

Refman's Blog: Cliff Keen Invitational

Fred Feeney - OhioWrestling.Net

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This weekend, I officiated the Cliff Keen Invitational in Las Vegas. There were big name teams, top ranked wrestlers, and overall it was a great weekend. Twenty-four officials on eight mats meant (and this was the best part) three referees on one mat. We were on for two matches, off for four. Not too bad, except with eight mats it took thirteen hours to get through the first day. Nevertheless, this tournament is well run, and I am glad I was chosen to work it.

Now the nitty-gritty.

A wrestling referee lives and dies with two things: proper mechanics and his in-depth knowledge of the appropriate criteria for every known takedown, escape, reverse, pinning situation and anything and everything else that will occur in any given match.

Coaches want their kid to win, parents want their kid to win, and of course, the wrestler wants to win. The referee, on the other hand, wants only to make sure that, by rule, the correct wrestler wins - regardless of who it is, or who is in the corner, or who the wrestler's parents are.

I am and will always be amazed at coaches and parents who think referees cheat. Yep, I said cheat. That we knowingly and purposely decide who we want to win or lose and then make sure it occurs. My goodness! I have never, in eighteen years, known any official at anytime knowingly cheat any kid out of any point. It's hard enough to referee a match without throwing in the ability to cheat on demand!

Are there bad calls? Yes. However whether a call is "bad" or not can also depend on where you are sitting and what your perspective is. If you are in the corner or sitting in the stands, yes, you are looking at the action through your eyes, but, before it gets from your eyes to your brain, it always goes through your heart! That is normal, typical, and understandable.

Many parents (not all) and many coaches (again, not all) want to blame someone other than their own wrestler for losing a match. Watch and listen to the true class coaches who understand criteria. They argue with power because they understand criteria.

I am amazed listening to coaches in their corners who are begging for a call when even a first year official knows better. "That's two, that's two!" It's two when proper criteria have been met and not just because you wish it to be.

This weekend I had a parent tell me that I "hate" their school and it shows in my

officiating. Every time I have a kid from this school, they lose! Really? Every time? Wow! That is incredible.

A coach told me that I hated him, and I take my “hate” out on every one of his wrestlers. What was amazing is three of his wrestlers heard that comment and came to me two hours later and apologized for their coach and his remarks. Where does this stuff come from?

I saw very good officials work this past weekend. I didn’t see one not get skewered in one fashion or another. It has become a way of life, I suppose, for some coaches and fans to behave.

I can hear some of you reading this already. “Can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen!”

Well, heat should come, and come hard and fast because of bad calls and/or bad mechanics. If I screw a call up, or miss a call, I should get called on that. These kids work too hard for a referee to miss things. But just because a call doesn’t go somebody’s way, that doesn’t mean they have the right to lambaste anyone.

There was some great wrestling, and I had some great matches this weekend. I work hard at this avocation that I have chosen, as do 99.99% of the referees out there.

It does dishearten me to watch a great match and see a very good official raked over the coals by the fans or the coaches in the corner, while at the same time, every official that is watching that same match knows the call was the correct one.

Can we all be that wrong?

The majority of the coaches in college are great guys and they understand the sport, but there are a few that whine because things didn’t go their way. There is an old saying that goes “those things that don’t kill us, only make us stronger.” It does wear on you after awhile however.

Now the other side!

A top Division 1 coach came to me after his kid lost a match on a very, very close call, and said, “hey, Fred, that was a great no-call.”

That is when you know it is all worth it.

“Before you criticize a man, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, when you do criticize him, you’ll be a mile away and have his shoes.”



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 forum. 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.

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