GHSA Wrestling Official's Handbook

2026 - 2027

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2026 – 2027 Rules Changes

1-5-1, 2 — Modified a minimal body fat percentage for female wrestlers.
4-2-6 **—** Clarified a comprehensive description of an intraoral mouth and tooth protector.
4-5-1 **—** Modified the process of weighing-in contestants.
5-24-4**b —** Clarified when a certain potential stalling situation hold is applied on the edge of the mat.
5-28-3, 8-2-7 — Modified the definition of recovery time.
7-6-3 — Clarified four additional elements of stalling.
1-4-3, 5-3-1-5, 10-3-1-5 — Modified how the use of byes affects bracketing in tournaments, round robin, pool play and scramble events.

Referee Signals Additions:
Official Wrestling Signals – Clarified how to signal stalling when the opponent is pushed out of bounds.
Official Wrestling Signals – Clarified how to signal stalling when opponent is pulled out of bounds.
Official Wrestling Signals – Clarified how to signal stalling when opponent is backing out of bounds.
Official Wrestling Signals – Clarified how to signal when wrestling action is continuing after going out of bounds.

Purpose

- Consistent explanation of signals, procedures and mechanics
- Reference guide for officials
- Learn and master mechanics
- Identify and use approved signals
- Promote consistency
- Encourage officials to:
  - Call each match in a professional, unbiased manner
  - Deal with all situations in strict adherence to the rules
  - Display unparalled character and conduct
  - Be mentally and physically prepared to conduct the bout
  - Draw attention to the wrestlers – not to themselves

The ultimate goal is to make the correct call EVERY time!

Why have good signals and mechanics?

- **Signals are the official's means of communication**
  1. *Know the signals*
     1. Signals/mechanics are one of the few things officials can control
     2. Know the signal that needs to be executed in EVERY situation
     3. Practice, practice, practice – don't have to think about signals
  2. *Improving your signals*
     1. Practice in front of a mirror
     2. Watch videos
     3. Time near fall counts w/ a stopwatch
     4. Vocalize (LOUDLY)
     5. Have a mentor who will be HONEST with you
  3. *Timing*
     1. The "how" and "when" of the signal is what makes you elite
     2. Timing is affected by position (or being out of position)
     3. Timing can be affected by "overthinking"
     4. Don't be 1) too early, 2) too late or 3) at the wrong time

POSITION + PATIENCE + POISE + PRESENTATION

BEING SUCCESSFUL WITH SIGNALS

- Other areas that will improve your use of signals (in order of importance)

1. Position
    1. Being in proper position is PRIMARY focus
    2. STAYING in position allows you to SLOW THINGS DOWN
    3. You are only as good as your position – don't be too close…don't chase…
2. Patience
    1. Let the situation develop (especially in scrambles)
    2. Patience promotes proper timing
3. Poise
    1. Comfort and confidence in all situations can make all the difference
    2. Achieving #1 and #2 above will provide that confidence
4. Presentation
    1. Have PERFECT timing, delivery and execution of signals

POSITION yourself to see the call. Once in position, be **PATIENT**. Remain **POISED** as the situation develops. **PRESENT** your signals flawlessly.

Mechanics for Specific Situations

- Have a LOUD whistle. Start whistle is quicker/shorter than stoppage whistle
- Hand motions for starts (neutral/top/bottom position) should be the same
- Hold points HIGH and ROTATE your hand
- Keep fingers HIGH and THUMB TUCKED
- Do not put your hands on your knees or your hips
- Use the stop signal any time you stop the action INCLUDING the out of bounds call
  - **Stalemate** – stop the match then indicate stalemate signal (Signal #14) with THUMBS UP and HANDS AGAINST CHEST
  - **Potentially Dangerous** – stop match then indicate color of potentially dangerous (Signal #13)
  - **Penalties/Infractions** – stop match, indicate infraction and corresponding points
  - **Stalling on Offensive Wrestler** – stop match, signal stall (Signal #16). Only exception should be rear standing.

Mechanics for Specific Situations (cont'd)

- Award points in the following instances:
  - **Reversal** – award the points BEFORE signaling reversal (Signal #18)
  - **Escape** – award points BEFORE signaling neutral (Signal #8)
  - **Nearfall** – award the points BEFORE signaling near fall (Signal #21)
- Neutral out of bounds:
  - Blow whistle while signaling out of bounds (Signal #10)
- Choice of Position
  - Use a system that works for you and allows you to track choice of position during dual meets
  - Officials have different preferences – some use front pockets, some use back pockets, some use wristbands
  - DO NOT USE DISC to indicate who has choice of position – use wristbands
  - After you flip the disc, LEAVE IT ON THE MAT until after choices have been made – then pick it up and return it to your pocket

Preventive Officiating

- Consider tactics that prevent situations from becoming potentially dangerous or illegal
  - Use verbal commands that don't signify a specific wrestler, such as:
    - "Action"
    - "Center"
    - "Offense"
    - "Improve"
    - "Still Neutral"
    - "Green is in control" or "red is in control"
    - "Contact"
    - "Fingers"
    - "Keep it Legal"

Preventive Officiating (cont'd)

- NEVER turn your back on the wrestlers. Always keep your eyes on them – stay between them after an out of bounds situation.
- If the action between wrestlers becomes overly aggressive, stop the match and warn the wrestlers that such behavior will not be tolerated
- Stay in between the wrestlers in neutral to help prevent false starts. Point to the lines to signify you're not starting the match until they're both on their lines.
- Move in closer when the offensive wrestler is applying pinning combinations such as arm bars, etc., to be in a position to prevent a potentially dangerous or illegal situation.

Pre-match Duties

- Arrive at least 1 hour early – allow ample time for the commute
- Take pride in your appearance – ensure your uniform is clean, pressed, clean shoes, etc. Look professional.
- Inspect mat area to ensure compliance – notify home coach of any issues
- Speak w/ table workers and set expectations for their performance
- Locate coaches of each team and arrange to speak to each team
- Conduct skin checks, weight class draw and weigh-ins
- Pre-match discussion w/ athletes
  - Keep it short & sweet – two to three minutes at most
  - Confirm starting weight
  - Ask to inspect special equipment
  - Discuss safety of the athletes
  - Discuss major rule changes
  - Discuss expectations related to stalling – what happens on the edge of the mat

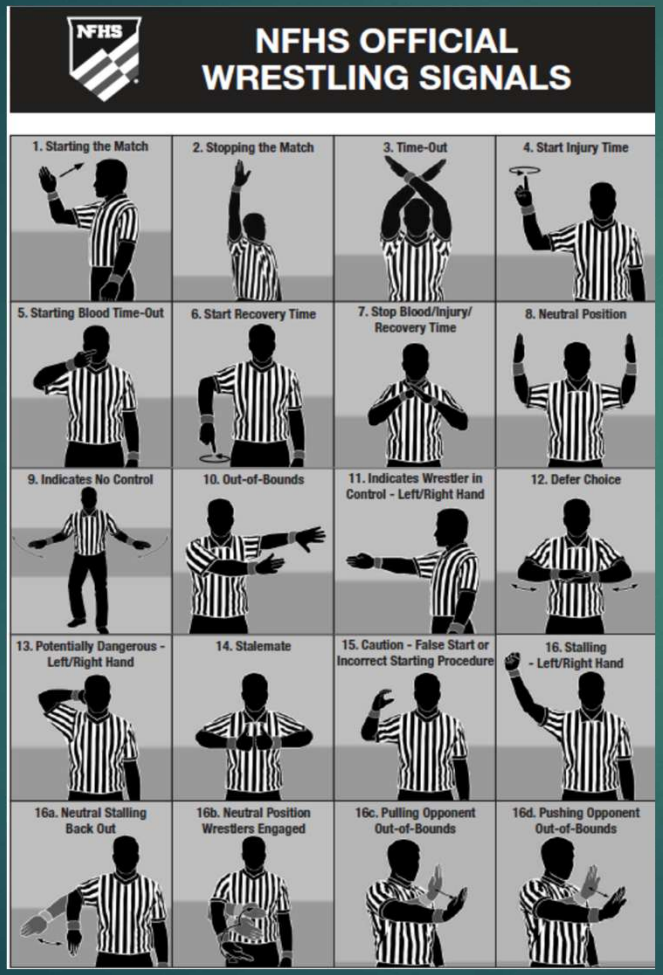
Pre-match Duties (cont'd)

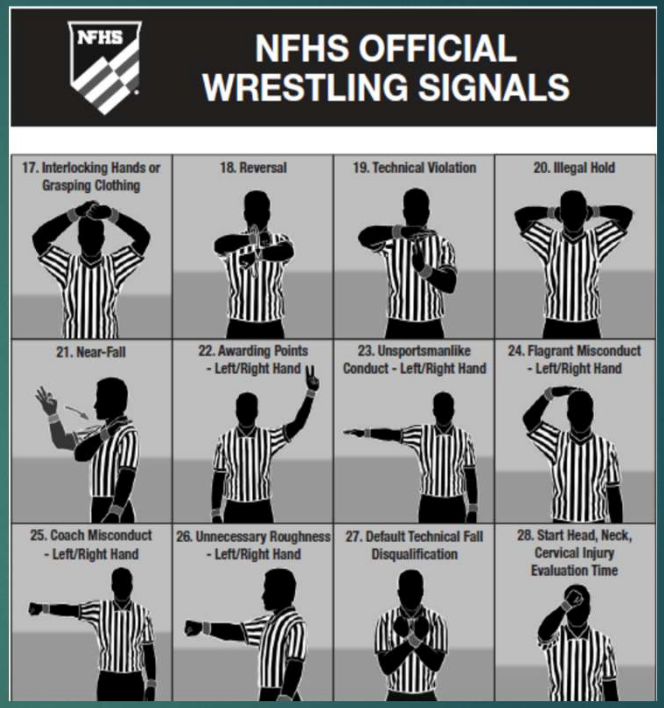
- Pre-match Discussion w/ athletes (con'td)
  - Offensive wrestler responsible for returning defensive wrestler safely
  - Discuss your starting sequence in referee's position to reduce false starts
  - Ask for questions – answer as required
  - Thank them for their time and wish them good luck

Discussion with 2nd Official

- Set expectations with your 2nd Official (SO) – communication is KEY.
- Talking points:
  - Clock is the number one priority – SO owns start/stop times.
  - Stay 180 degrees from Lead Official (LO) – if possible.
  - Look for backside violations that the LO can't see.
  - Look for nearfall activity if action moves away quickly.
  - Cover frontside if action turns away from LO.
  - Location during timeouts.
  - Location for Neutral starts and Referee position starts.
  - Location at the conclusion of each match (top of key).
  - Discuss how to handle disagreements on calls.
  - SO to remain in circle w/ wrestlers during coaches conferences at table.

Referee Signals





Official's Mechanics in Neutral Situations

- Wrestler's Position in Neutral Start
  - Both wrestlers must have one foot ON their respective starting line and the other on or behind the line
  - Wrestlers can not touch each other or the mat in front of their front foot prior to start
  - Both wrestlers must be stationary (no rolling starts)
  - Don't shake hands w/ the wrestlers unless they initiate shaking hands with you
- Neutral Starting Mechanics
  - Step between the wrestlers w/ outstretched arms between the starting lines – do not interfere w/ the wrestlers
  - Make sure you have visual acknowledgement from the timekeeper prior to starting
  - Verbally "set" the wrestlers
  - Sound the whistle loudly and sharply while making visual arm motion to start the match (Signal #1)
  - Move out quickly to a proper distance (10-15 feet) and adjust position according to the action. Glance at clock to ensure it has started. Keep wrestlers in view as you back out.

Official's Mechanics in Neutral Situations (cont'd)

- Neutral Standing Position
  - Be far enough away to observe the action and not interfere w/ sudden changes in position
  - Move in closer to observe potentially dangerous/potentially illegal holds
  - A distance of 10-15 feet is recommended – a longer distance provides a broader perspective
  - Anticipate how takedowns will finish so that you can remain out of the way and observe when control is established
  - Continually work to improve your position, situate yourself between the wrestlers as they're facing each other
  - Move to either side to observe scoring situations and hand fighting
  - ANTICIPATE ACTION– understand where you should go NEXT
  - DO NOT CHASE – stop and let the action come to you. Consider moving counter to the wrestler's rotation to be more effective.
  - CHANGE LEVELS to be in proper position to observe potentially dangerous/illegal moves; bend knees – drop hips.
  - VERBALIZE the award of takedowns – move in, lower your level – this allows the scoring wrestler to release locked hands and/or avoid stalling situations. VERBALIZE who is in control.
  - Award points in a confident manner ONLY USING approved hand signals. Arm should be extended overhead while rotating points (Signal #22)
  - Maintain eye contact w/ the wrestlers – trust the table to do their job correctly and keep your focus on the wrestlers.

Official's Mechanics in Neutral Situations (cont'd)

- Neutral Boundary Line Situations
  - BEAT THE WRESTLERS TO THE LINE – be in position to determine the location of each wrestler.
  - Position yourself the "tangent of the line" to view the action and the line to see when the wrestlers cross or approach the line.
  - Maintain proper distance and keep moving – be in position to observe if either wrestler touches OFF the mat surface.
  - Be patient; do not anticipate an out of bound situation occurring. Hold your whistle until you are sure a situation finishes out of bounds.
  - Call out of bounds by the rule and be consistent. Use proper hand signals (stop action and then out of bounds) with simultaneous whistle.
  - Always keep safety in mind if you are in tight space due to walls, bleachers, chairs, etc.. You may have to stop the match early in these instances.
  - When possible signal the earned points, and then blow the match our of bounds. Doing this creates an impression of confidence among coaches.
  - Be verbal when action moves to the boundary. Words such as "center" or "action in bounds" keep stalling calls from being a "surprise" to coaches.

Official's Mechanics in Neutral Situations (cont'd)

- Neutral Scramble Situations
  - Keep working to achieve and adjust to the best possible position to observe positions where control maybe established. Often, it is best to adjust your position by going in the opposite direction of the action.
  - Don't get in a hurry. In neutral scrambles let the action burn and keep calm.
  - If the action heats up or time becomes a factor, take a few steps back and take a deep relaxing breath.
  - Don't award a takedown until control has been established beyond reaction time.
  - When control is established award the points and be loud enough so that the wrestlers can hear your call.
  - If there is no control you can indicate no control using the authorized signal. Repeated use of no control or "airplaning" the no control signal does not look good or promote confidence with coaches or spectators.

Official's Mechanics in Mat Wrestling Situations

- Start of the Referee's Position
  - The goal of beginning action in this position is for to be FAIR to both wrestlers, NOT PERFECT.
  - If you have a larger than average number of cautions, it is probably the official's fault.
  - The hand movement should be the same as the start of the match in the neutral position.
  - The purpose of the hand motion is to indicate to coaches, timers, and spectators that action has occurred.
  - You should position yourself at an angle at either 10 or 2 o'clock (rotate positions between starts)
  - The referee should be standing and stationary when starting the action in the top/bottom position.
  - Once the wrestlers are set briefly pause then blow the whistle in a commanding way. Stay absolutely stationary so that your movements do not create false starts.

Official's Mechanics in Mat Wrestling Situations

- Movement as wrestling continues
  - After action starts the official is most often in the best position in front of the action toward the heads and slightly off to the side of both wrestlers.
  - 8 to 12 feet is often the best distance to view wrestling in the offensive and defensive position.
  - Be prepared to quickly move in to stop potentially dangerous positions before they become illegal.
  - Being verbal is an excellent tool to keep action legal. A quick "keep it legal" reminds wrestlers and coaches to stay within the framework of the rules.

Official's Mechanics in Mat Wrestling Situations

- When the defensive wrestler come to a standing position
  - As the defensive wrestler gets to their feet, the official should adjust their position to the head and hands of the wrestlers while preparing themselves to change directions quickly.
  - Watch for kickbacks.
  - Watch for defensive wrestler holding offensive wrestler's hands simply to bait a stall call.
  - Indicate control with authorized signal.
  - The offensive wrestler must MAKE AN HONEST ATTEMPT (INCLUDES RISK) to return the defensive wrestler.
  - In the rear standing position the match is not stopped for stalling.
  - Be prepared to change positions quickly to catch locked hands. Also, there is reaction time for locked hands when the offensive wrestler is returning the defensive wrestler to the mat.
  - Watch for a trapped arm return – try to stop it (potentially dangerous) if you can, and to penalize appropriately (illegal move) if it occurs.

Official's Mechanics in Nearfall Situations

- In a feet to back situation
  - Keep up with the flow of the action. It is easy to get caught out of position on throws.
  - While on your feet, quickly get into a good spot to observe nearfall criteria (change levels if possible – signal both the takedown and nearfall simultaneously) then drop down on the mat.
  - Do not begin your nearfall count until the defensive wrestler is in criteria.
  - Whenever possible, use a verbal and visual count. Solid, controlled mechanics help sell close calls.
  - Adjust your position to best view a fall.
  - Ensure the defensive wrester does not commit any illegal holds such as hands to eyes, mouth, etc.….

Official's Mechanics in Nearfall Situations

- From the mat
  - When the defensive wrestler is being turned into nearfall criteria, lower yourself down to the mat.
  - While down on the mat the official should stay in a position that maximizes their mobility and their view of the action.
  - Don't begin your nearfall count until the defensive wrestler enters criteria.
  - Stop your nearfall count if a wrestler comes out of criteria.
  - Give a clear, accurate verbal and visual count. This helps to prevent problems with coaches.
  - Do not award nearfall points until the danger has ended.
  - Do not use any unauthorized signal such as moving your hand up and down to indicate a 90 degree angle or wave your hand back and forth to indicate a wrestler moved in and out of criteria.
  - Do not shake your head to indicate a wrestler in or out of criteria.

The Role of the Second Official

- The Second Official (SO) is the first on and last off the mat.
- A good SO does not communicate with coaches during a bout. If a coach begins to question the SO it is appropriate for the SO to point to the lead official (LO) to indicate questions are to be addressed to the LO only.
- A good SO helps to prevent missed calls, timing, and scoring areas.
- SO's must ensure the clock starts and stops correctly.
- SO's must ensure the correct match score is always displayed.
- SO's must know what wrestler has choice of positions at the end of a period.
- The SO should check for chokes in front headlock situations.
- The SO should be in ideal position to view out of bounds situations.
- Stay 180 degrees opposite the LO. A good SO anticipates the LO's movements.
- A good SO keeps up with stall warnings, penalties, and which wrestler scored first.
- To change positions near the boundary, the LO should move inside of the line and the SO should take the outside of the line.

The Role of the Second Official (continued)

- In Nearfall situations
  - SO should work to stay in the best position to see any potential infractions, out of bounds and the clock
  - In a feet to back situation that moves away from the LO, the SO should be ready to provide a silent Sverbal near fall count until the LO is in position to see the Nearfall
  - Ensure both wrestler's aren't doing anything illegal or that any situation becomes illegal thru wrestling action
  - If an illegal move occurs, the SO should notify the LO. The call will be based on whether the situation was illegal or became illegal thru wrestling action. The LO will then make the determination and the call
  - The SO may count down "4, 3, 2, 1, Time" in Nearfall of potential Nearfall situations at the end of the period but will not use hand signals when counting.
  - The SO shall watch the clock to help:
    - See if enough time remains to score Nearfall points (2, 3 or 4 seconds)
    - To help with a "Fall Call" if the wrestler had the fall before the clock ran out

You are an officiating TEAM, and your goal should be to keep the wrestlers safe and get the calls correct. This is only possible if both Officials are fully engaged and communicate clearly and freely with each other during the match

Mechanics of Injury, Recovery and Concussions Timeouts

- Unless it's obvious, confirms that the wrestler needs injury time
- Official should stay in position to see the wrestlers, coaches and the clock (ideally, at the table)
- Inform the coach at 1 minute, 30 seconds and 15 seconds
- Use Signal #3 to indicate when injury or recovery times stops
- Injury Time (1:30 total - cumulative)
  - Use Signal #4 to start Injury Time once a trainer or medical personnel has arrived on the mat
  - It is critical that the Official knows the proper sequence when a wrestler takes injury time in all situations – make sure the wrestlers restart in the correct position
- Recovery Time (2:00 per instance)
  - Use Signal #6 to start recovery time
  - Make sure wrestlers restart in the correct position
  - Recovery time is used as a result of an Illegal Action, Unsportsmanlike Conduct or Unnecessary Roughness

Mechanics of Injury, Recovery and Concussions Timeouts - continued

- Concussion Protocol (5 minutes)
  - Start the wrestler with Injury Time and inform the trainer that you suspect a possible HNC injury.
  - Allow the trainer to assess the athlete for a possible concussion
  - If the trainer indications a HNC time out, then the official will clear the Injury Time and use the proper signal to indicate an HNC time out

Stalling General Guidelines

- The most difficult aspect of officiating wrestling is to understand stalling. You must develop a philosophy that will assist most situations. This is where the best Officials are recognized above the good Officials.
- Each wrestler is required to make an honest attempt to stay in the center of the mat and wrestle aggressively, regardless of position or the time or the score of the match. Action is to be maintained throughout the match by contestants wrestling whether in the top, bottom or neutral position, and both contestants , coaches and Officials to avoid the use of Stalling tactics or allowing the use thereof.
- Stalling is one of the most subjective calls in wrestling because:
  - No two Officials call Stalling identically.
  - No two Officials recognize Stalling within the same time frame.
  - Consistency with Stalling is tough due to different dynamics in each match.
- Any delays directly related to shoes or shoelaces is an automatic stall call.
- It is Stalling when a wrestler backs off the mat, or when either pushes or pulls the opponent off the mat.

Stalling General Guidelines

- Neutral Stalling
  - What to recognize:
- From neutral:
  - Continuously avoiding contact with opponent.
  - Preventing opponent from returning to or remaining in-bounds.
  - Playing the edge of the mat.
  - Continuously pushing or pulling with no shot attempt.
  - Repeatedly faking contact without follow-through.
  - Using an underhook or wrist control without a follow-through shot.
  - Collar tie pushing/pulling with no follow-through.
  - Single or double underhook without a shot attempt.
  - Wrist control (Single or Double) without attempt at a shot or to prevent opponent's shot.
  - With a forearm or head in a tied-up with no attempt at a shot or to prevent opponent's shot.
  - Repeatedly grasping or holding a leg with no attempt at follow-through to improve position.
  - Repeatedly gasping or holding a leg to prevent opponent from scoring.

Stalling General Guidelines (continued)

- Preventing opponent from returning to or remaining in-bounds.
- Standing behind an opponent in control of torso without an attempt to finish on the mat.
- Controlling a 2-on-1 (Russian Tie) without an attack attempt.
- Slowly straggling back from OB.
- Either or both wrestlers interlocking fingers in the neutral position. Official shall verbally warn wrestlers to stay out of the lock. If they do not release the hold, then the first offense is a stalemate - this is a warning to both wrestlers. Subsequent occurrences may warrant a stall call on either or both. Be verbal and preventive.

Stalling General Guidelines (continued)

- Offensive Stalling
  - It is Stalling when the offensive wrestler does not aggressively attempt to break down the opponent AND attempt to secure a fall.
  - It is Stalling when the offensive wrestler does not aggressively attempt to break down the opponent.
  - What to recognize:
    - Keeping the heel held to the buttocks for an extended period.
    - Deep waist and wrist with no attempt to improve.
    - Hooking the back ankle of defensive wrestler for an extended period with minimal attempt to break opponents down (Western Hook).
    - Staying behind an opponent in a rear standing position without attempting to return to the mat.
    - Repeatedly using two legs and being unable to turn opponent resulting in a stalemate or repeated use of cross-body ride with no attempt to improve position.
    - Running an arm bar with opponent broken down on the mat with minimal attempt to improve.

Stalling General Guidelines (continued)

- Defensive Stalling
  - The defensive wrestler must work aggressively to escape or reverse their opponent.
  - What to recognize:
    - Does the defensive wrestler initiate an escape or reversal?
    - Once broken down onto the mat, is the defensive wrestler working to build a base?
    - When the offensive wrestler comes off the hips creating space, does the defensive wrestler attempt to take advantage or content to stay down?
    - Does defensive wrestler attempt to improve their position by trying to score?
    - Lying on the mat with elbows tucked into the body.
    - Lying on the mat with arms and legs spread apart (par terre).
    - Grasping the opponent's hands and arms and just holding on.
    - Forehead down on the mat and/or "balling up."
    - Defensive wrestler repeatedly crawling off the mat, crawling to the edge or working toward out of bounds with no attempt to improve position constitutes stalling.
    - The official does not stop the match when penalizing the defensive wrestler for stalling.

Questioning, Coach Management, Unsportsmanlike Conduct

- Questioning and Coach Management
  - When talking to a Coach, do not stand chest-to-chest as it appears more confrontational (stand side to chest)
  - Listen first. Let the Coach be heard. Coaches are not always wrong.
  - If the Coach questions a call – and no change is made – and the Coach is not questioning score or timing – then the Coach MUST be given a Coaches Misconduct call.
  - The procedure for penalizing a Coach is critical:
    - Go to the center of the mat and calmly indicate and announce the infraction to the head table
    - Make sure the Coach is aware they've been penalized
    - Do not get emotionally involved. Be professional at all times.
    - If a Coach crosses the line, and an Unsportsmanlike Conduct is warranted, the Official should maintain composure and penalize the Coach in the same professional manner as the lesser penalty

Questioning, Coach Management, Unsportsmanlike Conduct (continued)

- Unsportsmanlike Conduct
  - Official should constantly monitor and assess the intensity of the match and determine if the athletes are nearing a potentially negative situation.
  - If the situation is identified, the Official may stop the match and have a chat with both wrestlers in the center of the mat.
  - Be preventative.
  - NEVER turn your back on the wrestlers.
  - If a situation can't be prevented, the Official should penalize the offending wrestler(s) in a calm and professional manner.
  - The Official should also make the table and Coach(es) aware of the penalty.

Overall Guidelines

- Good officiating does not start the first day you officiate – IT TAKES TIME.
- Watch and learn from top officials via in person, video, meetings or conversations.
- Put in the time to get better.
- Mistakes are inevitable – learn from those mistakes and don't make them again.
- Experience is the best teacher.
- Attitude
  - Continuous improvement and growth is critical to an Official's success.
  - Complacency is the enemy.
  - An Official should always be learning, working to improve, and getting better.
  - Two things define you as an Official
    - Your patience when you have nothing
    - Your attitude when you have everything.

Overall Guidelines (continued)

- Mindset
  - Ego is the enemy - we are all imperfect and won't get everything right.
  - Use the tools available to you to get the call right in the end.
  - Do not worry about what others fail to do – focus on yourself and what is under your control.
- The Team
  - Work together in a professional manner and treat each other with respect.
  - It's about getting the calls right – making a mistake is NOT the mistake – not using the team and the tools at your disposal to correct the mistake IS the real mistake.
- Mentorship
  - Find a mentor you can trust and will provide you with constructive feedback
  - Share videos, discuss calls, watch matches together
  - Get constructive feedback from others
  - It's OK to be vulnerable
  - The goal is to "plant trees for others to climb."

Overall Guidelines (continued)

- Quiet Confidence
  - Great officials are confident because they constantly prepare, analyze and strive for improvement.
  - Perfection is not possible, but excellence can be reached
- Humility
  - Great officials let their actions speak louder than their words.
  - Understand that first and foremost the sport is about the athletes.

Summary

- Officiating wrestling is difficult.
- The process of improving as an official takes time and effort.
- Experience is the best teacher; try to work as much as you can especially in the off season.
- Have a growth mindset. Expecting yourself to be perfect is setting yourself up for failure.
- Realize you are going to have bad days/events. It is part of the human condition. Being a wrestling official is an excellent way to learn how to forgive yourself for making mistakes.
- Don't compete against other officials. Compete against the standard.
- Hang out with officials that are better than you. You'll learn a great deal.
- Find fellow officials who will be honest with you, and don't argue with them when they tell you what you don't like hearing.
- Set goals for your officiating and have fun trying to reach them.