

You're the worst official ever!

"You're the worst official ever!" Ever heard that? Ever said that?

I believe one of the greatest traits that any official of any sport must have is simple courage. Courage to make the right call, at the right time, regardless of what level, who is watching, or what the consequences of such action might be.

With the above said, I do believe that 99.99% of the referees on the mat working are truly dedicated, know the rules, are 100% unbiased and apply the rules fair and square.

When I watch a wrestling match, I look at the referee and see if his mechanics are correct, not the wrestlers. I have over the years seen referees blasted because of a certain call, knowing full well that his call was based on the stated rules.

Because the call didn't go your way, they now become... the worst official ever?

So where does courage come into the equation in wrestling? It is about simply walking onto a mat and doing the right thing based on the rules.

Though I have seen, many times, a call not made because a coach in the corner is already in the ear of the official, telling him the other kid is doing this or that, knowing full well that his kid is the one that is stalling or fleeing, the vast majority of referees make the call based on the proper criteria. For the young official, he or she may or may not have the required mat time to fully work through all the bias being shouted at him in order to make the proper call.

I personally had a takedown call where, though it looked like the kid finished in bounds, I saw both kids were out of bounds at one micro-second. Yes it was close, and yes I believe in rewarding the aggressor, but when I see and know that a takedown cannot be awarded because of the rules, I can't make that call.

Did I get booed? I sure did. Did the coach take me to the table? He sure did. My simple explanation was, "they were out of bounds." Why can't that be enough of an explanation?

At the National Duals I saw one of the greatest working Division 1 college officials (in my opinion) and during one particular takedown situation, he did not call a takedown. It was a very, very tight situation in which, to be honest, I might have called it. The takedown would have won the match for the team. The offended coach charged the mat and screamed at the official. The official never changed facial expression, never raised his voice, and didn't even acknowledge the coach's presence. He simply waited until the tirade was over and calmly notified the table to deduct one team point for unsportsmanlike conduct, then he walked off the mat. Confidence? Unflappability? I say it is courage!

A new, young referee boldly walks onto a middle school mat, desperately searching their memory banks to try to remember everything that they were taught in class and read in the rules book, thinking of all the things that could and might happen and how they will handle things. The new official will, at times, not make a call based on a pure lack of knowledge versus him trying to stay out of trouble. Mat time will change all that eventually, I hope.

We are all human and will all make mistakes. We all tend to be influenced by outside sources every match, whether we are fully aware of it or not. Referees must strive to always "do the right thing." The right thing, by the way, is based solely on the rules. It is a pretty simple formula.

Do you think you can ref a match?

Next time you watch a match, whether you are a coach or a parent, ask yourself if you do know what you are really looking at in order to know if a match is poorly officiated. To do so, one must have mastered not only the rules book, but the case book. You need to know what the interpretations are and what the judgments are for every conceivable situation that can occur. Have you mastered these?

Do you truly know what you are looking at and looking for? Do you know what good mechanics are? Do you thoroughly understand what is a takedown and what isn't? Do you know what "control is sometimes felt" means? Do you understand two-man mechanics? Do you truly know what is illegal, and when to call it and when not to? Do you do have a understanding of "tit for tat"? Are you are aware of mat position and which way a certain move will go and which way you need to move in order to be in the proper position?

Shall we continue with a complete understanding of stalling and all that is involved with determining that?

No doubt you have an intimate grasp on officiating philosophy and know on the "when in doubt" type of calls, which way to call certain things. You have expertise in dealing with bad table help, or not enough table help. You also are aware of how to deal with all the different types of coaches. You have a handle on sticky situations and recognizing and reacting to different formations and strategies. Certainly you know how to deal with a irate dad or worse, an irate mom! You been taught how not to listen to some things but hear other things, right?

Besides dealing with the nuances of the match, I am sure you know how to officiate at every level. And how mechanics might change based on the type move or position, right? I am sure you know 100% of penalty enforcement, including what technical violation is versus an illegal hold, what is blood time, and is there "recovery blood time"? Surely you also understand all about potentially dangerous holds and why something is legal versus illegal, correct? Not to mention how to award points, pre-meet duties, out-of-bounds situations, near falls, "same situation" in near falls, and stalemates.

Are there bad refs out there? I am sure there are some. But until you know exactly what you are looking at, and looking for, please stop looking for an excuse to pin blame.

I know your son or daughter has worked hard to get where they are, but guess what? So has that official who is calling their match. Someone has to win, someone has to lose, and we really don't care who it is. Hug your athlete, win or lose, but please... leave the ref alone.

"With courage you will dare to take risks, have the strength to be compassionate, and the wisdom to be humble. Courage is the foundation of integrity."

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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.