

Refman's Blog: "Midlands"

Fred Feeney - OhioWrestling.Net

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A referee's insight into the 44th Midlands Championships.

In my humble opinion, aside from the NCAA Division 1 Championships, the Midlands is the toughest college tournament in the country, year-in and year-out. I already hear the Southern Scuffle aficionados screaming that Midlands is not what it used to be. Well, let's look at that. According to the InterMat rankings as of December 19...

Southern Scuffle

1. Missouri - 1
2. Minnesota - 2
3. Cornell - 13
4. Edinboro - 12
5. Navy - NR
6. Chattanooga - 18
7. North Carolina State - NR
8. Maryland - NR
9. North Carolina - NR
10. Ohio State - 19

Midlands

1. Iowa State - 7
2. Iowa - 5
3. Northwestern - 8
4. Central Michigan - 10
5. Indiana - 16
6. Illinois - 15
7. Michigan State - 22
8. Northern Iowa - NR
9. Harvard - NR
10. Northern Illinois - NR

From this referee's point of view, either one offers great competition and great matches.

Midlands is run on eight mats with twelve officials for the first two sessions on Friday. On Saturday morning, seven officials work on four mats. I will tell you that those matches on Saturday morning are some of the most intense, action-filled matches I have ever officiated. Every match, every minute, every call, is as good as it gets in college wrestling - aside from the NCAA Championships. After semis are over, the seventh place matches are wrestled and then there is a break until the finals.

Finals are run on three mats with six officials, who are picked through evaluations the previous year. This year was my fifth Midlands and my first finals. I was very excited. Of the six finals officials, there were only two of us who have not worked a Division 1 NCAA Championship tournament. The Midlands finals are broadcast on CSTV so there is a boom camera that overhangs the mat and follows the action everywhere. Some years, the lead official actually wore a "helmet camera." Thank goodness that did not happen this year!

As luck would have it, I was to officiate the first championship match at 125. Fanthorpe from Iowa State went against from Indiana's #1 seed Angel Escobedo. The match was great and went to overtime with Escobedo getting the takedown to win it, 3-1. I was lucky enough to get a second final, the 174 pound match-up of returning All-American, #3 seed Luedke from Iowa against #4 seed Umbehauer from Rider. That was another great match that also went to overtime with Luedke pulling it out 6-4 in Sudden Victory.

The Midlands is steep in history. When you read the program it is like reading a wrestling history book. Simply amazing.

I decided to write down some of the tough calls I had to make in the semis and share them with you. Here were a few:

1. A Quick Counter

In college, counters occur very quickly. In this situation, red took green down with sort of a fireman's carry and I anticipated where green would land and when he hit, I just started a count when green countered and got to his feet (amazingly) came out of the situation. I was prepared to give the takedown, but the kid countered so fast I couldn't. Of course, as it would happen, the kid that made the initial throw lost on a takedown fifteen seconds later. Tough call

2. Establishing Control

With three seconds to go in overtime, red throws green and green ends on his right hip, not in near-fall criteria but more than 90-degrees turned. Red is not perpendicular to green, but is on his left hip and turning in. I called the takedown based on the fact it met my criteria for control. The rule book says that sometimes "control is felt." This was the case here. Two evaluators were watching the match, both saw the same action and one thought it was a clear takedown, the other felt he would have needed more. Tough call.

3. Locking Hands

With twenty seconds to go in a consolation semifinal, red is riding green pretty tight. Green sits out with red square behind him and throws himself and red completely backwards (I have never seen this before) in sort of a backwards Granby roll. When they went over, I thought to myself that the only way red could have held on to him was to lock hands, but I didn't see it. Suddenly green does the same thing, I drop my level a bit and alas, red locks hands as they go over. I come up with the locking hands signal and the match ends. It was a simple call actually, but the coach will never, ever believe I actually saw the locked hands, and told me so.

4. Potentially Dangerous

It was a semifinal match pitting Iowa against Iowa State. Iowa is cranking a

half in a 0-0 match in the second period. I know how hard it is to get near-fall points in any match, let alone a Division 1 semifinal. As I watch him crank it over, I am verbally saying "keep it legal." At the point I thought it was dangerous (knowing full-well the wrath of the Iowa fans that would rain down on me) I stopped the match. The Iowa assistant went crazy, of course. Coach Brands motioned to him to settle and walked to the score table. I was "bracing" myself for the onslaught that I felt might occur. Then, Coach Brands quietly said to me "I assume you stopped it for potentially dangerous". I answered, "yes sir." He said, "okay, I understand". Tough call? Not really, notwithstanding the grief I knew might come, but I was grateful that Coach Brands acted professionally, as a head coach should act. Assistant coaches are usually the "bulldogs" and I guess that is part of their job description. Head coaches usually take that higher road and, though they may not like or understand every call we make, they do tend to act in a professional manner.

5. Fleeing The Mat

The fleeing rule tends to be a lot easier to call in college since the NCAA has placed a lot of emphasis on the need for the wrestlers to wrestle on the mat. It was in overtime of a consolation semifinal match and there was a shot by red followed by a duck under to the rear of green. Green is five or six inches from the edge of the mat and just simply walked off the mat with red behind him. As he is walking, I am thinking to myself that there is no way he will walk off the mat. He did, and I penalized him for fleeing and the overtime was over. The coach of that wrestler simply said from the chair, "you can't walk off the mat like that."

6. The Art Of Circling

Last but not least... It was the third period with green up 4-3 with a stalling warning. He chose neutral to begin the period. The warning came with about one minute left. All he was doing was locking up and blocking off, so it was a simple stalling call to make. With thirty seconds to go, the coach is screaming, "circle, circle, circle!" I wish I could have stopped the match and asked him why he wanted his wrestler to circle. Does he really believe that referees think circling is a move? Yes, green circled and never made any attempt to at a move, yet he as he circled, he blocked off. Again, it was a simple stalling call in my mind. With fifteen seconds left, I hit him for stalling again and it tied the match up. The coach was furious that I would even consider his kid to be stalling. In overtime, I very easily could have called stalling on him again, but with fifteen seconds to go, he spun around on a counter to a shot and got the takedown. The coach came to me as I was signing the bout card and asked what in "tar-nation" was I thinking when I hit his kid for stalling. I smiled at him and said, with a straight face, "of all the books on takedowns I have read or seen in all my years, I have never seen one on the art of circling." He smirked, then smiled, then laughed. He understood where I was coming from.

"Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand."



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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