

Coach Misconduct and Unsportsmanlike Conduct ***Are You Calling it Correctly?*** ***By*** ***Ed Rawlins***

Coach Misconduct and Unsportsmanlike Conduct are two distinctly different penalties and are often confused or misapplied in High School wrestling. These distinct penalties also have different consequences according to the penalty table.

Wrestling coaches are often given too much latitude when addressing the official. Far too many officials will allow sidebar discussions to occur and thus, interrupt the flow of the meet or tournament. Properly understanding and following these rules can ensure that the match is not constantly interrupted and if need be, mistakes on the part of the referee can be corrected.

Coach Misconduct.

This penalty is always applied to the head coach (NFHS 5-5-2). As per rule, (NFHS 7-5-4) a coach is permitted to address the referee at the scorers table when the coach feels that the official has erroneously applied a rule.

When the coach feels an error has been made, he should approach the scorer's table and the referee can conduct the conference when there is no significant action taking place on the mat. Officials should meet with the coach and listen to the coach's comment(s). Coaches should conduct their discussion in a sportsmanlike manner and Officials should let the coach speak and allow him to finish. After the coach has finished, one of two things shall occur: 1) the official agrees that some type of error occurred and will take action to correct or 2) the official does not agree with the coach or the coach questioned the referee's judgment and will receive a warning for coach misconduct. Again, the misconduct warning and subsequent penalties are charged to the head coach regardless if an assistant coach initiated the conference. The NFHS has incorporated an official signal for Coach Misconduct and has included a score book/bout sheet abbreviation for warnings and subsequent penalties (CMw and CM).

Officials are often inclined to have rules discussions/clinics in the coach's corner or vicinity the team bench and this is the incorrect location to have a conference. The purpose of the Coach Misconduct rule is to allow the coaches an opportunity to be heard if they think an error has been committed and the official has to either rule in favor or against the questioning coach. A secondary purpose of this rule is to ensure that the contest continues to flow with few interruptions. We cannot allow coaches to challenge, question, or ask for an explanation for every point or call. Proper mechanics, verbalization and use of the proper signals can alleviate confusion between the coach and official.

Following a warning on the head coach, the next offense will result in team point deductions as outlined in the penalty chart. Coaches are permitted to approach the scorer's table to discuss **any** matter with the referee (NFHS Case Book and Manual 6-6-6 Situation C); even to question an official's judgment. If a coach requests a conference at the table and begins to question judgment, after the coach is done, a warning or penalty should be imposed immediately.

If the official has to stop the match and have a discussion at a place other than the table (NFHS 7-5-2), Coach Misconduct does not apply, Unsportsmanlike Conduct may be warranted (NFHS Case Book and Manual, 6-6-6, Situation H).

Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

Misconduct only applies to the head coach. Unsportsmanlike Conduct can be applied to any team personnel. Coaches, assistants, athletes, trainers and other team personnel are responsible for their actions before, during and after a match. Unlike misconduct, there is no warning designated by the rules and acts of Unsportsmanlike Conduct have an immediate penalty associated with the act. Specific acts of Unsportsmanlike Conduct are outlined in the Rules Book (NFHS 7-5-2 and 7-5-3). A coach that begins badgering the referee or his assistant, if one is being used, is on the verge of drawing an Unsportsmanlike Conduct penalty (Repeatedly holds his fist in the air signaling stalling). The referee can attempt to be proactive in nature and give a friendly verbal warning to the coach, such as *"OK Coach, lets stay behind the bench"* or *"I'm watching coach."* The fact is, coaches are always going to be talking/chirping and in the sport of wrestling you will usually be within close proximity of the coaches. A referee also needs to exercise some patience when the coaches are chattering. You'll hear the coaches arguing calls, even judgment calls (stalling), but the referee should not have *rabbit ears* nor should the referee be influenced by the coach's comments.

If the coach's comments become a constant distraction you are most likely not following the action on the mat and possibly not keeping the wrestler's safety in mind. Constant distractions will cause the official to interrupt wrestling. It is time to penalize someone for Unsportsmanlike Conduct. For Unsportsmanlike Conduct, there are no warnings; it is an immediate deduction of team point(s) as per the penalty table.

If an argument ensues, it is possible that the coach may cross the line into flagrant misconduct and that act warrants ejection.

PENALTY COMPARISON/ PROCEDURES FOR COACHES

Type	1 st Instance	2 nd Instance	3 rd Instance
Coach Misconduct	Warning	Deduct one team point	Deduct two team points and the coach is removed for the remainder of the day
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Deduct one team point	Deduct two team points and the coach is removed from the competition	
Flagrant Misconduct	Deduct three team points and the coach is removed from the competition		

There can be instances where a coach requests a conference at the table that falls into the coach misconduct category but his actions become unsportsmanlike and should be penalized accordingly. (NFHS Case Book and Manual, 6-6-6, Situation C).

Conferences between coaches and referees are a necessary part of wrestling and should be conducted in a professional and civil manner. There are times when the coach is correct and the official should have the integrity to change a call or correct an error. Officials should have some thick skin, but when it becomes a distraction and forces you to continually interrupt a bout and preventative actions are not working, a penalty, with no forewarning should be assessed.

Coach Misconduct and Unsportsmanlike Conduct are two different infractions. Coach Misconduct can only occur at the scorers table (when the match clock is not running). Officials must understand the differences between the two and rule accordingly. It is perfectly acceptable for a referee to discuss a rule, call or explain why a certain judgment call was made. The place for this discussion is after a dual meet is complete or during a break in a tournament. Officials can not continually stop the contest to explain everything. Some officials will allow a coach to discuss a rule at the table, but will not impose a misconduct penalty. This is now an open invitation for the coach to question everything. If the coach wants to discuss something in his corner, ask him if he would like to take the

discussion to the table. A smart coach is likely to sit down or learn to pick his battles.