



...On the New "Tiebreaker Choice" Rule

By Bill Welker

The new rule by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), regarding who has choice in the 30-second tiebreaker, is definitely a step in the right direction. However, it does have a flaw. Consider the following.

Simply stated, "The wrestler who scores the first point(s) will have the choice of position should the match reach the 30-second tiebreaker. This includes penalty points as well as points the wrestler earns on his own."

This high school ruling is slightly different than the college regulation. On the collegiate mat scene, the wrestler who scores the first "offensive" points or receives a penalty point will be given the choice if the bout reached the final 30-second tiebreaker segment. In other words,

the competitor who scores the first take-down or near-fall points, not escape or reversal point(s), will earn the choice in the 30-second tiebreaker. So what's the big deal?

Well, in many cases, we are back to the "luck factor," or flipping the disk with the scholastic ruling. Allow me to explain.

If no points are scored in the first period of a dual meet, the wrestler who has the choice at that weight class will most likely take down at the start of the second period. The same is true in tournament action; the wrestler who wins the second period flip will choose the bottom position. Escaping in both situations earns them "choice rights" should the match reach the 30-second tiebreaker, having scored the first match point. Yes, we're back to the luck of the draw.

Oh, there is one other point of emphasis. This concerns coaches. I have officiated at a number of tournaments so far this season. What I have observed is that some coaches are forgetting this new rule in reference to mat strategy.

In the past, if Wrestler A had the choice or won the toss in the second period, the best move would be to "defer" the choice to his opponent. This approach is a wise one for a couple of reasons. First, since his antagonist would most likely take the bottom position, Wrestler A would be physically fresher to hold him down. And finally, after second period action, Wrestler A (as well as his coach) would have a better handle of what position to choose in the final stanza of the match.

However, with the new 30-second tiebreaker rule, coaches must rethink their strategy regarding their wrestlers' choice of position selection at the start of the second period. If there is no score at the end of the first period, the wrestler would be better off selecting down. Thus, if he at least escapes, that matman will have scored the first point and would be given choice of position in the 30-tiebreaker, should the match reach that final stage.

I have witnessed some coaches overlooking this point, telling their boys to defer when the bout was tied at the end of the first period. After each match, I asked the coach why he made that choice under the new circumstances. It was then that each coach realized his blunder.

In sum, I believe the current college approach is fairer because we are dealing with offensive points. No luck involved. But still, the NFHS rule is better than what we had in the past, and next year they just might consider adopting the college version of the 30-second tiebreaker rule.



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