



## Habits of a Successful Wrestling Official

Do keep in mind as you read this article, we as officials are always chasing the impossible to call the perfect match. The items that follow are ways to help get closer to that goal every time you step out on the mat to call a match.

### 1. Read and reread the rules book, case book, and mechanics books.

The official must be an expert and know the rules better than anyone in the building. Coaches will test your knowledge as they do not know all the rules and will ask for incorrect calls. The case book will help describe situations involving the rules written in the rules book for real life situations. The mechanics book is key as you need to have good mechanics, be in position, and know how and where to be on the mat to make the correct call.

Tip 1: Read the rule in the rules book and then read the case book interpretation of that rule to gain full understanding of the rule.

### 2. Develop a Criteria for Everything in the Rules Book.

The top officials do not just call a match according to how the match is being wrestled, they prepare for the match and everything they may or may not have to call. Have a criteria for every rule in the rule book and how you are going to call it. This will make calling matches easier as the criteria need to be met for points to be earned and awarded. The calls need to be automatic and having thought it through with your criteria allows for this. It also allows the coaches to meet at the table to go smoother as you have the reason for calling points in your criteria. Develop these and live by these with rules book support.

Tip 2: Protect the contestants at all times. Safety is our number one priority and do not be afraid to stop a potential scoring situation to save a knee, shoulder, or other body part.

### 3. Study Mechanics and Mat Movements

The top officials study mechanics guides and study the upper echelon officials in how they move on the mat and how they signal everything. There is no shame in copying something that looks good and works well for others. Movement on the mat should look smooth even when swift. Hustle to be in position but do not look frantic while doing so. You should cut the mat as an official as a ballroom dancer cuts the dance floor. Practice the movements and how to work 2 person mechanics. Practice point giving and counts

There is a list of approved signals. Know them and only use those signals. Do not use made up signals or start the match with your own signal. Know how to display points promptly and make sure to always turn them after giving so all 360 degrees can see the points. Practice all the counts so that you are spot on with one second with the end of your count and the same time as the end of the visual count. Be verbal and loud in these situations and make these things a reflex so that you do not have to think about how to display signals, points, and counts. Do practice in front of a mirror of giving points and study yourself. Use a stopwatch to make sure all your counts are perfect to the second and do not get

too excited during the match and speed up the counts. For college guys, neutral danger situations and counts are a must to practice. Reminder to use the correct hand to start and stop the match. When starting the match, use your right hand as the green (means go) wristband will signal go and use the left hand with red (means stop) to stop the match.

Tip 3: Find the right distance away from the wrestlers that allows you to see everything, get to the other side if action carries you there, and slow the action down. If the action is too fast, you need to back up and it will slow. Do not allow smaller mats to change this distance of how far you work from the wrestlers.

#### 4. Gain Experience through working on the mats

Angela Duckworth In the book Grit sums up in two sentences the underlying meaning of why we need to gain experience. “Our potential is one thing. What we do with it is quite another.” We all have potential to succeed at some level but to realize the potential we need to elevate through experience. This is done by using the criteria and rules to become efficient and successful while calling as many matches as possible at each level of wrestling. Do not take matches that are over your ability even if offered them, it could stunt your growth and reputation. There is no substitute for experience, and you will gain something every time you are out on the mat to be able to be successful at all levels of wrestling. Albert Einstein puts it best when he said, “The only source of knowledge is experience.”

Tip 4: When moving around the mat pretend it is the rug that you cut as a ballroom dancer. You need to move with a quick elegance and tempo that allows you to see everything but yet look composed to give off the feeling of complete control.

#### 5. Find a Mentor

Find someone who is better than you and is willing to help coach you on your journey. Not everyone is a good mentor but there are a lot out there that will be and are good ones. Remember that sometimes it is key to knowing your officiating style and pick someone that you can work with to enhance your style. Ensure that they care about you and helping you achieve your goals, and not in it to pad their own reputation. Seek the information and be a good mentee. Listen and do not be combative as they are only telling you things to help you. It is called developmental feedback, and we all need it even the guys who are calling the D1 championships, as we are human and not perfect officiating an ever-changing sport. Your mentor also will be a seasoned official and will know assignors and others that can help you in your career. They can help advocate for you when they see that you are ready for the new challenges.

Tip 5: Pay close attention to who has control so that you do not miss count situations in college and locked hands when the contestants get in a scramble and face each other.

#### 6. Study Video of your matches

Video record your matches and review them. One of the toughest things to do is watch yourself and critique yourself but this is the only way to get better. Pay close attention to your nonverbal body language, your signals (are they crisp and consistent), verbal language, your mat movement, your calls, and your interactions with coaches and wrestlers. Your mentor can help in this area as well. Set up a

camera at the table (like a go pro with a mini stand) or have someone record you in the stands. Do not miss out on the opportunity to record yourself as this can really help you stand out.

Tip 6: Make calls based on the rule and the rule interpretations. Never make a call based on how you feel the coaches or fans will feel about the call. The rules are to be called correctly no matter who gets upset.

## 7. Put together a group of colleagues

Put together a small group (2-4 suggested) of colleagues that have a similar aspiration and are calling similar events and levels. Make these guys your trusted group to talk with about matches and travel buddies. It is nice to have someone to talk with and travel with on your journey who will not judge but encourage. Remember as Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that has." This should be the mantra of your small group and keep this in mind as you create this group. Go change the world one great call at a time giving a positive officiating experience to all.

Tip 7: Learn every time you step onto the mat. There will be something new to add to your toolbox and use each situation to help improve. We all make mistakes, and the goal is to limit them to one time.

## 8. Be the Official the Coach Wants and Trusts

This is something that many officials fail to grasp as we need to look the part on the mat in showing that we are confident in what we are doing yet approachable and not ego driven. Be confident in making your calls but willing to discuss calls without any issue or attitude. Sometimes coaches just test you or make sure they understand the call so that they can coach to that standard in the future. Do not take offense to any positive discussion about your calls. You may be the teacher that the coach or wrestler needs on that day.

Tip 8: Have a good system to keep track of who has choice in each period of a match and the dual. Some people use rubber bands, others use multiple discs, and others use both back pockets. This is a good thing to discuss with others to find what fits your style.

## 9. Be Aware of your Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

Use verbal communication to spur action by using words like action, center, or improve. When using these commands and other verbal action cues, remember to use them only once. You do not need to coach the wrestlers through every situation. If they do not listen and choose to do something else that results in you having to make a call, make that call such as stalling due to a back off the mat.

The best way to see the nonverbal communication that you display is by videotaping your match. It can help to eliminate negative nonverbal communications that are speaking louder than your verbal communication. Do not let your nonverbal communication destroy your positive efforts when calling a match. Calling a match is a lot more than just throwing up the points.

Tip 9: Observe other officials that work the levels you aspire to be at. See what they do and ask them questions as almost everyone would be willing to help if you only ask them.

## 10. Control Your Emotions

The only thing that you always have complete control of when you are on the mat is your emotions. Find your inner peace, and that may be through mediation or breathing exercises. Do not let crazy

situations derail your emotions and get you all caught up into it. There are different roles in wrestling. Wrestlers are pumped up to compete and coaches are amped up due to having a subjective interest in their wrestler winning. The official has the job of calling the match wrestled in front of them and not to get caught up in any of the emotions that come from competing. Officials have a role and need to remember that. Using the criteria for all the rules can assist when something goes sideways like a flagrant misconduct, and it can be calmly called in these situations without getting too emotionally involved. Every situation can be handled calmly within the rules book.

Tip 10: When going to the table never assume what the coach is going to say or ask. Always let them speak first. It is important that prior to going over to the table to take a deep breathe and compose yourself so that you can be professional in that interaction.

## 11. Know How to Communicate with Coaches and Wrestlers

The only thing that you leave behind in this world are memories and in which it is very important to make a good first impression and work to build upon improving that impression every chance you get. Do not ruin everything you strive for by saying something that you should not say in anger or in a joking manner. Learn how to properly communicate with people where they hear your answer or message without upsetting them. It is an art to communicate with upset people and deescalate a situation. Know how to look for the signs in wrestlers that things may go wrong here and prevent them from happening by smoothing over the situation. Nonverbal communication may be more important than verbal communication sometimes. Make sure you can properly read people and know how to react to each situation.

Tip 11: Know the best positions to be in for each situation that the wrestlers are in. If the top guy pulls the bottom guy backwards for near fall, then do not be in front or you may miss the near fall. Stay out to the side in this situation. Find out where you need to be to be successful in calling all the points that are scored.

## 12. Constantly Work to Improve

Work to get better and be the best version of yourself out on the mat. Remember the saying that Ray Kroc (Former CEO of McDonalds) used to say “As long as you are green, you are growing. As soon as you are ripe, you start to rot.” Grow forever, evolve, and improve otherwise you will digress. One strategy that is used is 6 pack list of things that you are currently working on. In this written 6 pack you can the 6 most important things that will help your officiating. It is an ever-evolving list as things once mastered can be replaced with new ones. To assist in the develop of this list, one helpful post season activity that you can do is a reflection recap list of the past season. On that list you can include a list of what you did well, what you need to work on and did not do well, where you went in the past season and what matches or duals you hope to be considered for in the upcoming season. Good way to end the season and know what you need to work on going forward into the off season.

Tip 12: Keep a journal of your matches and what you did well as well as what you need to work on. It does no good to do this if you do not read it during the year and prepping for the next season.

## 13. Make Goals for yourself

Make a realistic, achievable 1 year, 5 year, and career goal for yourself and work to achieve them. Your mentor or colleagues can help you with these goals, but you should have a solid basis for what you need to work on. Write them down! The only way to hold yourself accountable is by seeing them on

paper or a computer screen. Goals do not always have to be sport specific as they can be about officiating in general. Goals are written to be committed to and them work to achieve. You can start with small goals and work towards bigger ones. Well developed goals are the way to work up the ladder to achieve the success.

Tip 13: Be grateful for the matches you have and work them with all your efforts. Be thankful to the people that put you in those spots and helped you along the way. Don't complain about things as it makes you look bad. A simple thanks is a wonderful thing.

#### 14. Develop a Solid Pre-Meet

A pre-meet is used to educate the contestants on what you feel is important to their success on the mats. It should only be 2-3 minutes and can include here to protect them and safety, use all means to get calls correct (video review and camera angles), new rules or points of emphasis, how your starts will be, eliminating cautions, 3 general rules for success (1. Wrestle in Center; 2. Wrestle in all 3 positions; 3. Do not go Out of Bounds) and anything else you feel is important. Also ask about special equipment and if they have any questions for you. Wish them good luck.

Tip 14: Avoid toxic people. Do not listen to or surround yourself with people that are not supportive. Life is too short to have a negative person raining on your parade.

#### 15. Be Prepared if There is a Dual Meet Tie

Have the tiebreaker criteria memorized or on a sheet that you carry out to dual

Tip 15: Remember to hold up delayed stalling or locked hands calls above your head so everyone can see them.

#### 16. Do Not Go Out with Pre-Conceived Notions

Call what the wrestlers give to you in the match with the criteria that you developed for all the rules. Too often some officials will state that if the score is 0-0 after the first 1:30 of the period, I must hit someone with stalling. Do not go looking for something that is not there, call the match to your criteria and do not go looking for things that are not there in the match in front of you.

Tip 16: Pay close attention to the top wrestler's belt buckle (the area where your belt buckle would be located if they had one on), if it is going North to South into the mat, they are not working to turn the bottom wrestler. If it is going East to West or some variation of it, they are working to turn the bottom wrestler. This is true with legs in or out.

#### 17. Develop off Mat Skills that Enhance Mat Skills

Not everything that can help you on the mat is found in the rules, case, and mechanics books. Sometimes we must reach for other books that can help us in areas that we need to improve. Reading books can help you on and off the mat and give you a new perspective on life and how to live it.

Here are some books that we have found to be helpful

High Performance Living by Mike Hagerty

Be Where Your Feet Are by Scott O'Neil

Grit by Angela Duckworth  
Good to Great by Jame C Collins  
Mindset by Carol Dweck  
Verbal Judo by George Thompson & Jerry B Jenkins  
Extreme Ownership by Joko Willink and Leif Babin  
Start With Why by Simon Sinek  
Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek  
School of Greatness by Lewis Howes  
Atomic Habits by James Clear  
The Comfort Crisis by Michael Easter

Some of these books are available in TED talks as well so you can get a quick sneak peak by watching them.

Tip 17: In the heat of the moment, if it feels good to say it out loud, do not say it out loud.

#### 18. Be Where Your Feet Are

When you show up to an event, you are there for your role as the official. This is the moment that you are in and need to give it your all. Do not let your mind drift off the mat to things that could distract you while on the mat. The other items in your life need to be put on hold so that you can fully immerse yourself into your role as the official that is protecting the wrestlers, enforcing the rules, as well as officiating a great match. Leave your cell phone in the locker room. By having your cell phone out on the floor, it just shows that you are not totally invested in the task at hand and can be a huge distraction. Do not look around the mat and see who is watching you. It does not matter to the 2 individuals on the mat who is evaluating you or watching you. Also, it does not matter what reaction people (other watching officials or people) on the sidelines give with their non-verbal communication, they most likely are not talking about your match or you. Stay focused on your match and what is happening in that match. Be where your feet.

Tip 18: Review the penalty chart, illegal moves, and technical violations every time prior to calling a match. This is the area that can jam you up if you are not ready and have a clear understanding of these moves.

#### 19. Stalemates Are Not a Crutch

Do not use a stalemate as a crutch to get out of having to make a call. Multiple stalemates called for the same thing is stalling and multiple means more than once. Do not stalemate things that do not need to be stalemated. Use verbal commands like action to spur movement out of these situations. Pay attention to the clock, it is not a good idea to stalemate something with less than 10-15 seconds on the clock. If an injury risk is present, use a potentially dangerous call to protect the wrestlers.

Tip 19: When working 2 man mechanics, have your second official call out either 15 seconds or 10 seconds to help you avoid calling stalemates with a short time on the clock. 15 is a good time as it gives time for the referee to either stop the match or let it continue. With 15 seconds, if you stop the match, the wrestlers will still have time on the clock to score points.

## 20. Be Careful Using Social Media

Social media use has exploded and officials are no stranger to using social media. Please be aware that social media can be accessed by everyone, and it is probably not a great idea to use it to broadcast where you are going to be calling matches or complaints about other officials. Social media should never be used to comfort yourself after a tough match. Fans and people on social media are not your friends and are not going to be kind. This is why it is important to have a solid group of colleagues and your mentor who you can turn to in order to learn and grow from every experience while also giving you good truthful advise if needed. Sometimes you may call the tough match well but it just does not feel good and this is why you need someone to turn to in order to discuss these types of matches. Also, do not criticize any of your fellow officials, coaches, or athletes on social media. Silent cannot be misinterpreted.

Tip 20: If using an assistant, it is a good thing to meet prior to and have discussions on what as the lead you would like as reminders on the clock, clock countdown starting at, positioning especially on near fall when the lead is not in position to see, kickbacks and cutbacks watch, and mat movements in regards to out of bounds. Your goal as the assistant referee should be to be the best assistant referee in the world.

## 21. Be Prepared by Enhancing Yourself

Taking care of your body and self is crucial to your success on and off the mat. You want to be ready for the physical demands by engaging in a proper exercise and work out program. Along with this you need to find the correct diet with the right nutrition to sustain you for the day that you have on the mats. Your body is a complex machine and needs to be treated as such. You do not buy a sports car that requires premium fuel and fill it with the low grade gas. This is the same as what you need to feed your body with quality whole foods to maintain the proper energy level so that you can be your best all match or tournament. The last component is getting enough rest to make sure you are sharp and mentally focused. You do not want to be tired or mentally spent when calling a match. Nothing is worse than not remembering whose has a stalling warning or number of cautions issued to whom.

Tip 21: Exercise and use good nutrition to be at your top form when you step out on the mat. There are a lot of things that happen on the mat and you need to be at your best.

## 22. Have Fun

This can be a highly demanding job and remember we do this for the same reason why we started playing sports, for FUN! Win every time on the mat and smile while enjoying the ride. Remember this saying from Massimo Bartoli, "Everything you do, every day, will have an impact in the future." If you want to achieve greatness at anything you need to be willing to put the hard work and time into it. It may not go as well as you wish or as quickly as others but in time it will always impact you in your life.

Tip 21: Do not look at the table when giving points. You will miss something on the mat

