

Handling Coaches During the Match

by

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As I have traveled throughout our region giving clinics to other officials one of the most common concerns is in regard to the actions of the coaches during a match. It appears that too many officials are worried about what the coaches are trying to say to them during the match. I have had dozens of questions start out with "What do you do when the coach says...?" or "How do you handle a coach that does...?"

My reaction was one of astonishment that these officials were giving far too much recognition to coaches during a match. Why do they care so much about what the coach is saying to them? My response is:

* Concern yourself with the two competitors on the mat and make sure they are safe and you are giving them your very best effort to assure a fair match. You could conduct a match with 2 competitors, scorer's table personnel and yourself and everything else is inconsequential to the running of a match.

* The coaches and spectators have nothing to do with the on going match and their comments are irrelevant. Unless they are trying to let you know there is a legitimate problem with the clock or the score, there is no other reason to pay any attention to them. Unless they go to the table and request the bout be stopped.

* If you give clear signals and brief verbal comments such as "no control" or "on the line" or "only has one ankle" you may head off a coach that is looking for an explanation why his kid didn't score or was scored on during a flurry of activity.

* During the meet is not the time to run a clinic on the rules. You are not obligated to explain everything you are doing out there. Using the prescribed signals and assisting with verbal responses to your own calls is your obligation and will help immeasurably in keeping everyone aware of what is happening on the mat. And, It is ok to presume the coaches know the rules. If they don't that is their problem. Ignorance doesn't give them the right to continuously interrupt the match without some expectation of a penalty.

* Do not get into conversations with anyone off the mat. That shows you have "rabbit ears."

* If an authorized individual wants to talk to you they can take it to the table. And if they do, you are obligated to direct the competitors to stay in the 10' circle and then you can go to the table. And after all this delay to set up a discussion there are only two responses to the delay. The coach has a legitimate correction of time, score or a rule misapplication and the correction is made without penalty and wrestling resumes. Or, there is nothing to correct or the coach is questioning judgment, and the coach is penalized for misconduct (NFHS).

Note; Do not go to the table until the coach gets there first. I have seen refs move quickly to meet with the coach that is headed to the table so they can end the discussion quickly and get the match started again with as little delay as possible. Only to see the coach turn around before getting to the table and you are left standing there wondering what the coach is doing. Technically he hasn't gotten to the table and made his request to stop the match. You can't penalize the coach for thinking of stopping the match and changing his mind before getting to the table.

* The first thing I ask of the coach when we meet at the table is "Where is your rule book?"

There will be a penalty involved here unless you think there was a misapplication of a rule. And if that is true you better be able to show me the exact paragraph that is being scrutinized." Rarely do they have a rulebook. And now they are usually trying to come up with a quick "question" that will not get them penalized for delaying the match. If they have a rulebook listen to their question and rule accordingly.

* When a coach goes to the table and tries to use a delaying tactic involving a "clarification" of the score and I am sure that the score is correct I will invoke a penalty for the delay. If I am not sure of the correct score I will give the benefit of the doubt to the coach and check to see what the correct score is without any penalty. Any request for clarification anywhere other than the table will 99.9% of the time be ignored unless I think it is in the best interest of the match to give a quick response without interrupting the flow of the match.

* The referee does have responsibility over the entire gym and everyone that is present. But, it is unreasonable to assume the ref can pay much attention beyond the 2 competitors on the mat. If there is some outrageous action by coaches, teammates or spectators that distracts the referee and requires special attention then the match should be stopped and appropriate action should be taken to eliminate any unsportsmanlike activity.

* Focus on the wrestlers on the mat. If you do you will eliminate a lot of

distractions and you will increase your ability to make the best judgment calls and minimize the chance of injury. That is the business of officiating. The rest is administrative. And the rulebook provides all the steps to take when you are not officiating and you have to deal with the extracurricular administrative activities.

* When you use the rulebook the way it is intended, and you do it from the start, with consistency, you will eliminate a lot of the unnecessary delays. The message goes out to the coaches that they better be sure a stoppage is legitimate and worth the risk of penalty.

When all is said and done, the most respected and sought after referees are the ones that do the best job on the mat with consistency and fairness. Never showing any partiality to either team or coach goes a long way to identifying the best of the best.

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