves a response from the referee. As a dedicated mentor, who spends many hours training his athletes, he deserves that courtesy.

One final point. Referees make their fair share of mistakes. It's the price we pay for being human. And they have

found that honesty is truly the best policy when dealing with coaches. At times a referee must approach a coach and admit, "I blew the call." Most of the time, the coach will respond, "Well, okay, but don't let it happen again."

They accept the admission, but more importantly, the coach respect the referee's integrity.

Yes, referees have a very serious task to perform in wrestling. Control of the contest should be high on their

priority list, but not at the expense of professional courtesy toward the coaches and athletes. No referee should ever become bigger than the sport, itself.

After all, "Sports are for kids...not the adults." ■

Talent Flows When Your Ego Goes

Confidence is not a suggestion when it comes to being good in this avocation. It is at the core of what it takes to be a good official in any sport at any level.

Rarely will you see timid officials succeed. Experiences and knowledge help create that confidence. As officials get more comfortable, they acquire a bit of an edge. It's a natural progression. However, that edginess can quickly turn into arrogance, which can be a big turn off to the people you work with and for. So how do you toe the line?

Walk the talk

If you are going to carry yourself as if you know it all, have the knowledge to back it up. There are plenty of people who think they know rules, mechanics and philosophies in their sport. Know them and how to apply them.

Knowledge helps to create legitimate confidence that surpasses the qualities of the arrogant. You can only sweet talk your way through situations for so long without actually knowing before the people around you catch on.

Listen

A really quick way to show you care about anyone other than yourself is to stop talking. Just listen. You may have more experience than anyone in the room but that doesn't mean you can't learn something new.

Even if your partners have nothing to offer you, listening goes a long way in establishing crewness with the person or people you are working with.

When it comes to building rapport with coaches, sometimes all they want and need is for you to listen. Not every interaction with a coach has to be a give-and-take. Sometimes the message is subtle. If you don't listen, you'll miss it. And the next time the coach may not be as helpful.



Confidence gained from years of experience allows Chris Tucker, Ewa Beach, Hawaii, to make good decisions in his assignments. Belief in one's own ability is different than cockiness, which is to be avoided.

Know your audience

There are new officials who want to learn everything they possibly can from you. There are officials who are perfectly content with where they are and don't particularly care what you have to say. That's OK! Don't waste your time and energy forcing your knowledge on people who don't want to hear it.

You can easily tell if someone is engaged through their body language and response to what you are saying. Talking to a partner or coach who doesn't want to listen is a sure way to make them feel that you think you are better than they are whether you mean to or not.

Learn from mistakes

Perfection is unattainable, yet we

continue to pursue it. Knowing when you're wrong is important, but accepting when you're wrong is the difference maker. Don't be a repeat offender!

If you can help someone learn from something you did wrong, you are helping the entire officiating community get one step closer to that, albeit unattainable, goal of perfection.

Be yourself

Nobody wants to be known as "that official." You know the one, the know-it-all, Mr. or Ms. Perfect, the one whose ego can't fit in the locker room or the official who can't stop talking about how great he or she is.

Just as officials can suffer because they don't have enough belief in themselves, others pay the price for

having too much, or worse, the wrong kind of belief in themselves. There's a huge difference between having a rock-solid ego and being obnoxiously arrogant. Ironically, it's often the folks who try to come off as know-it-alls who really have the most self-doubt.

The reality is every person has a unique set of qualities they bring to the game and their crew (if applicable). Trying to be someone you're not will quickly catch up with you.

Use your confidence wisely

It's important to manage that confidence and use it for the good of the game. Remember that what you do is louder than what you say. Don't let your confidence turn in to cockiness. ■

Wrestling Injury Surveillance Study

As high school sports participation in wrestling continues to increase in the United States, particularly among girls, the number of injuries will also likely increase unless effective injury prevention programs are implemented. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the NFHS Sport Rules Committees use data from the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study (High School RIO™) to monitor rates and patterns of sports injuries among high school athletes. High School RIO is currently collecting the 20th year of sports exposure and injury data.

Among the nine sports included in the original sample of High School RIO for which national estimates are constructed (i.e. football, boys' and girls' soccer, girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, boys' wrestling, baseball, and softball), the 2023/24 academic year data show that boys' wrestling had the 3rd highest overall injury rate, 4th highest competition injury rate, and the highest practice injury rate. In 2023/24, girls' wrestling had the highest practice injury rate out of the twenty sports under

surveillance in the convenience sample of High School RIO™ as well as the second highest overall and competition injury rates.



The head/face was the most commonly injured body part in both boys' and girls' wrestling competitions (31% and 36%, respectively) followed by the knee in boys' competitions (17%) and the shoulder in girls' competitions (16%). In boys' wrestling practice, the most commonly injured body part was the head/face (22%), and in girls' practice, was the knee (23%). The most common diagnosis in both boys' and girls' wrestling competitions was concussion (26% and 32%, respectively), followed by sprain in boys' competitions (25%) and strain in girls' competitions (16%). In boys' and girls' wrestling practice, the most common diagnoses were sprains (20% and 26%, respectively) and strains (16% and 29%, respectively). Skin infections continue to disproportionately affect the head/face in both boys' and girls' wrestling.

In 2023/24, 13% of all reported wrestling injuries were sustained by females as compared to less than 5% in 2016/17 and years prior. When looking at data from the 2009/10 through 2023/24 academic years, in general, mechanisms of injury were similar among male and female wrestlers. However, a greater proportion of injuries among females were related to contact with playing surface (35.4%) compared to males (30.5%). Understanding patterns of injury in wrestling is one valuable tool when considering injury prevention efforts to keep wrestlers as safe as possible.

If you are interested in more information about High School RIO or you are a certified athletic trainer who is interested in becoming a reporter for wrestling, please email the High School RIO team at highschoolrio@datalyscenter.org. Please visit <http://datalyscenter.org/resources/high-school-rio-annual-reports/> to access the annual summary report referenced above. ■

Classify Coaches For Better Dialogue

To be a top official you must understand coaches, their goals, their methods and their tactics. Coaches' personalities range from timid to terrible, from understanding to unreasonable and from polite to pugnacious.

Knowing coaches' personalities and what type of coach they are will give you a great opportunity to manage

the game efficiently. Sometimes a clear and concise explanation will resolve a situation. Let's examine the types of coaches you might encounter.

Dr. Jekyll-Mr. (or Ms.) Hyde

Dr. Jekylls warmly greet you in the parking lot or near the bench and exchange pleasantries, stories and jokes and assure you how happy they are

to see you. Then a few minutes before the game begins, they drink the potion that turns them into a monster until the game ends. You must be prepared for the emergence of the daunting Hyde. If you suspect a Jekyll, firmly but politely extricate yourself and go about your pregame routine. The opposing coach may be watching all of that frivolity and may feel the playing field isn't

even. Then, you may have two problem coaches on your hands.

Apologizer

This type usually finds the officials after the game and apologizes for poor behavior during the game. The apology is usually not sincere. Apologizers are worried about the next game when they have the same officials. The Jekyll-Hyde coach frequently becomes an Apologizer after the game. Don't fall for that ruse.

Praiser

The Praiser likes to tell the officials how great they are before the game to the point of absurdity, perhaps even telling the players that you are one of the best officials of all time. Of course, the Praiser is looking for the first call (and all of the following calls) to favor his or her team. When a call does go against a Praiser's team, you'll usually hear the backhanded compliment, "You're better than that!"

Intimidator

The Intimidator uses physical size, voice, histrionics, reputation, previous success, perceived status in the conference or state power structure or general aggressiveness to intimidate the officials. While it's generally unwise to try to match the Intimidator's act, backing down or appearing meek isn't the answer either. Work your game. If the Intimidator steps over the line, forget all the above factors and treat him or her like anyone else: penalize or eject as the situation dictates.

Divider

That type works covertly to drive a wedge between the officials. Examples of what the coach might say to one official are, "You'd never make a call like that," or "Tell your partner that's two blown calls." Don't buy what the Divider is selling.

Inciter

Inciters try to rile up spectators to "ride" game officials with the intent of pressuring them to make calls in their team's favor. Any coach who attempts to incite spectators must be issued a strong warning or be ejected from the game.

Whiner

Most Whiners are also nitpickers, pointing out minor or perceived



This conversation with a coach will proceed much more effectively if Don Valdez, Irvine, Calif., is able to understand what type of coach he is working with.

infractions. There isn't much you can do about the Whiner except grit your teeth and hope the Whiner gets laryngitis.

Polite Coach

The Polite Coach is often a polished critic, prefacing comments with the word, "Sir" or "Ma'am." Usually, the words that follow will be critical, confrontational or even nasty. The Polite Coach, after being penalized or ejected, often laments, "What for? I was polite."

Anti-Officials

Let's face it. Some individuals and some coaches are anti-official or just anti-authority. Anti-official coaches just can't be pleased. They can make your game difficult and trying. Their competitive nature is such that you are an obstacle in their quest to gain a victory. If you understand that type you can manage that coach more successfully. Remember not to take it personally. They're yelling at the uniform, not the person wearing it.

Official-Coach

The coach who is also an official can be a nightmare. While the Official-Coach should realize how difficult an official's job is, he or she is often biased, insensitive and out to prove expert knowledge of every phase of the game. Sometimes the Official-Coach goes

beyond showing off and tries to show up the officials. That can never be tolerated.

Bookworm

The Bookworm coach is a close relative of a Rulebook Charlie official. The Bookworm is usually an intelligent coach who studies the rulebook religiously but who often misinterprets the spirit and intent of the rules. That type is often a literal-thinking person who doesn't understand or appreciate the nuances of the rules. A common argument will be, "Well, that's not what the rulebook says."

Silent Coach

The Silent Coach is a brooding, scowling individual who doesn't like or trust officials. At the pregame meeting or when you introduce yourself, Silent Coaches shuffle their feet, look at the ground and nod or shake their head rather than fully participating in the meeting. They might speak to the opposing coach but avoid any unessential conversation with the officials. Do not let the silent treatment unnerve you and vow to do your best possible job. Also, don't be fooled. That silent act before the game could be a ploy for a torrent of rage once the action begins. ■

Turn Down the Heat on Arguments

Remember that movie line, “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it any longer”? You’ve likely felt that way a few times during games you were working. Your anger may have led to a well-deserved ejection or other sanction handed to a player or coach.

Arguing rarely solves anything and most often makes the official look aggressive or out of control. That’s why it’s best to avoid the argument altogether. Here are some suggestions for taking control of a conflict before it turns into a rhubarb.

1. Let the other person talk — and don’t interrupt. In other words, have the courtesy to listen before you say anything. You may have made up your mind and there’s no way you’re changing anything, but by fully listening to what the coach or player has to say, you can at least empathize with the other person’s viewpoint.

2. Using your own words, repeat the problem back to the coach or player. That lets the aggressor know you heard him or her and that you understood the message. It also gives that person a moment to calm down.

3. Don’t debate judgments. You should always remain objective and not try to justify judgment calls once you have made up your mind.

4. Limit discussion only to the most recent call. When the coach or player brings up a play from earlier in the game, it’s time to shut down the conversation. Make it clear you’re only willing to consider the current conflict; the past is history.

5. Remain assertive and decisive. Avoid being wishy-washy with agreements. You’re free to change your mind about a call, but it should never appear that you were talked into that change. And if you do change your mind, do it in a strong, decisive manner. The worst thing you can do is look like you’re going back and forth with your decisions.

6. If you can help it, don’t engage in any discussion when you’re very angry. You’ve probably seen a game or heard stories in which a player gets ejected, followed shortly by the head coach, then an assistant, and maybe a couple of other bench personnel follow. It’s easy to see how a person’s tolerance level would get shorter and shorter with

each successive verbal assault. Situations like that call for an alert partner to step in, giving you a moment to cool your jets and let the adrenaline drain.

7. When discussing problems, focus on solutions. For officials, that doesn’t mean changing a call, but it might mean acquiescing to a coach’s request to consult a crewmate. Or you might say something like, “It was a good no-call, coach, but I understand your frustration and I’ll keep an eye out for the sort of contact you’re talking about.”

In summary, remember that anger can be used as a motivator by invigorating you to get something done. Perhaps that something is a change in how you deal with anger. Anger tells you something is wrong and you need to deal with it. The best way to make anger work for you is to modify what needs to be changed, but don’t become an extremist and think you need to change your entire being.

Put things in perspective, leave your personal life off the playing field and leave your officiating gear at the game. The key to self-control is change, and vice versa. Always remember: No one can make you mad unless you want to be mad. ■

Keep Skin Conditions in Check

Communicable skin conditions continue to be a major concern in wrestling. If a participant has a suspected skin condition, NFHS Wrestling Rules require current, written documentation from an appropriate health-care professional stating the athlete’s participation would not be harmful to an opponent. Cold sores are considered a skin lesion and are subject to the communicable skin condition rules.

The NFHS has developed a form that can be used for that documentation, and several state associations have adopted similar forms for use in their states.

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 — or verify that skin checks have been done by a designated, on-site meet, appropriate health-care professional — as part of their pre-meet duties prior to EVERY dual meet and tournament.

If there is a suspect condition, the wrestler or coach **MUST** present the proper clearance form at the weigh-in

for any dual meet or tournament in order for the wrestler to be allowed to compete.

The only exception to the requirement of the proper clearance form would be if a designated, on-site meet, appropriate health-care professional is present and is able to examine the wrestler either immediately prior to or immediately after the weigh-in. The designated, on-site meet, appropriate health-care professional has the authority to overrule the diagnosis of the appropriate health-care professional who signed the proper clearance form presented to the referee at the weigh-in.

One of the keys to preventing the spread of communicable skin conditions is for coaches and referees to fulfill their responsibilities professionally. It is, however, only one of the keys.

The other and equally important key is proper prevention. While prevention can be complicated, in most cases it only requires that a few basic steps be taken by ALL involved in the sport.

- Educate coaches, athletes and parents about communicable skin conditions and how they are spread.
- Clean wrestling mats daily with a solution of 1:100 bleach and water or an appropriate commercial cleaner.
- Maintain proper ventilation in the wrestling room to prevent the build-up of heat and humidity.
- Clean all workout gear after each practice including towels, clothing, headgear, shoes, knee pads, etc.
- Require each wrestler to shower or use a body-wipe after each practice and competition. Do not share bars of soap. Use individual soap dispensers.
- Perform daily skin checks to ensure early recognition of potential communicable skin conditions.
- Refrain from sharing razors or other personal hygiene supplies.

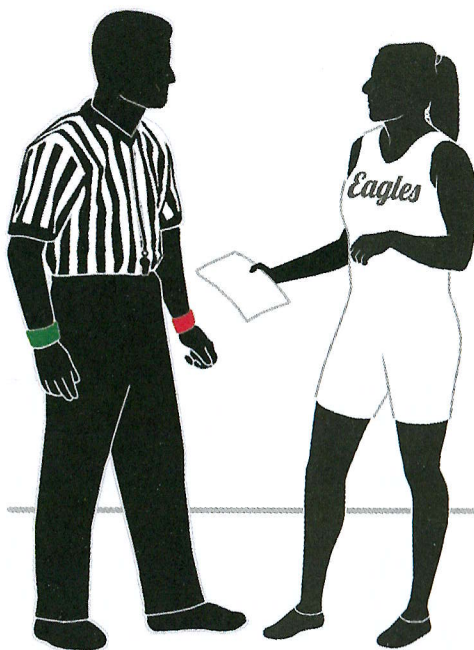
Covering an active infection does not meet the requirements of the NFHS wrestling communicable skin condition rule for competitions. An active infection shall not be covered in practice either.

It is a coach's professional responsibility to ensure that skin clearance forms presented by his or her wrestlers are legitimate and reflect the athletes' true conditions.

Coaches and referees all play a vital role in controlling communicable skin diseases. They must err on the side of what is best for the health of all involved in the sport when dealing with communicable skin diseases.

Referees are the last line of defense in keeping wrestlers with communicable skin diseases off the mat. The safety of all who step on a competition mat is at stake. Coaches must realize that referees would not be placed in a position to make difficult participation decisions if coaches would perform skin checks on all of their wrestlers each day.

NFHS Wrestling Rule 3-1-4a states that "Before a dual meet begins, the referee shall perform skin checks



Wrestlers who have a suspect skin condition must present the proper clearance form to the referee at the weigh-in for any competition.

or verify that skin checks have been performed by a designated, on-site meet, appropriate health-care professional." NFHS Wrestling Rule 3-1-5a states that "Before an individual, combination or team advancement tournament begins each day, the referee shall perform skin checks or verify that skin checks have been performed by a designated, on-site meet, appropriate health-care professional." The skin checks should take place by referees or a designated, on-site meet, appropriate health-care professional at weigh-ins whenever possible.

In reference to multiple-day competitions, communicable disease "skin checks" shall take place at weigh-ins each day. Checking skin on the first day only is not an acceptable practice regarding the communicable disease detection procedure.

NFHS Wrestling Rules 4-2-2, 3, 4, 5 are very specific concerning a contestant who is suspected of having a communicable skin disease. It is the responsibility of the contestant,

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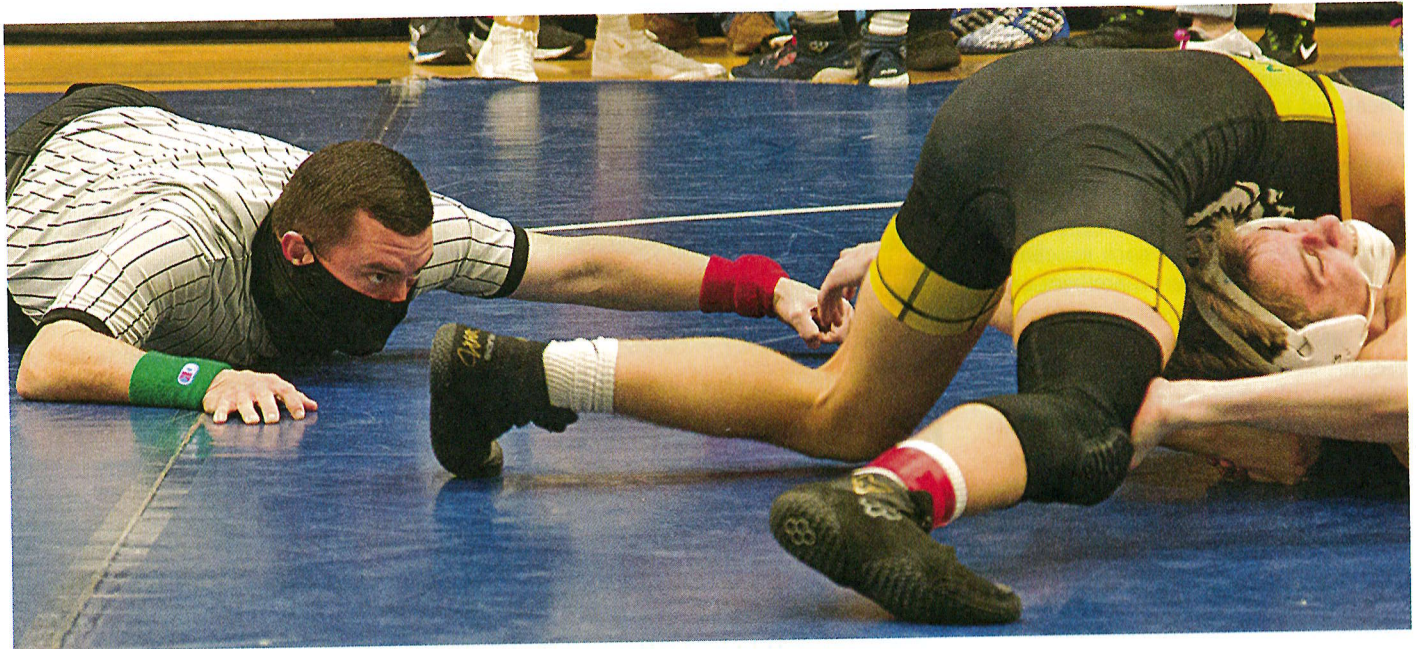


parents, coach and referee to identify a possible communicable skin disease and then have an appropriate health-care professional evaluate the condition if possible. Similarly, it is everybody's responsibility (coaches, referees, appropriate health-care professionals and tournament administrators) to

ensure that all wrestlers are competing in an infection-free environment. For more detailed information, refer to the "Skin Conditions and Infections" chapter in the NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook. Also, please refer to the following two NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

documents: "General Guidelines for Sports Hygiene, Skin Infections and Communicable Diseases" and "Sports Related Skin Infections Position Statement and Guidelines." Both of these NFHS SMAC documents can be found on the Sports Medicine page on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. ■

Find Success With These 10 Tips



- 1 Read the current NFHS Wrestling Rules Book (including illustrations) and the NFHS Wrestling Case Book and Manual in detail from cover to cover. Review it often during the season.
- 2 Review all signals and practice in a mirror. Use only NFHS approved signals.
- 3 Make it a point to watch experienced, successful referees and take notes. Furthermore, when you do start officiating, have these same referees critique your performances on the mat.
- 4 Before the season starts, go to various schools and referee wrestle-offs. Ask another referee to accompany you and critique each other.

Kendall Chrysler, Las Vegas, has an open look at the defensive wrestler's pinning area as he focuses on a near fall situation.

- 5 Start off officiating at the junior high/middle school level to develop the experience.
- 6 When making close calls as a referee, never look at the coaches for approval. This is a sign of officiating weakness that is obvious to the coaches.
- 7 If you award points too soon, it's okay to wipe them off. Coaches admire referees who do so.
- 8 If you totally "miss" a call you cannot fix, do not become defensive with the coach when he/she asks for a

conference at the scorer's table. In fact, your best bet is to admit the mistake. Not only will the coach respect your admission, but he/she will respect your honesty.

- 9 The key to stalling is to be consistent. In other words, don't call it quick one match and slowly the next bout. Consistency is also important in all areas of wrestling: takedown and reversal control, line calls, falls, etc. In essence, you must demonstrate overall "consistency" throughout the entire match.
- 10 Finally follow the "Three Fs" — Be Friendly, Be Fair, and Be Firm.

If you follow the above suggestions, you will most definitely enjoy the avocation of officiating wrestling. ■

Admit Mistakes, Prevent Recurrences

Nobody's perfect. But because of the expectations for our industry, mistakes by officials get added attention, scrutiny and unending comments. Imagine how you would feel if you mistakenly signaled a takedown instead of a reversal in the closing seconds of a match. It's not easy to get past some mistakes. Whether mistakes are big or small, it's necessary to move forward ... the right way.

Officiating is difficult. As the old saying goes, "You're expected to be perfect and improve each game after that." But once we truly understand and accept officiating is difficult, it becomes a challenge that requires honesty, humility and the desire to learn, grow and improve.

Mistakes will happen. They happen to every official, at every level and in every match. How we deal with mistakes and move beyond them is what determines our success. The fear of making mistakes and the fear of criticism and failure can be daunting. It's why most people sit up in the stands and never put on the stripes in the first place.

Mistakes and thinking about them negatively can also create stress, which is too often underestimated as the root evil of much psychological and physical ailing. When the stress monkey is hanging around our neck, especially when we are working games, it is almost impossible to perform with good judgment, clarity and composure. Properly dealing with it, then letting it go and moving on, is the key to handling mistakes.

When we discuss mistakes in sports officiating, it seems safe to categorize them into two distinct areas: errors in judgment and misapplication of rules. Not only are they different in terms of how and why officials make them, they are very different in terms of how observers and supervisors view and handle them. What is the dividing line between errors in judgment and misapplication of rules?

Be it errors in judgment or misapplication of rules, are there any mistakes that are unforgivable for officials? Absolutely.

There should be no leeway for issues involving integrity, such as cheating. No one who does not have full integrity should be an official. If you intentionally make a bad call or show favoritism to one team, you should look for a new avocation.

How to Move on

When you make a mistake in a match, two areas need to be examined in terms of dealing with the mistake. The first is on the spot, in the moment and for the remainder of the match. The second is the greater period of work: the days, weeks, months and even seasons afterward.

At the time you make the error, you must be able to re-focus. Once the move is over, move on. If it's haunting you from that point on, you're not going to be able to make it through the rest of

the match. Officials who can't let it go and dwell on it are more likely to make additional mistakes.

You have to be able to admit your mistake, first to yourself, then to officials with whom you're working and maybe, depending on the circumstance, to the coach. You don't have to explain how you arrived at every call or admit you blew it. If it's a close one and you feel you might have missed it, you can try to calm the screaming coach with, "I was where I was supposed to be. I had a good look at it, but to tell you the truth, I wouldn't mind taking another look at it."

Another argument-ender with which officials have had success is, "Coach, if it happened the way you said it did, maybe I did miss it." You're not directly admitting a mistake, but you're addressing the coach.

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Sometimes as officials we need to be able to be honest with coaches about not having the best look at a particular move. If Oscar Rodriguez, Los Angeles, is able to be candid in a tense moment, it may help to defuse the situation.

Avoid being the official who comes in the locker room after the match and says, "I don't think we enforced that penalty correctly, but I didn't want to say anything." Raise the question on the mat. If you're wrong, there's no harm done and you've delayed the match only for a few seconds. If you're right, you've saved yourself from an embarrassing miss.

Postgame Review

Once the match is over, the postgame meeting starts a reflection

process. Start with reviewing the video if it's available. If you see a mistake while watching, ask yourself, "If that wasn't the right decision, what was the right decision?" Ascertain what prevented you from making the correct decision and figure out how you can make sure you get it right the next time.

The key is a frank self-evaluation. You may have to beat yourself up some. That doesn't mean completely destroying your self-confidence, but improvement only comes from an honest assessment. And that's not just

for rookies. As the saying goes, are you an official with 20 years of experience or have you just repeated your first year 20 times?

The perfect match has yet to be worked. Mistakes happen. It's what you do afterward that makes all the difference.

No error, regardless of how or why it was made, will ever go away. But it is within your power to fix the case and ensure it doesn't happen again. You cannot change the past, but it is possible to alter your future. ■