

By Jim Vreeland

High school wrestling has seen a variety of changes over the past 25 years. Some of those changes include:

- ✗ Once-legal holds have now been tagged illegal or potentially dangerous.
- ✗ Dropping riding time at the high school level.
- ✗ Clearer distinctions on stalling have made wrestling more exciting.
- ✗ Starting the wrestlers three feet apart in the neutral position rather than at the edge of the 10-foot circle has brought the match closer and quicker.
- ✗ Allowing the use of medication during the match, such as an inhaler for a wrestler with an asthma condition, is in the best interest of the athletes.
- ✗ Most recently, the injury time has been reduced from two minutes down to a minute and a half, with two timeouts instead of three. But, giving the opponent choice of position on the second time-out has forced wiser mat strategy and better-conditioned athletes.
- ✗ Adding the five-minute clock for control of all bleeding also gives the contestants a fair opportunity to compete.

All of these changes have made wrestling more exciting for the spectators. These rules changes have combined for better, safer and much more aggressive wrestling. With all of these changes, there is still a technical violation call that needs to be made more often — fleeing the mat, or pushing your opponent off the mat, to avoid being scored upon.

There is a significant difference between the first stalling violation, which is a warning, and fleeing the mat on the first offense. The fleeing violation should be a penalty point the first time it occurs, and it should be called consistently.

In discussing stalling, RULE 7-6-1 states, "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 the score of the match. Action is to be maintained throughout the match by the contestants wrestling aggressively, whether in the top, bottom or neutral position and both contestants are equally responsible for initiating the action ..."

In discussing technical violations, RULE 7-3-2 states, "Going out of the wrestling area or forcing an opponent out of the wrestling area, by either wrestler at any time as a means of avoiding wrestling, is a technical violation. Both wrestlers should make every effort to remain inbounds. When the referee feels that either wrestler has failed to make every effort to stay inbounds, the offending wrestler shall be penalized. Penalty points shall not be awarded in situations where near-fall points are earned."

The rules book mentions the significance of staying inbounds. "... Officials have the authority to penalize wrestlers and, when they fail to do so, they are in essence, giving his opponent an advantage." The importance of aggressive wrestling is stressed under Comments on the Rules in "Avoiding Wrestling." It states, "Both wrestlers should make every effort to remain inbounds. When the referee feels that either wrestler has failed to make every effort to stay inbounds, the offending wrestler shall be penalized. The rule very clearly states that if a wrestler goes out of the wrestling area or if he forces his opponent out of the wrestling area at any time as a means of avoiding wrestling, it is a technical violation. The rule states that each wrestler is to wrestle aggressively regardless of the position or the time or the score of the match. Action is to be maintained throughout the match in the offensive, defensive or neutral positions. There are too many occasions where wrestlers use the edge of the mat in order to get out of a situation when, in fact, they should be penalized for going out of the wrestling area."

All of these explanations are quite clear and specific. The NFHS gives the match official the authority; yet moreover, expects the official to make the technical violation call when a contestant intentionally leaves the wrestling area to avoid aggressive action, to avoid being scored upon, and generally to avoid wrestling. Both contestants must make every effort to stay in the circle and

FLEEING

A TECHNICAL VIOLATION

compete aggressively. This is always the official's judgment.

Listed below are several examples of the technical violation penalty point for fleeing the mat:

NEUTRAL POSITION:

- ✗ Wrestler A shoots a single leg and lifts Wrestler B's leg. Wrestler B hooks a whizzer, then turns to the out-of-bounds circle, hops and pulls Wrestler A out of bounds.
- ✗ Wrestler A lifts a single leg of Wrestler B. This time, Wrestler B turns his opponent's back to the outer edge of the circle and drives the opponent straight out of bounds. Wrestler A is still holding the leg while being pushed out of bounds.
- ✗ Wrestler A, while attacking from the center of the circle, takes numerous shots. Wrestler B continues to move back, then eventually backs off the mat to avoid another strong double-leg attack from Wrestler A.

OFFENSIVE POSITION:

- ✗ During the action of being reversed in a switch, Wrestler A crawls out of bounds as Wrestler B is arching over the top to turn the hips down to gain control. Wrestler A has avoided being scored upon and thinks about going back to the center of the circle to get a clean start in the referee's position.
- ✗ Wrestler B hits a stand-up. Wrestler A, standing behind and still in control, lifts Wrestler B and takes several steps to walk the opponent off the mat.
- ✗ Or, Wrestler A simply begins driving Wrestler B forward. When Wrestler B tries to turn to stay inbounds, Wrestler A continues to pull his opponent to get off the mat.



DEFENSIVE POSITION:

- ✗ Wrestler A gets taken down, and is immediately put into a cradle. As Wrestler B is working to turn the opponent, Wrestler A continues to crawl and pull both wrestlers out of bounds.
- ✗ Wrestler A gets thrown with a lateral drop and is immediately put to his/her back. As the official counts "one thousand-one" and flags out one hand count for the near fall, Wrestler B bridges and drives over the out-of-bounds circle.
- ✗ Wrestler A applies a cross body, and then steps over the top into a double grapevine. As Wrestler A starts a power half, Wrestler B turns to find the outer circle and crawls out of bounds.

The official's position is clear. Be fair, completely unbiased, and evaluate the match based solely on the performance of both athletes. The match official is to impartially apply the rules of the sport for both contestants. The examples mentioned above illustrate one wrestler using the out-of-bounds circle to avoid wrestling, and specifically to avoid being scored upon. A wrestling match involves two contestants, and it is not fair for one athlete to work aggressively in the circle while the other intentionally leaves the mat to avoid competition. By not awarding the technical violation penalty point when fleeing the mat occurs, the aggressive wrestler is being put at a distinct disadvantage. Instead, the attacking wrestler should be recognized and rewarded for wrestling skills and for carrying the bulk of the action in the match. Awarding the penalty point is both the correct and fair call in this situation when one of the wrestlers leaves the mat to avoid giving up a score.

It is important to note that if the offensive wrestler earns either a two- or three-point near fall, the wrestler cannot also earn the point for the technical violation if the defensive

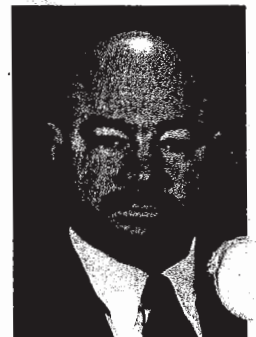
wrestler bridges off the mat. The offensive wrestler has been recognized and rewarded for aggressive wrestling skills in earning the near-fall points.

A colleague once described the out-of-bounds circle in relationship to fleeing the mat this way: if the edge of the circle were a straight drop-off into a deep pit with a tiger roaming at the bottom, both wrestlers would never get close to the edge. Both wrestlers would fight 10 times harder to stay inside the circle, rather than fall into the pit. Each would much rather deal with the

opponent than deal with the tiger.

The technical violation penalty should be made promptly, without hesitation, and in the spirit of good sportsmanship for both athletes. The call should be made and explained with eye contact at the scoring table. With the call made in this manner, all can understand the official's position on the wrestlers leaving the wrestling area to avoid competition. All can see the confidence the official exhibits while making the call. The athletes can learn from the experience of the competition, the value and importance of aggressive wrestling.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jim Vreeland, who has been a wrestling official in Ohio for 30 years, was president of the South Shore Wrestling Officials Association from 1987 to 1998. He has been an official at the Ohio High School Athletic Association state wrestling tournament for 13 years, and was inducted into the Ohio Wrestling Hall of Fame in 1996. Vreeland was a member of the group that wrote the NFHS Wrestling Officiating Training Manual. He is an accomplished speaker and writer of high school wrestling, and a longtime wrestling camp director and clinician.





WRESTLING

The issue of proper weight management was foremost on the agenda of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Wrestling Rules Committee at its March 25-26 meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee is composed of one voting member from each of the eight NFHS sections, along with representatives of the National Federation Coaches Association (NFCA) and National Federation Officials Association (NFOA). Sam Crosby of New Jersey is the chairman of the committee.

The main goal of the committee, according to Jerry Diehl, NFHS assistant director and liaison to the Wrestling Rules Committee, was to provide a situation for athletes whereby they could concentrate less on making weight and more on wrestling.

The most significant rules changes dealt with Rules 4-5-1 and 4-5-3, concerning weigh-in procedures for dual meets and tournaments. These rules changes were implemented to eliminate the detrimental practices associated with dehydration that are considered to have a negative impact on a wrestler's well-being. In both dual meets and tournaments, wrestlers will be required to remain in the weigh-in area and not participate in any dehydration activities.

"In the past they could leave the area," Crosby said. "Now we are saying to the wrestlers that they should not be concerned with weight and be ready to weigh in at that time."

Rule 1-1-2 was also changed to provide for a random draw after the weigh-in to determine the wrestling order of the weight classes instead of working from the lightest to the heaviest classes.

"The traditional draw allowed for wrestlers in the heavier weight classes to hydrate, bulk up and wrestle out of their class," Crosby said. "This also adds some excitement to the match by not always having the heavyweights finishing a meet."

Another topic tackled at the meeting was the overtime procedure. Previously, at the end of regulation, if the score was tied, a disc was tossed to determine who would have choice of offense or defense to begin overtime. Now, Rule

6-7-1 has been changed to allow the wrestler who first scored a point during regulation to have the choice in the 30-second tie-breaker.

"I think this is a good change," Crosby said. "This will give wrestlers more incentive to get that first point."

In addition, four other rules changes were addressed:

- Rule 4-3-1 had language added to prohibit the use of any type of electronic communication between a coach and competitor.
- Rule 6-1-3 has been changed to reduce the time of an overtime period from two minutes to one minute.
- In Rule 6-6-2, failure of the official to give the opponent his choice following the calling of a second injury time-out has been added to bad time.
- A new article has been added to Rule 7-3-7 to also penalize the wrestler who appears on the mat not properly equipped, in addition to the penalty to the coach as addressed in Rule 7-5-3.