

Preventive Officiating

By Ira Fleckman

Referees are asked to protect the wrestlers from injury, apply the rules fairly, enforce grooming regulations, enforce bench decorum rules, prevent or punish stalling, never call stalling on a wrestler who is being overpowered and most important not to interfere in the contest but to allow the wrestlers to determine the outcome themselves. However, referees are also admonished to adhere to the concept of preventive officiating. That is to intercede in the match at the proper time to prevent any undesirable circumstance from occurring.

The concept of preventive officiating relies upon the experience of the official and his ability to predict what may occur. For the most part this works but it does place a burden on the official and places power in his hands that is always subject to second-guessing.

Some of the situations that call for preventive officiating include the range of situations specifically described in the National Federation of High School Associations Rulebook as potentially dangerous. These holds and situations are broadly described as those that may become illegal and the referee may stop these actions without any penalty at any time. The problem here is that one wrestler has worked very hard to achieve an advantage over his opponent and when the referee acts to stop the action that advantage is lost, too. While some may argue that this is a small price to pay for preventing an illegal hold or a possible injury, others would claim that the referee's action might also

prevent a scoring opportunity.

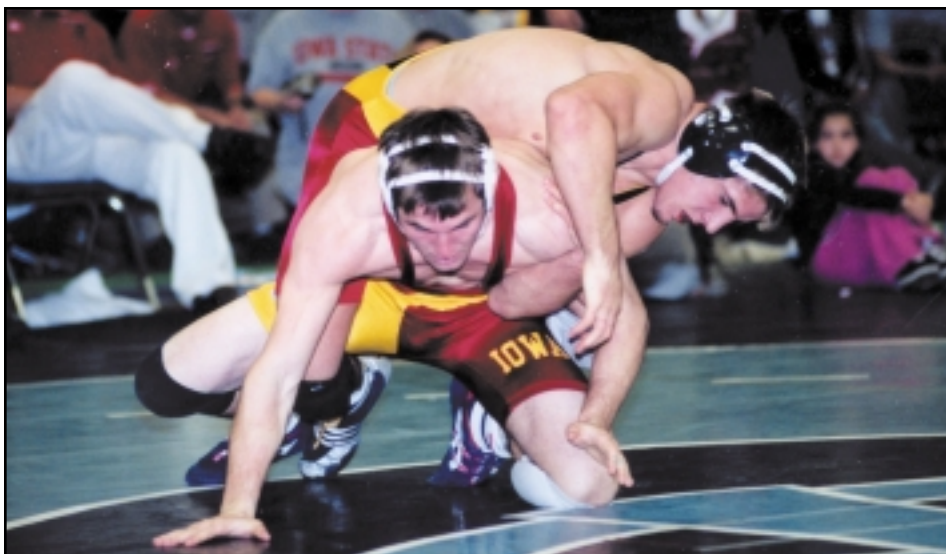
The referee who stops wrestling when wrestlers become over aggressive, use setups such as head taps in an inappropriate manner, clash heads repeatedly while attempting to establish head position, grab at the clothing, repeatedly deliver hard cross faces without following up with a technique designed to score, use their heads or forearms to force an opponent's head down with vigor or otherwise seem more intent on doing harm than scoring points can usually calm down the wrestlers. The referee might threaten penalties for unnecessary roughness and remind the wrestlers that there are rules to abide by. Often a simple stoppage and a few well-chosen words by the referee will be enough to focus over emotional wrestlers on the need to act within the rules. Some coaches object and claim that the referee shouldn't coach and if someone is guilty of a rules violation it is the referee's job to issue a penalty.

In the case where a clearly superior wrestler is caught off guard and placed in a pinning situation, or makes an error and places himself in danger of being pinned or in the case where the offensive wrestler places his own back on the mat should the referee take extra care to count the two seconds for the fall or should he hustle to insure that the wrestler who has gained an advantage because of his opponent's error be rewarded for his good luck. In every pinning situation the referee should hustle to be in position. He should be certain if there is a change of control involved that

control is established. While he hustles to get into position the referee should start his count for near fall points. If the action is a roll through then no reversal and no back points can be awarded. If the wrestler in the near fall situation is held for two full seconds then it is clear that a reversal and near fall have been earned. If the wrestler who placed himself on his own back or was surprised and caught in a pinning situation is held with his pinning area in continuous contact with the mat for two full seconds then a pin must be called. In the situations described above preventive officiating calls for speedy but deliberate action on the part of the official. The call must not be rushed.

In the case where one wrestler is clearly superior to his opponent, (who is determined not to be pinned) should the referee use stalling calls against the less skilled wrestler to prevent injury? The wrestler who is being overpowered must not be called for stalling. In this scenario the referee must not be too protective of the less skilled wrestler nor should he allow the superior wrestler to take any shortcuts to end resistance. However, while it may seem clear that one wrestler is superior to another, the less skilled wrestler deserves the right to avoid the pin and save his team a point. This situation places the referee in a tough situation as the superior wrestler may soon become frustrated while the coach of the less skilled wrestler might protest against any and all aggressive actions taken by his wrestler's opponent. The referee must allow the wrestlers to settle the issue. The less skilled wrestler's coach can default the match at any time. As long as the superior wrestler obeys the rules he must be allowed to work for the pin.

It is never correct for a referee to act outside the spirit and the letter of the rules. Preventive officiating shouldn't prevent wrestlers from wrestling either. It would be wrong to call a pin that wasn't actually there just to get a poor wrestler off the mat. It would be equally wrong to call a potentially dangerous situation because a less experienced wrestler displayed panic. Generally the referee must limit his actions to the spirit and letter of the rules. 🏠



Harold Nichol's Open, 157 lb. Championship. Wright, Nebraska, decisioned Travis Paulson, Iowa State, 4-3. Photo by John C. Johnson.