

An Open Letter to an Aspiring Official

By William A. Welker, Ed.D.

In this article, I want to share with you my open letter of advice to an individual who sincerely wants to be a successful wrestling official. Read it carefully.

Hi Eric,

So you want to be a wrestling official. First and foremost, you must contact your local wrestling officials' board secretary to find out what he needs you to do. If you don't know who he is, then contact your state high school athletic association office. They will tell you who to contact in your area and what it entails. Below are the officiating tips you requested:

My Ten Personal Tips to Succeed as a Wrestling Official

- Read the rule book (including photos) and case book in detail from cover to cover.
- Study and rehearse, by a mirror, all the official "signal" mechanics illustrated in the back of the rule book.
- Make it a point to watch experienced, successful officials and take notes. Furthermore, when you do start refereeing, have these same officials critique your performances on the mat.
- Before the season starts, go to various schools and referee wrestle-offs. Then ask the coaches how you did and if there are areas in need of improvement.
- Start off officiating at the junior high/middle school level. Unlike the youth level, you will be dealing with coaches who have state association "rules of conduct" they must follow. Too often at the youth level, you have father coaches who go "ballistic," don't follow rules of conduct, and often chase young officials away from the refereeing ranks.
- When making close calls as an official, never look at the coaches for approval.
- If you award points too soon, it's okay to wipe them off. Good coaches admire officials who do so.
- If you totally "blow" a call you can not fix, do not become defensive with the coach when he asks for a conference at the score table. In fact, your best bet is to admit the mistake. Not only will the coach respect your admission, but he will respect your honesty.
- Keep in mind, no two officials will ever call stalling in the same manner; it's too subjective of a call. The key: "Be Consistent" when signaling stalling; in other words, don't call it quick one match and slowly the next bout. There is one exception - Heavyweights - they wrestle much slower and often it is best just to allow them to decide the match.

Consistency is also important in all areas of wrestling: takedown and reversal control, line calls, falls, etc. In essence, you must demonstrate overall "consistency" throughout the entire match.

• Finally, I believe in the "Three Fs" - Be Friendly, Be Fair, and Be Firm. If you follow the above suggestions, you will most definitely enjoy the avocation of officiating wrestling.

Sincerely -- Bill Welker

Dr. Bill Welker, Wheeling, West Virginia, was awarded the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Mideast Section All-Sports Distinguished Officials Award. He served as the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission wrestling rules interpreter, clinician and supervisor of state tournament officials for 28 years and was a member of the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee for a four-year term.



World Team Trials Challenge Tournament Finals - 55 kg. Jacarra Winchester (USOPTC/TMWC) with a two-match sweep over Lauren Mason (Brunson UVRTC). Winchester won the first match 10-0 technical fall, followed by a 10-6 decision. Photo by Johnnie Johnson.