

The D3 Nationals versus D2 and D1...not the Big Show but close.

March 23, 2007

By Frederick Feeney

Well, a few weeks ago, I officiated my 5th NCAA Championship, 4 D3 Championships and 1 D2 Championship so far. I have been asked to give a little insight into these tournaments as far as how they run and the evaluations the referees are subject to. Also if there is a difference in intensity between the D2 or D3 versus D1. Since I have not done the D1's...yet, I can only speculate and that is what I shall do.

A little background.

I remember my first D3 Finals...they were held in Dubuque Iowa and I was very very excited. My mentor, coach and friend, Bob Triano and I had lunch the day before I left for the tournament and he told me officiate the same way as I have all season, be intense without being too focused and most important have fun. I had a great tournament, felt good, moved good and hoped I would get rewarded with a finals match. Though I truly didn't expect one since I was the rookie, I really wanted one badly and was so nervous sitting in that locker room as Pat McCormick read off the names of who was refereeing what finals match. I didn't hear my name called at 125, or 133 or next or next or next. I was sure I wasn't getting one and then I heard 197 wasn't me so I resigned myself to not getting one. I didn't really hear the 285 pound match but knew it wasn't me. The guy beside me patted me on the shoulder and said he was glad he was working with me in the finals. I said..."oh...I'm assisting you at heavy?". He looked at me and said "no...you are the lead!" I got it! My first NCAA finals..I was so happy and pleased.

Last year, I was fortunate enough to have both the D3 and the D2 Championships. I remember talking to a referee who had all 3 Championships in one year. I told him I had 2 of them this year and how cool it would be to have all 3 in one year. He said "be careful what you wish for!" I found out what he meant that week. At the D2's at Findlay Univ that year, I felt that things stepped up somewhat from the D3's. Not that it was better wrestling...just different. A different type of intensity. The coaches were a bit more severe and the emotional drain was phenomenal. Pressure is not only felt from the first match, it can be cut with a knife. It hangs in the air, thick and dripping from the rafters. I was lucky enough to get a final again at that tournament too.

Evaluations.

When you are working the 2's or 3's as a referee, the evaluations are done by the coaches. At the D1's, the evals are done by real evaluators. Big difference. Not that coaches don't know how a match should be officiated, but they do tend to have a different view depending on if their kid won or lost. Shouldn't be that way, but it is a fact of life. 99% of the D3 and D2 coaches that I know are great guys and are way above fair. There are a few that no matter what you do, no matter how mechanically correct

you are during a match, their evaluation of you is based on if their kid wins or loses. At the D1's, the evaluators are either former referee's who have been to the Big Show and blew a whistle or they are former coaches who have been there and know how a match should be called. There is a form that each evaluator uses and there are numerical values. At the end of the semis, the forms are collected, tabulated and then the top 10 work the finals and the bottom 10 sit during the finals. Up to this year, they assisted in the finals but that has changed now.

I am a proponent of evaluations at any level, high school or college. How can you truly know you are doing things right if no one is critiquing you, other than the two coaches in the corner?

Staying Focused (the secret)

One of the key factors when doing a match regardless of if it is a JV match or a National Tournament is staying focused at all times. My secret for doing that is this: If I am being evaluated at a tournament I know eyes are on every move I make and I better make sure my mechanics are correct. What if I am not being evaluated? In order to maintain my "consistency" I pick one person in the stands, whoever it is, and I tell myself that this person is the person that when this match is over will tell me if I get the D1's. That guarantees me that I will not slack off on any given match. Simple? Corny? Well..it works for me! If a referee will open themselves to proper critiquing, they will improve tremendously!

Levels of Intensity.

I have been fortunate to work some high level D1, 2 and 3 duals and tournaments over the years. There is a difference of style at each level I think. It isn't that there is a different degree of intensity, it the style of wrestling between the 3 divisions. Here is an example of what I mean. A friend of mine and a fellow referee worked some D1 stuff, but it wasn't Big Ten level matches. He was fortunate to get the D1 one year and a couple weeks prior, he refereed the Big Tens. He had never worked a Big Ten dual let alone the Big Ten Championships. When I saw him the following season at a tournament we do together, he mentioned how grateful he was that he had the opportunity to so the Big Tens prior to the D1 tournament. Why? He wasn't used to that level, style, scrambling etc and it prepared him mechanically for the D1 Championships. On the other hand...I have worked a lot of Big Ten level duals and Midlands Tournament, Cliff Keene Las Vegas Tournament etc and those are as tough as it gets in my opinion.

My mentor Bob Triano always told me to work the highest level and as much as I can prior to the NCAA Championships be it 1, 2 or 3 so that I would be ready for anything thrown my way. On that same regard, I think referring college makes me a much better high school official because of the higher level of activity and complexity of the moves and situations. Watch how a referee handles himself on the mat. His or hers confidence level is always very apparent when the tough calls start flying. Why? The more that

referee has seen, the easier it is to recognize what is occurring. I have always told my class that I teach that if you had to take a safari into the deepest darkest part of Africa and you had your choice of two different guides, one with tremendous experience who has hand fought alligators and lions and knows every inch of the jungle or the other guy who read a book about how to guide....which would you choose? Same with referees...confidence equates with experience. As is our confidence, so is our capacity.



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 forums. Fred's in-depth experience encompasses both scholastic and collegiate levels, having culminated with numerous assignments at the OHSAA State Tournament and 5 NCAA Division II and III Championship finals. Fred and his wife reside in Dublin, Ohio.

© Flocasts.com
All Rights Reserved