

Jan 23, 2007 Coaches Corner

Taking the Referee out of the match

Does it sometimes appear to you that certain referees don't always seem to be as fair as you would like? The wrestling mat is one of those special places for sure in that, unlike the rest of society, there is nobody else to blame and certainly no place to hide. Naturally in searching for blame to assess we sometimes look to the only other person on the mat... the referee. Are all referees fair and totally without bias? Certainly not, they are human like the rest of us. While they should strive to be as fair as humanly possible we should all realize that this is a difficult task at best. While wrestling has its share of clearly defined rules and regulations there also exist many which are open to interpretation. For example, what is the exact length of time shoulder blades are held to the mat before a fall is awarded? What is the exact definition of "control" as it pertains to a takedown? What is the exact definition of a stall? All of these scenarios come into play in almost every match and all of them are open to interpretation and can be different depending on who is your referee for the day.

Issues often occur during a match because of one main reason... lack of uniformity among wrestling officials. While you may experience a referee who awards a fall after what only seems an instant for a fall, the very next match you may experience a situation where it seems a fall was obvious and was not awarded such as recently occurred in one of our matches. And we have all seen the situation where the heavier weights are seemingly never called for stalling yet the lighter weights are called much sooner. Referees are as different as wrestlers. What can you do about this and how can you use it to your advantage?

One thing you can do as a wrestler is to study the referee and take note of his preferences. We've all sat through a match and prior to your own personal match there were probably many other matches prior to yours where you could have taken note on what the referee's tendencies were. Were there JV matches prior to the varsity level where you could have watched instead of doing all those other distracting things in the stands like friends or girlfriends? Are you the 5th match of the varsity lineup? Study the ref for the match and see how he handles the referee's position. Is he a stickler for proper placement of the hand on the navel, hands on the mat? Is he a bit liberal when it comes to locking hands giving a wrestler a second to "unlock" or is he one of those instantaneous refs that call it as soon as a knee touches? Does he call a fast stall? How fast is his fall? These are all things a smart wrestler takes note of and remembers during his match and can use to his advantage. If you have a ref that is lax when it comes to stalling then if you are ahead with 30 seconds to go and your tank is pushing "E" you might get away with more then at other times.

The most obvious thing you can do is to take the referee out of the equation and not get into a situation where one questionable call decides your match. Improve your condition, get stronger, wrestle tougher. If you are winning by a spread of 8-2 for example, then the takedown you thought you should have received doesn't come into play so much. The stall call doesn't hurt you. Likewise at an overall team match level if your team is ahead by, for example, 12 points then one call that doesn't go your way and maybe costs the team one 3 pt. match does not affect the overall win or loss outcome.

As a smart wrestler, which we should all strive to be, the best thing you can do is control the match yourself and do not leave it up to a questionable call by the ref. Win your match outright by a wide margin or a fall & don't let him take it away from you. A real good example is our own Dustin Renelt. How many times has he suffered a questionable call? Not often! Know why? He's usually so far ahead and relentlessly attacking that the one or two times a question has come up it hasn't made any difference. That's how you win 100 matches.