

“Stalling”

Reprinted & updated by
Dick Loewenstine

For as long as interscholastic wrestling has been contested, the question of stalling has been of tantamount concern to both coaches and officials. Every year, questions arises as to how stalling is to be called or how can I coach a wrestler to stall without being penalized. All must realize that stalling is an art, it is coached, and it is a violation and it must be penalized. Coaching stalling as a tactic, in either offensive or defensive position, is well documented. Coaches and athletes must accept the fact that if they do stall, they will be penalized for stalling. Rules 5-25 & 7-6 requires each wrestler to make an honest attempt to wrestle aggressively. Coaches need to coach this and officials need to penalize when aggressive wrestling does not take place.

The attached information has been compiled after lengthy, in-depth review of materials provided at various national rules meetings, assorted articles and discussions with experienced coaches and officials. The information contained should serve as a guide for coaches to teach aggressive tactics and for officials to recognize when a wrestler is not being aggressive. Both coaches and officials have continued to ask for a set of criteria that both wrestlers and officials can live with that will define what stalling is and when it should be called. However, this is probably the most subjective part of coaching or officiating in any sport. Generally speaking, there are specific objective criteria that can be applied by officials in making the stalling call and officials have to be aware that if they think a wrestler is stalling, they probably have already missed the initial stalling moves and stalling should have been called earlier.

It is hoped that the "stalling" information provided will be used as a guide in making objective and consistent stalling calls. As officials, we must strive to be consistent with our calls, as the wrestler merely asks for consistency in that what happens in the first period will happen in the third period. Athletes can adjust to officials much more easily than coaches so, again, consistency is our prime concern.

It is hoped that this information will be the starting point for both coaches and officials to work toward the ideal of eliminating stalling from wrestling in total.

STALLING

Stalling is probably high school wrestling's most controversial call. If there was one single element of wrestling that proves baffling to the minds of wrestlers, coaches and fans alike, it is definitely the stalling call. Why, no one really knows, but one fact remains, we must find some uniformity in the identifications and calling of stalling.

The purpose of this article is to begin to clarify stalling by the basic definition, and isolating some simple techniques to identify when it begins. This will reduce the frequency of stalling, increase the aggressiveness of wrestling action and promote the activity in the spirit of which the rules were written. Ultimately wrestling will be much more enjoyable for all involved.

To begin our challenge, it is important to realize that a successful official must develop a mental attitude for identifying and calling stalling. Further, is it just as important to develop a pattern of consistency from match to match and meet to meet. When calling stalling, the official should be confident in making the call...we call it “selling the call” with a clear and commanding signal. There should be no doubt to the wrestlers and coaches that stalling has been called.

It is also important to understand that the burden for eliminating stalling does not belong to the official. We must realize that the coaches have a great deal to do with stalling through their coaching philosophies, techniques and strategies. No matter how hard we try to define stalling, identifying stalling, and penalize accordingly, there will always be someone that will try to gain the competitive edge by stalling. It would be against human nature to believe otherwise.

All things aside, whether to call stalling, or not to call stalling, on one wrestler or his opponent, it must consistently be called. And from the beginning the rulebook clearly makes it known that only one person is given the power to make this difficult and controversial call. .. the official.

Lets begin with our basic definition - "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."

While there are four major parts of this definition, the most important and difficult is "wrestle aggressively". In its simplest form:

Initiate Movement + Follow Up =Wrestle Aggressively / Significant Action.

Initiating the movement is to begin or originate a moves or series or moved; making the first move or taking action" that requires a countermove or action. Follow Up is an attempt to fully execute a move or series of moves. Significant Action is the continuity or flow of action, commonly referred to as "chain wrestling", that is created through the initiation and follow up of movement.

It is most important to consider the words "regardless of" when referring to "time and score". What this simply means is, when you see it, call it. If the action was stalling in the first period, it is stalling in the third period, and vice versa. If the action was stalling when the score is 0-0, it is stalling when the score is 8-3, 5-4, or 6-6. Stalling is stalling, because of the action or lack of action, not because of the score or time in the match. The only variation to this, would be the intermittent use of move or movement, or progression of events or moves that would constitute a stalling call. Maybe one action by itself wouldn't warrant a stalling call, but the action repeated later or coupled with another action later in the match would warrant a call. Then stalling should be called without hesitation.

In adding to our thoughts on "time and score" let us address the statement "I don't want to make that call, I want the kids to decide the match." If the wrestlers, through their action or lack of action have created a stalling situation, then they have decided the match. Remember that we as officials are given the power to penalize only if we see the violation. This power wouldn't be there is they were doing another move or sequence of moves. We didn't make them do what they are doing to cause the situation; they choose their actions.

Lastly, we need to address the importance of understanding and considering the sequence of penalizing and awarding of points. Stalling can be called anytime during the match, while wrestling is on going, when there is stoppage from out of bounds, at the end of a period, or anytime it is identified. It becomes important when we consider the overall picture and eventual outcome.

As an example, let's consider a situation where the top man is stalling in our judgement and has been doing so. We look at the clock and see there is a small amount of time left in the first period and think to our self, let's just wait until the end to make the call. In the meantime the bottom man

escapes and the period ends. The stalling call is never made. In the second period the same wrestler is on top and wrestling continues. Midway through the period, he again begins stalling and we stop the match and charge him.

Because it is the first time, only a warning is issued, but realistically it's not the first, but the second. The bottom man is actually at a loss, because he has lost all the time involved without the opportunity to score a point. He loses 5-4, but can we justify this?

In summary, we must have a good grasp for the sequence of events that warrant a stalling call and the awarding of points accordingly. If we do, and we make the call without hesitation when we recognize it, there most likely will be an increase in action and less second-guessing of the official for the stalling call.

Now that we have defined what stalling is and have that definition as the foundation for our focus, along with clarifying the components of "time and score", so they do not become steering mechanisms, we can direct our attention to specific techniques or criteria in detecting stalling. In this phase, we will concentrate our efforts based on "position", whether it is top, bottom or neutral.

Before we begin, it is important that we must "detect" or look for stalling by applying our criteria to any given situation. It is then and only then that we will actually be able to make a good stalling call and be consistent over the long term. If we don't look for stalling, we will never identify it or call it and chances are we will witness a match with very little significant action, with the possibility existing that the better wrestler may never have the opportunity to show his skills and score.

In the *neutral position* where there is normally more movement than mat wrestling, sometimes it becomes more difficult to judge whether every effort is being made to stay in the 10 foot circle. The few positions that might take the action out of the circle are the locked up position, reflex actions and feinting. In all cases, they must attempt to make contact at some point in the series of movements and not to do so would warrant a stalling call. In applying our definition, we need to look for who is initiating action or being the aggressor by setting-up his opponent. Ways that are most common are circling, changing levels, changing direction, and attempt to penetrate his opponent. Taking a step backwards can be constituted as a set-up if it is followed up with an attempt to move in on their opponent.

Follow-up in the neutral position can best be described as an honest attempt to secure a takedown and can be easily detected by concentrating on the hips. If they stay back, the wrestler is most likely on defense versus offense.

Other actions or holds that are common faking of aggressive action are blocking with the head or forearm on the shoulder, chest or head; controlling the wrist of Russian Tie Up without follow up action; hanging on single without follow up; elevating a single leg without attempting to bring the opponent to the mat; repeatedly giving up the single leg without any attempt to follow through; dropping to one or two knees to block without an attempt to bring the opponent to counter; and using single and/or double underhooks without attempting a takedown.

Another aspect of stalling from the neutral position is counter wrestling. Three situations that most commonly occur and can warrant stalling being called, are the repeated use of the back crotch to lift without attempting to elevate; front head and arm without attempting to score; and

underhooks without attempted follow up. In all cases, if these situations happen and action stops, the first time they would be stalemated. The second and repeated uses would warrant stalling penalties.

The last area of emphasis when looking for stalling in the neutral position is the intent to "play the edge". While this area is directly related to staying in the 10-foot circle, certain situations can easily be detected. Preventing an opponent from returning to the center or failing to return to the center when an opponent gives the opportunity to do so is stalling. This is not to be confused with "fleeing the mat", which is a technical violation, The difference being that the "fleeing the mat" call is made when a wrestler leaves the mat to gain "safe haven" and avoid being scored on. The stalling call is made when the wrestler leaves the mat to avoid wrestling.

Stalling from *offensive or top position* occurs when a wrestler fails to make an honest attempt to work for a fall. While it is not realistic to expect the top man to jeopardize his control or lead by going straight to a fall maneuver at the whistle, he should work through a series of improvements to that end. By this we mean, break the defensive wrestler down to the mat, then apply moves to score through near fall or pinning combinations. Stalling from the top position usually comes from maneuvers that are used to prevent action, but the best "rule of thumb" to watch for is the "perpendicular theory from the advantage position". Basically this theory is based on the top man working so that the midline (spine) of his back is perpendicular to the midline (spine) of his opponent. Most moves from the top position require this to happen at some time in the follow up process to execute the move. When the top man counter wrestles and is content to just hold and control his opponent and ride the hips, he most likely is not moving perpendicular and this would warrant stalling. Riding can sometimes be disguised when the top man continually changes his attack by switching from ankle to chopping the arm to wrenching the waist to the wrist ride or any other movement where his intent is to just keep his opponent off his base. The key here is to look to see if the top man comes off the hips.

Other tactics or situations that often are perceived as stalling are a cradle for control only when there is no attempt to take the bottom man over; the over and under working up; ½ nelson spiral; crab ride with no attempt to turn (a good crab ride keeps opponent off the mat and turns him); dropping to a single from the whistle; and when the bottom stands, the top man lifts him off the mat or walks him off the mat without making an attempt to bring him back down to the mat.

The last area of emphasis regarding stalling on the top man is the cross body or "legs" series. Over the years leg wrestling has had its place in mat wrestling and still can be used as an effective means to score points or a fall. However, the tendencies are leaning towards less and less use of the legs. Many people think that legs create little or no action the majority of the time and bring wrestling to a dull state. For that reason, the burden to wrestle aggressively and score with the legs is generally put on the top man.

While using the cross body the top man must attempt to turn the bottom man. The key to power in using the legs is for the top wrestler to keep his hips above his opponents. If they are below his opponents, he has very little chance to turn him, and chances are he is riding his opponent or will become locked up in a position where he is unable to score or progress the action. A stalemate would be called. Assuming that the bottom man has not caused the stalemate, and this situation is repeated, each time the match is stopped the top man would be charged for stalling.

In the event that the top man has applied the legs while on the mat and the defensive wrestler stands bearing all the weight of the top man, it should be stopped and called potentially

dangerous. If this situation were repeated, each time the match is stopped for potentially dangerous, the top man would be charged for stalling. It is important to note that the match should only be stopped if the top mans rudder leg is not down. It is also important to understand that if the legs are applied after the bottom wrestler has reached his feet or on the way up and the rudder leg comes up, the situation is stopped as potentially dangerous and stalling is called on the first time.

Lastly, we must understand that in order to follow the progression of stalling warnings and penalties, there can be any combination of reasons for stopping the match to warrant stalling. The following charts would represent the for "legs" sequences:

Legs are in and on the mat

- 1st stop-Stalemate-award
- 2nd stop-Stalemate-warning for top wrestler
- 3rd stop-Stalemate-penalized top wrestler for stalling

Legs in & then they stand / top man does not have a rudder leg on the mat

- 1st stop-Potentially dangerous-award
- 2nd stop-Potentially dangerous-warning
- 3rd stop-Potentially dangerous-penalized

Bottom man Stands first and then top man puts the legs in

- PD- top man receives a warning for stalling
- PD-top man is penalized for stalling

The only exemption to the stalemate sequence would be when the bottom man creates the stalemate with an action like clamping down on the top man's arm so he can't get it out. If this action is repeated, the bottom man would be warned and penalized accordingly.

In summary, the general burden to score when the legs are applied is put on the top man. Also, understand that the general consensus is that a good leg man will control his opponent and they shouldn't reach their feet. We can't penalize the bottom man from coming up and out.

When the *bottom man or defensive man* fails to work up and out, most likely he has not initiated action designed to escape or reverse, and should be charged with stalling.

Once again the best "rule of thumb" to watch for is the "perpendicular theory for the defensive man". This theory is based on the bottom man working so that the plane of his back is perpendicular to the mat. Most moves from the bottom position require this to happen at some point in the follow through and execution of the move. While the bottom man does not have to expose himself to a fall situation, he must wrestle aggressively and, in doing so, he will most likely work to get his head up and back perpendicular to the mat or to his feet. If the defensive wrestler is broken down on the mat, we are looking to see if he is making an honest attempt to get to his base and working for a reversal or attempting to get to his feet for an escape.

Other signals that would point to the bottom man stalling would be just continually basing up on all fours without attempt to escape or reverse; balling up in the fetal position; grasping his opponents hands or wrist just for control or grasping their legs so the top man can't move to the side; locking his own hands when flat; and going out of bounds to intentionally get a new start.

Our final point of interest deals with the "delaying of the match". There are two common techniques that are used to delay the progress of the match specifically following the stoppage of the match. They are straggling back from out of bounds and not assuming the position to start.

Stalling shall be called consistently throughout the match including the Sudden Victory and for the two 30 second Tiebreakers (I and II). Stalling in the 30 second Ultimate Tiebreaker is the only exception to how you would call stalling, since the offensive wrestler's responsibility is controlled wrestling. Therefore, the first obvious stall call on the top wrestler will be called a stalemate. (The example of an obvious stalling maneuver would be for the top wrestler to immediately clamp down on a leg of the defensive wrestler and not move up. Another example would be if the offensive wrestler stands up with the defensive wrestler and not make any attempt to take the defensive wrestler back to the mat.) If this is repeated, the next call will be called stalling. Keep in mind, all cautions, warnings, penalty points, injury time, etc. all carry through the entire match.

In closing, it should be pointed out that the ideas in this article are meant to be basic guidelines from which we all can understand stalling. In no way have we addressed every situation that could lead to a stalling call. To do this, we would have to analyze every possible outcome of every maneuver and that doesn't seem feasible. Wrestling has evolved to the sport that it is today and will continue to change as different styles and philosophies emerge. As they do, we will constantly weight them for their credibility and adjust the rules accordingly. Most importantly, until the rules are changed, we all must find some uniformity in the identifications and the calling of stalling.

As in any sport or business, there are certain rules, guidelines or practices that a businessperson, coach, or official may not agree with. They take a position, "I do not agree with that rule and therefore, I am not going to follow it". In business, as well as athletics, this is not an acceptable practice. Specifically, in athletics there are national governing bodies that create the rules we follow and there is also an opportunity for everyone to have input into the rules and their changes, therefore; if a rule is not acceptable we must go through the proper channels to have the rule changed or eliminated. It is NOT the prerogative of an official and/or coach to set aside a particular rule because they do not agree with it. Officials must not "pass" on a call they don't believe in – instead, work for a change in the rule through your state and national rules organizations.