



January 8, 2016

**SITUATION:** At the conclusion of the regulation match, which ended in a tie, the coach of wrestler A asked the referee for injury time because he was concerned about his wrestler. The referee started the injury clock then watched as the wrestler drank water and rested while coach did nothing to attend to or inquire of an injury. At the conclusion of the match, the referee went back and assessed an unsportsmanlike conduct team point penalty on the head coach for the misuse of injury time. In the locker, after the end of the event, the referee inquired of his fellow officials their opinion of the penalty. Many tell him he can't make that call. The referee takes the unsportsmanlike team penalty away.

Was the team penalty warranted and correct? Were the others right to tell the referee he had to take the penalty back? Was the penalty the wrong call at the start? What should have been done, if anything at all? What errors did the referee make in this situation?

There is a great deal involved to discuss a variety of aspects. The match referee was correct with the team point for the unsportsmanlike penalty on the head coach. It can't be a match point because wrestler A did not ask for injury time, then simply refresh and rest. The problem is that the timing was way off.

The coach has the opportunity to ask for injury time. He is with his team members all season and in this case he knows his athletes far better than anyone else. If the coach can throw in the towel to end a match because he is concerned for his wrestler, he certainly can ask for injury time.

As always, we need to look into and understand the intent of the rule and may need to apply common sense to the situation. We heard an explanation by a veteran official describe the rule book as our armor, it is our shield. We all need to let it work.

**Page 38 Rule 7-5-3** "Unsportsmanlike conduct of coaches and other team personnel is any act which becomes abusive or interferes with the orderly progress of the match. ...". The coach did interfere with the orderly progress of the match. We have no timeouts in wrestling. We have recovery, injury, blood, and official's time, but no timeout for rest. This alone supports the unsportsmanlike penalty assessed on the coach.

**Page 44 Rule 8-2-1 NOTE:** "Taking an injury time out for a non injury situation is unethical." Unethical conduct is an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. This is understood by several situations. First; if the defensive wrestler stands, then holds the wrists together and drops to one knee to draw the clasps hand penalty ... it is unsportsmanlike conduct on the defensive wrestler. Here the wrestler is using the referee to make a call in his favor, it is unethical. Second; if the defensive wrestler screams while being pinned then jumps up and says he is OK ... it too is unsportsmanlike conduct on the defensive wrestler. In this case it is misuse of injury time, and using the referee to make a call in his favor, and again unethical. By these examples we clearly know that unethical conduct is unsportsmanlike behavior.

## On page 86 “Coaches Code of Ethics”

**Item 1:** “The coach shall be aware that he or she has a tremendous influence, for either good or ill, on the education of the student and, thus, shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest ideals of character.”

**Item 6:** “The coach shall master the contest rules and shall teach them to his or her team member. The coach shall not an advantage by circumventing the spirit or letter of the rules.”

The NFHS has for many years conveyed the very strong message concerning sportsmanship for all referees in the yearly rules interpretation presentation. We are to insist on good sportsman-like behavior and ethical conduct on everyone’s part. There is a reason for the message to always be included. We all are part of the educational team charged with being good role models for athletes.

Finally, page 13 Rule 3-1-13 “The referee has the authority to rule promptly, and in the spirit of good sportsmanship, any situation not specifically covered in the rule book.” The rules of the sport (all sports) involve sportsmanship and admonishing unsportsmanlike behavior. In this case, when the coach circumvented the rules of injury time to give his wrestler rest it was unfair to the opponent; to delay the match. Coaches do not control the wrestling match, nor are they allowed to hijack the proceedings. Coach’s behavior is expected to be above the low level of winning by unethical tactics.

The referee is at fault from the very beginning and through the end. He should have started by asking Wrestler A if he was OK. “Hey green, are you OK?” When he says yes, just continue on with the match. Get the over-time started to be fair to both wrestlers. He if says he is injured, he gets injury time then if the referee feels he is misusing injury time, the penalty for the unsportsmanlike conduct is a match point and goes to the wrestler because he requested it. We all need to remember there is an opponent who is being delayed so his opponent can get rested and refreshed.

**Remember:** being right is not always the popular call and the popular call is not always right. We all distinguish ourselves by how we handle the tough ones. Learn ... learn from every situation.

Next, the referee should have made the unsportsmanlike conduct penalty immediately. Waiting until after the match is concluded was wrong. The coach would have a grip to complain about. Then, getting everyone’s opinion in the locker room after the tournament was fine, but to then take back the call based on 12-15 other referees was the next error. There is a reason why the following words always appear in a bulletin:

## BE PROFESSIONAL \* PROMPT \* DECISIVE \* DIRECT

The reason is to remind everyone to handle unique situations properly and quickly. The longer time passes to deal with a problem it will always come back to bite you in the back end. If the referee had made the penalty call promptly he should have stuck with it.

Don’t just read the rule book and case manual, but rather understand the intent of the rules, and how they all play an integral part developing the parameters of fair play for the sport of wrestling.