

Proper Wrestling Officiating Mechanics, A Three-Part Series Combined

By Fredrick Feeney, Ohio

Part I – Start of Match and Takedowns

We are at the start of the post season tournaments. How do you know if a referee at this level is doing a good job? Well, it really is all about proper mechanics. In my referee classes that I teach, I tell my students to always be a duck. If you walk like a duck, and quack like a duck and look like a duck, people will naturally think you are a duck. Same way with being a referee. If you are doing the things that make you look like you are a referee people will believe you are.

When I watch a match, I very rarely watch the action of the wrestlers, I am usually watching the mechanics of the referee. Very quickly, I can tell if he is a duck or not.

Next time you watch a referee work, watch his mechanics. Be it high school or college, that referee will very clearly will show you his “feathers”.

One other point, you may not agree with all a referee’s calls, but if his mechanics are correct, you can be assured, he knows what he is doing.

Proper Wrestling Officiating Mechanics

- Signals - clear and complete for all rulings
- Position - optimum location to see what is required to make a ruling
- 1st Rule – Hustle! 2nd Rule – Hustle! 3rd Rule – Hustle
- 2nd Rule – Anticipate! Anticipate the action. Always be in position for the action to come to you. Credibility of rulings increases from optimum, stationary positions
- Don’t anticipate the call, anticipate the move. That sounds like a contradiction, but it’s not. If you can “**feel**” what’s coming and adjust your position or your visual focus on the right area, you’ll see the action better and you’ll have a much better opportunity to make a correct call.

Prior to Match

- Arrive hour prior/Dressed appropriately
- Proper Pre-Meet
- Communicate with table
- Assign right colors
- G/R in book
- Chairs matside?
- How will tappers work? 4-3-2-1 Time!

Start of match

- Correct wrestlers?
- Eye contact with timer
- Start in close
- Whistle & Motion all in one
- Don't create false starts
- Look for Visible Lean
- Back out quick – Be prepared for a quick shot
- Angles/Angles/Angles

Signals - Points

- Clear, High and Rotate
- Use Approved Signals
- Don't Look at Table!
- Maintain Focus
- Check Table / Scoreboard after every period

Neutral Position

- Centered looking between wrestlers
- Angles lie
- Move laterally ahead of attack

Takedowns - Single Leg Attack

- Cross Face - front side, see face
- Hands - front side, see hands / fingers
- Front Trip - side, see top contact
- Back Trip - back side, action comes to you
- Lace finish - back side, see whizzer or cross leg control

Takedowns - Double Leg Attack

- Cross Face - front side, see face
- Deep shots on mat - side view to see:
 - Control
 - Locked hands around back
 - Imminent near fall
 - Crotch / body lock lift effectiveness

Takedowns - Front Head Locks

- Change level as low as required, possibly down on mat
 - Location of lock / forearm
 - Inclusion of arm
- Side without arm included
 - See any contact / pressure on the neck

Takedowns – Other types

- Duck Under – Anticipate where the throw might go.
- Drags – Don't get out of position if it goes away from you
- Ankle picks – Don't get in too close
- Front trips – Don't let them trip into you, get further back
- Back Trips – Don't let them trip so far away you can't see everything
- Spaghetti Wrestling – Hold your call! Let it finish
- Position yourself different for middle of mat versus line calls

To be prepared against surprise is to be trained. To be prepared for surprise is to be educated.

Part II - 2nd and 3rd Period Starts and Referee Position

In the continuation of this series on proper mechanics, officials should strive to work on the proper mechanic on calling a match, versus their "own style". There is room for "personal style" but not at the expense of proper mechanics.

2nd Period - 3rd Period

- Have a system to know proper choices
- Flip and let the disk hit – Don't catch it
- Kneel to pick it up (saves your back)
- Verbalize so the table and both teams know who chooses what
- Do it same way every time
- Double check with table
- Know 3rd period choice with your system

Starts - Referees Position

- Clear Directions: Bottom, top, or optional
- Bottom: see lines – get the right angle
- Top: Feet location – get the right angle
- Top: contact – get the right angle (see a theme here?)
- Move to see what you need to see when you need to see it
- Establish a proper cadence
- Motion & Whistle as one action. Don't cause a false start because of your own actions

First Moves

- Near side arm chop – Be on the near side
- Legs In – Get on the open side
- Merkle – Understand what it is and when control is established
- Three Quarters – Be aware of the turn and ready for the fall
- Switch - far side. Don't chase the tail. They go right, you go left.
- Scramble / Crawl - either side, not in front
- Optional starts – Angles!!! If you don't have the proper angle, one of the coaches will.

Sit Outs

- Hands, Fingers - front or side. Watch for pull backs
- Snap back to near fall – side
- Turn in – side

Control Position – Standing

- Safety first – How will the fall be broke when brought to the mat?
- Hands - front or side – Can the bottom kid protect himself?
- Back Trip – side position
- Front Trip – side position
- Watch for the Whizzer or...Whiz. What's the difference?

Cradles

- Cradles happen – watch the hands – be in the correct position
- Roll Through - front position
- Straight back – back position
- Inside shoulder - from top looking down
- Top and Side Views Blocked - Try rear view, up spine

Bottom Position

- Sit outs – Locked Hands? Stall?
- Stand Ups – Reverse?
- Switches – Re-switch possible?
- Granby's – Back points? Who checks who?
- Optional Starts – Turn in? Angles!

Pinning Combinations

- Arm Bars, Half Nelsons
 - Close enough to protect bottom wrestler
 - Ahead of turn to see criteria
 - Consider rotating in opposite direction
 - Keep it legal! Blair Tilts?
- Guillotines
 - Close enough to protect bottom wrestler
 - Audible count
- Visible, Audible Signals
 - Every time near fall criteria is met and lost

- Proper 2 seconds

Out of Bounds/Line Calls

- Apply all of the above and be in the right position
- Be there ahead of the action. Much easier to sell a call when you are in the proper position.
- Straddle the line and then catch only if you need to.
- One of the worst times to be “late” in getting into position.
- Focus first on supporting points
 - Feet will move, control will not disappear
- Preferably, award any points earned prior to out of bounds signal
- Keep wrestlers in view coming back

Treat every match as if your entire career is based on this one match's evaluation.

Part III - Tough Calls. Tough Coaches and Assistant Referees

This is Part 3 of 3 on the series on proper mechanics. Watch the very best officials be it college or high school and will see the proper mechanics being used from the first match to the last.

When asked how do I keep the same tempo through a match or a tournament, I do this: Before every match, I look at the crowd and I pick one person, doesn't matter who it is, but to me...that is the person who I imagine is not only is evaluating me, but “can on the spot” give me the D1's or the State Tournament, or whatever, based on how I referee this one match. If you make every match that “one match” you will always be in top form.

Spaghetti Wrestling

- When is control gained? You better know the right criteria.
- Know the criteria – Enough said.
- Verbalize – Still Neutral! Let everyone know what you are seeing.
- Be decisive. All part of selling the call
- Don't Panic – You will see it and know instinctually what to do at the right time.
- Don't listen but don't tune them out – The coaches might just help you by them seeing something you don't. Get into the right position.
- Be in the Proper Position – Worse thing is to be out of position and try and sell a call.
- **Sell the call!!! See all the above!**

Resolving Conflict/Dealing with Coaches

- Know the criteria better than any coach

- Listening skills – Learn them and use them
- Flexibility – Adapt and Adjust
- Willingness to change – Understand you may be wrong!
- Agree to disagree – Can't win them all
- Eye contact – Look the coach in the eye when you talk with him
- Don't interrupt – Give him his turn
- Know the rules – You are the expert, act like it
- Who had the best angle? Were you in proper position?
- Understand what occurred – Play it over in your mind's eye
- There are always consequences – Have courage to do the right thing
- Let the rules work for you – Knowing the rules better than anyone is strong medicine.
- Make your own call – Don't be bullied by anyone.
- **Be Consistent!**

Proper Use of Assistants

- Why? To get it right
- Extra eyes/ears/mouth/brain
- 51% to 49% - The lead is the voice
- First on, Last off – Go to top of mat and see what occurs before and after
- Stay in the match/ No arms folded or in pockets
- 180 from the lead
- Stay outer circle
- Know the choices
- **Neutral Position**
 - Clock start?
 - Don't block table
 - Stay out of the way
 - Catch but be ready
 - Circle and close in during spaghetti
 - Circle in and to head for falls/Keep standing
 - Out of bounds? Catch Correctly Back/Side
 - Front Head locks – Open to your side?
 - Fig 4 – Scissors
 - Know when to step in and stop match
 - Line Calls – What did you see? Simple stuff
 - Falls – Stay up
 - Watch clock
 - Be prepared for when time was out
 - Second Period/Third Periods
 - Refresh lead ref with cautions/warnings
 - Know choice/Keep choice
 - Stalling/Communicate if needed

- Don't agree? Move away and talk
- Agree to disagree
- Great call? Tell him/Nod

- **Second Period/Third Periods**
 - Refresh lead ref with cautions/warnings
 - Know choice/Keep choice
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 - Great call? Tell the lead/Nod

- **End of Match Procedures**
 - Declare Match Over
 - Keep Both Wrestlers in View
 - Good Handshake/Raise Hand
 - Hesitate a bit before going to table if alone
 - Assistant to top of mat
 - Check Score/ Circle Winner/Fall/Bout time

Summary

- Anticipate the action
 - Work hard mentally, maintain Focus
 - Know what's coming
- Always consider priorities
- Arrive ahead of the action
- Know where to be
- Announce and signal clearly
- 5 P's - Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance
- Be smooth
- Be in Control
- Be Confident

CLEAR rulings, from GOOD POSITIONS, compliment the credibility of all calls.

Rulings from poor positions, or delays, as you "chase" the action, compromise the credibility of correct calls.

Be a duck!

If you walk like a duck and quack like a duck and look like a duck, people will think you are a duck. Same with being a referee. Act like one, look like one and people will think you are one!

Perfection consists not in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.



About the author, Fredrick Feeney: Fred, a long time Ohio wrestling official, is a member of the CDWOA, the CWOA and the NWOA, and is a moderator on several popular wrestling discussion forums. Fred's in-depth experience encompasses both scholastic and collegiate levels, having culminated with numerous assignments at the OHSAA State Tournament and NCAA Division II and III Championship finals. Fred and his wife reside in Dublin, Ohio.

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