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Stalling: Fact or Fiction?

By: Fred Feeney

Stalling, as defined by the dictionary, reads like this.

Stall: Function: *verb, intransitive senses* : to play for time; *transitive senses* : to hold off, divert, or delay by evasion or deception.

Apply this definition to our sport of wrestling and it basically means the same thing. In order to make the correct call an official must first be able to recognize stalling when it occurs on the mat. The following is taken directly from the NCAA officials' evaluation model:

"The official needs an intimate knowledge, understanding, and insight into the sport of wrestling, in order to properly recognize stalling. He must be able to discern between a wrestler that is unable to execute and the one that can execute but will not." [emphasis added]

SOME INITIAL THOUGHTS ON STALLING...

1. PHILOSOPHY...

The philosophy hasn't changed in over 20 years. It must be sound; no one has changed it or has been able to.

2. ACTUAL...

Both wrestlers must make an honest attempt to wrestle aggressively.

3. COACHES...

The coach wants to know why must his kid, who's winning 8-0, be responsible for initiating the action? Why is it that stalling seems only to be called in the third period with 20 seconds to go and the crowd is booing?

4. REMEDY... as the official you must :

A. Be consistent :

- Why am I calling stalling at this time ?
- Have I called it this way through the entire match, or only in this period because of the score ?
- Was it used to prevent a single move ?
- Was it used repeatedly to prevent the opponent from attacking ?

B. Provide verbal communication:

- **"Center"** – work in or to the middle.
- **"Action"** – wrestle aggressively. Each wrestler must allow their opponent the opportunity to attack.
- **"Contact"** – create an angle and attack.

C. Provide visual communication:

- Be careful about rotating your hand in order to show more action is needed.

D. Carefully scrutinize out-of-bounds situations:

- There are only three ways to go out-of-bounds, and two are stalling!
 1. Flurry of action = not stalling
 2. Backing out-of-bounds = stalling
 3. Pushing out-of-bounds = stalling

Understanding that today's wrestlers are more apt to not want to lose rather than trying to win. It is with this mindset that the act of stalling creeps into the better wrestlers' style. There is no difference between a wrestler stalling because he is out of condition, or is scared of being pinned, and one that is not bettering his position because he already has the advantage and doesn't want to take the chance of something bad happening.

Each wrestler has the responsibility to make an honest effort to make sure that action is maintained throughout the entire match by wrestling aggressively, whether in the neutral, offensive, or defensive position. Each wrestler must continually try and improve their positions.

NEUTRAL POSITION...

When in the neutral position each wrestler must work for a takedown. Each must attempt to stay in the 10' circle. Some stalling techniques are:

- Avoiding contact
- Backing up without shooting
- Upper body ties
- Blocking with the head or forearms
- Faking contact
- Grasping a leg with no follow through
- Tapping the head without a shot
- Being content with staying neutral
- Controlling hands or wrists without attempting a takedown
- Playing the edge of the mat
- Preventing an opponent from returning inbounds or remaining inbounds
- Repeatedly grasping one leg to keep the opponent from scoring

These techniques used once may not indicate stalling. But the official must consistently ask himself "what is the wrestler doing with it?"

From the neutral position countering a move, such as flattening out on a double or single leg, is itself not stalling. It becomes stalling when the flattened wrestler stays content by not improving their position or by not shooting back. Another thing to closely observe is which wrestler is creating angles to improve their position versus staying vertical.

TOP POSITION (OFFENSIVE WRESTLER)...

The wrestler in the advantage or top position must continually work towards a fall.

Many wrestlers who have the lead will try and ride the bottom wrestler and wait out the end of the period or match. In high school wrestling there is no riding time, so the top man must work to improve his position and that means working for the fall. There is a lot of "fake" wrestling going on. This is when the top man moves from side to side, ankle to ankle, half to ankle and so on without really doing anything. Watch and see if the top man is driving with his feet or is up on his toes. If he is flat-footed, he is probably being passive.

When hit for stalling it is not uncommon for the coach of that wrestler to protest that his kid is wrestling. When asked by the coach, it is the official's duty to be able to convey to the coach exactly what he sees going on and what prompted him to make the stall call.

Some other common stalling techniques from the top man are:

- Deep waist and ankle to ride only
- Double grapevine

- Cradle without attempting to turn for the pin
- Running a half from the back instead of from the side
- Putting in the double grapevine when the bottom man tries to stand
- Staying behind the bottom man when he does stand and then not trying to return him to the mat
- Breaking him down and faking a turn
- '*Slow hand*' around the waist when mounting from the starting (referee's) position
- Keeping the leg held to the butt for more than 5 seconds
- Some wrestling may appear to be stalling when in some cases it is justified, such as working a tilt.

Stalemates occurring from the same move or moves more than twice may also bring the stall call. This is why the official must have a good working knowledge of the sport.

BOTTOM POSITION (DEFENSIVE WRESTLER)...

The wrestler on the bottom must work for an escape or a reversal.

Unless the bottom wrestler is simply overpowered, which is not to be considered as stalling, he must maintain action. No wrestler has to give up position, but attempts to score must continue. If the bottom wrestler has the lead in the match he cannot defend his lead by just laying there.

Some common stalls on the bottom are:

- Slow to assume the correct position, (which is delaying the match)
- Remains on all fours from the referee's position upon the referee starting the clock
- Sits out and pulls elbows in, close to the body, and stays there
- Maintaining a base without initiating an escape or reversal
- Lying flat on the stomach with the head down on the mat
- Initiates no aggressive action to escape
- Moves only to counter or block holds

The bottom man is not required to expose himself, but must work to improve.

OTHER COMMON STALLING TECHNIQUES...

- Straggling back from out-of-bounds
- Adjusting knee pads out-of-bounds before returning to the center of the mat
- Taking off and readjusting headgear

MECHANICS...

Stalling must be called whenever the official spots it. Of course this doesn't necessarily mean as soon as the whistle is blown.

At the start of the match officials should observe how each wrestler sets up their moves. From this the official can get a pretty good idea of what action is used to initiate moves, and those that don't, to distinguish differences between set ups and stalling.

When first warning the wrestler for stalling officials must explain their call. For example "*warning green stalling, blocking with the elbow*". This lets the wrestler and his coach know exactly why the call was made. Be careful with what you say so you're not accused of coaching.

Do not get yourself in a trap when calling stalling, stalling can occur at anytime in the match. Calling it too early or too late in a match without proper justification must be avoided.

Time of the match should never be a consideration. When calling stalling, consistency is the key. If you're not calling stalling when it occurs in the first five minutes of a match, don't call it in the final minute. Coaches want officials to be consistent with their calls. This holds true for stalling.

You're in the finals and the match goes into overtime. You've called stalling throughout the match and it continues into the overtime. CALL IT!. That's your job. It's the rule and, without a doubt, the call is consistent with your previous stalling calls. However, if you've not called stalling during the match, be very careful about calling it in overtime. Be fair, but be consistent.

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS...

- Is the wrestler preventing his opponent the opportunity to score?
- Is aggressive wrestling occurring in the ten foot circle?
- What causes the wrestlers to go out-of-bounds?

A PARTING THOUGHT...

Without question stalling is by far the most divisive call made by officials. Some will contend that different parts of the State, or certain officials, call stalling more liberally than others. Still others make the case that stalling is called substantially more at sectionals, districts and state then at any other time during the season.

Stalling, in its purest sense, is an extremely subjective call. It exists in the minds and eyes of a certain segment of onlookers while it perplexes others watching the same match. How can that be? Multiple factors distinguish between action used to initiate wrestling versus action used to avoid wrestling. The capability and capacity to distinguish those elements that lead to stalling comes with time and experience. Time spent on the mat will enhance your ability to recognize and call stalling.

Becoming proficient as a wrestling official requires, above all else, MAT TIME, MAT TIME, MAT TIME!!!!



About the author, Fred Feeney: Fred, a long time Ohio wrestling official, is a member of the Central Ohio Wrestling Officials Association, the Collegiate Wrestling Officials Association and is a moderator on a popular wrestling discussion forum. Fred's in-depth experience encompasses both scholastic and collegiate levels, having culminated with assignments at the OHSA State Tournament and NCAA Division II and III finals. Fred and his wife reside in Dublin, Ohio.

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