

NFHS OFFICIATING SIGNALS & MECHANICS HANDBOOK

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Modified by Rod Frost to remove all references of NCAA with permission from Tim Shiels

Officials,

With permission from Tim Shiels, we have updated this NCAA document to fit NFHS rules and signals as of the **2025-26 rules changes**. This is a great read, please spend the time to read this as it will make us all much more consistent.

Regardless of officiating experience, this manual, along with the 2025-26 Rules Book and updated Case Book, is invaluable.

INTENT & PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Mechanics Handbook is written to provide every Wrestling Official consistent explanation of the signals, procedures, and mechanics while officiating. The Handbook is another tool to help sharpen your officiating skills. Referring to this Handbook often to study, learn, and master the mechanics and signals will only help you on your officiating journey.

This will be a living document that will continue to evolve with additional material and information being added over time.

Only the signals shown in the 2025-2026 NFHS Wrestling Rules Book are acceptable. Officials should avoid making up their own signals and mechanics. Consistency is critical among Officials.

To be a successful Official, the goal should be to develop consistency in all areas from the beginning to the end of the season. The ultimate goal is to make the correct call every time. Every match deserves the same respect and effort.

Wrestling Officials have the responsibility of conducting bouts in a dignified, professional, and unbiased manner and shall deal with all situations in adherence to the rules, in the spirit of good sportsmanship, and in the best interest of the wrestlers and the sport. The character and conduct of Officials must be above reproach. When in uniform or onsite, an Official shall not fraternize with competitors and/or coaches.

Officials should keep themselves prepared both physically and mentally to administer bouts.

Officials shall enforce the rules firmly and fairly in both letter and spirit in such a way that attention is drawn to the wrestlers rather than to themselves.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SIGNALS & MECHANICS

Signals are an official's best means of communication. The better we communicate, the better the flow of the match and the less confusion for the wrestlers, coaches, and fans. Having good clear signals allows everyone in the arena to understand what just occurred on the mat. *The wrestlers are the story, and the Officials are the reporters.*

1. Know the Signals

One of the few things an official can control is the execution and delivery of the signals and mechanics. Knowing the signal that needs to be executed in every situation is critical, so you don't have to think about it. This is achieved by practicing your signals to the point they become muscle memory. When an official eliminates their signals from their thought process, it allows the official to focus more on other areas.

2. Suggested Ways to Improve Appearance of Your Signals

Practice in front of a mirror so you know what they look like.

Watch yourself on video.

Time your counts on a stopwatch.

Work on being loud when verbalizing calls.

Have a trusted person or mentor watch and provide feedback on your signals and mechanics. Examples may include: "arms are not straight or not extended," "nearfall was not at 45 degrees," "not rotating your points overhead," "fingers are apart on Stop signal and Neutral signal," etc.

3. Timing is Everything

What makes an official's signals elite is how and when they deliver the signals.

The timing and consistency of when the signal is executed can be easily affected if the official is out of position or if the official is overthinking. It doesn't matter how good the official's signals are if they are being put up too early, too late, or at the wrong time.

POSITION • PATIENCE • POISE • PRESENTATION

SUCCESS & CONSISTENCY WITH SIGNALS

After officials put in the work to make their signals muscle memory, there are other principles that will allow the official to further develop their signals. Below are those principles, which are listed in order of importance. They are all important and all work together with the goal of getting each call correct, delivering a sharp signal, and clearly communicating the call.

1. Position

Being in proper position to make the call should be the primary focus. Working hard to stay in the proper position affords the official the opportunity to slow things down and have great timing when making calls. If the official is out of position and rushing, then it can negatively affect the quality and delivery of the signals. You're only as good as your position!

2. Patience

When an official maintains good position and they are not too close or chasing the action, it allows the official to be patient when letting situations develop, especially in scramble situations. Patience also promotes proper timing when making a call and delivering the signals.

3. Poise

The level of comfort and confidence in each situation can mean the difference in getting the call right or wrong. Achieving principles one and two should give the official confidence to relax and be poised in all situations. Being poised also allows for smoother signals.

4. Presentation

The timing, delivery, and execution of your signals.

POSITION yourself to see the call.
Once you're in position be **PATIENT**.
Remain **POISED** as the situation develops.
PRESENT your signals sharply and smoothly.

MECHANICS SEQUENCES FOR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

1. Maintain a loud and clear whistle throughout the match. Typically, the start whistle is quicker and shorter than the stoppage whistle.
2. Hand motion for starts (Neutral and Referee's Position) should be the same.
3. Hold points high and rotate your hand.
4. Keep your fingers tight with your thumb tucked when making stop signal and pointing control with the correct color hand.
5. Do not put your hands on your knees or your hips.
6. Use the Stop Signal (Signal #2) any time you stop the action for something other than an out of bounds call.
 - a. **Stalemate** – stop the match then indicate the stalemate signal (Signal #14) with thumbs up and hands against your chest.
 - b. **Potentially Dangerous** – stop the match then indicate color of Potentially Dangerous (Signal #13).
 - c. **Penalties/Infractions** – stop the match then indicate infraction and corresponding points (See book for proper signal).
 - d. **Stalling on Offensive Wrestler** – stop the match then signal the stall (Signal #16) on the offensive wrestler.
7. Award points first in the following instances:
 - a. **Reversal** – award the reversal points before signaling the reversal (Signal #18).
 - b. **Escape** – award the escape point then use the neutral signal (Signal #8).
 - c. **nearfall** – award the nearfall points prior to bringing hand across to the far shoulder (Signal #21).
8. Neutral Out of Bounds – use the following sequence:
 - a. Blow your whistle while signaling out of bounds (Signal #10), no stalling situation
 - b. If you have stalling, indicate with proper color as follows:
 - i. Stalling for backing or pushing/pulling out, Stalling (Signal #16), then the Neutral Signal (#8).
9. Choice of Position/Disc Mechanics:
 - a. Figure out a system that works for you and is easy to track choice of position at the beginning of 2nd/3rd periods during dual meets.
 - b. Some officials keep the disc in the front pockets, while others use their back pockets, or even their wristbands.
 - c. **Do not use your disc to indicate who has choice of position**. You are wearing wristbands, use these to indicate who has choice of position.
 - d. When you flip the disc (during a tournament, or the 30/30 tiebreakers), stay

in the center of the mat, flip the disk and leave it on the mat until after the choices have been made, **THEN** pick it up and put it in your disk holding spot (pocket, etc.). DO NOT CATCH THE DISK IN MID-AIR!

PREVENTIVE OFFICIATING

Officials may use tactics to prevent certain situations from taking place or from becoming potentially dangerous and/or Illegal. Some examples of preventive officiating are listed below.

1. Using simple commands such as the following (never single out one wrestler):
 - a. "Action"
 - b. "Center" or "Work Center" or "Action Center"
 - c. "Offense"
 - d. "Improve"
 - e. "No Control" or "Still Neutral"
 - f. "Green is in Control" or "Red is in Control"
 - g. "Contact" or "Engage"
 - h. "Keep it Legal" or "Keep it Safe"
2. Never turn your back on the wrestlers. Always keep your eyes on the wrestlers and stay in between them after an out of bounds situation.
3. Sometimes a stoppage in the match is necessary, if you feel the action is moving toward an aggressive state by either or both wrestlers. Stop the match and indicate to both wrestlers that that type of behavior is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.
4. Staying in between the wrestlers on neutral starts can prevent false starts. You may also point to the starting lines, so the wrestlers understand you're not blowing the whistle until they're on the line.
5. Move in closer when offensive wrestler is applying various pinning combinations such as arm bars, a guillotine, or Blair ride for example, to be in position to prevent a potentially dangerous situation or to prevent a hold from becoming Illegal.

PRE-MATCH RESPONSIBILITIES

Give yourself ample travel time to venue. Locate home management and ask to be taken to your locker room. Try and arrive onsite 60 minutes early if at all possible, PRIOR TO THE DESIGNATED WEIGH IN TIME ON YOUR

CONTRACT. This will allow for being able to get dressed, do some of your pre-meet inspections of the mat area, and prepare for weigh in.

Inspect mat area to ensure compliance. Notify Home Management of any issues. Remember to look for the 5 feet of extra mat for out of bounds. Expect table and bench to make sure at least 10 feet away. For tournaments, sometimes the table is close to the mat, so see if there is room to move them back.

Speak with the table workers and timers to see if there are any questions.

Locate coaches of each team and ask when they would like you to address their team.

Pre-Match Discussion with Coaches & Athletes

Keep it Simple, Keep it Short - two to three minutes at most. Ask if anyone has any special equipment.

Two most important things: safety of the athletes and getting the calls right.

Discuss major rule changes.

Neutral out of bounds – explain potential outcomes, nothing but action or backing/pushing/pulling out stalling. Traditional stalling – emphasis on how you get to the edge, etc.

The offensive wrestler is responsible for attempting to return defensive wrestler.

Discuss your starting sequence in referee's position. Reduce cautions.

Ask them if they have any questions, then thank for their time and wish them good luck.

Discussion with Second Official

Be sure to discuss expectations with your Second Official (SO), if you have one.

Communication is key. Talk to one another during the match.

Talking Points

1. Clock is number one priority – start and stop of match clock.
2. Stay 180° from Lead Official (LO), if possible.

3. Look for backside violations that LO cannot see.
4. Look for nearfall if action moves away quickly.
5. Cover front side if action turns away from LO.
6. Location during timeouts.
7. Location for neutral starts and referee's position starts.
8. Location at the conclusion of each match (top of the circle, facing the table).
9. Discuss how to handle disagreements on calls.
10. The SO to remain in circle with wrestlers during a coach's conference at table.

OFFICIAL'S MECHANICS IN NEUTRAL SITUATIONS

1. Wrestler's Position in Neutral Start

- a. Both wrestlers must place one foot on their respective starting line and the other foot on or behind the line or the line extended. Don't start unless both wrestlers have a foot on the line. Point to the line to ensure this. Eliminate unnecessary cautions.
- b. Hands and/or forehead cannot touch the opponent.
- c. Both wrestlers must be stationary until the whistle sounds (no rolling starts).
- d. It is not recommended for the official to shake the hands of the wrestlers unless they initiate shaking hands with you.

2. Neutral Starting Mechanics

- a. The official should step in between the wrestlers with outstretched arms between the red and green starting lines. Make sure this position does not interfere with the wrestlers, however.
- b. The official should be stationary and facing the scorer's table. Point at and make eye contact with the timekeeper.
- c. Make sure you have visual acknowledgment from timekeeper prior to blowing the whistle.
- d. Sound your whistle loud and sharp while simultaneously making a visual arm motion to start the match (Signal #1).

- e. Move out quickly to a proper calling distance (10-15 feet) and adjust your position according to where the action goes. Glance up momentarily to ensure that the clock has properly started. Always keep both wrestlers in your line of sight as you back out.
- f. It is recommended that the whistle remain in the front of the official's mouth unless giving verbal commands to the wrestlers – not on side of the mouth.

3. Neutral Standing Position

- a. Situate yourself so that you are far enough away from the wrestling to observe the action and not interfere with sudden changes in position. Move in closer when identifying potentially dangerous and/or potentially illegal maneuvers.
- b. A range of 10-15 feet is suggested. Find your comfortable space. A wider range allows for a greater perspective.
- c. Know how various takedowns finish so you can position yourself to stay out of the way and to observe control as it is established.
- d. Continuously work to improve your position and situate yourself between both wrestlers as they face each other to ensure you can move to either side in scoring situations and to see the hand fighting.
- e. Anticipate position. Understand where action should go next.
- f. Do not chase the action; stop and let the action come back to you. Oftentimes moving counter to the wrestlers' rotation is more effective.
- g. Change levels and be mobile in order to be in proper position to observe potentially dangerous and/or illegal maneuvers; bend knees – drop hips.
- h. It is important to loudly verbalize the award of takedown points. Move in and lower your level. This allows the scoring wrestler to release the locked hands. Verbalize who is in control.
- i. Award points in a confident manner using approved hand signals. Arm should be extended overhead while rotating the points (Signal #22).
- j. Eye contact should be maintained strictly on the wrestlers. Trust the table team to do their job correctly and keep your focus on the wrestlers.
- k. **With the 2025-26 clarification about how a cutback/leg block will be defined, be very observant when a wrestler, from behind or at the side, leave their feet to take the opponent to the mat!!!**

4. Neutral Boundary Line Situations

- a. Beat the wrestlers to the boundary line. The official should be in position to observe the location of each wrestler. Position yourself on the tangent of the circle in reference to the wrestlers position on the mat so that you can view the

action and the boundary line to see when the wrestlers break contact with inbounds. Maintain proper distance and keep moving. The Second Official should be in a position to see if either wrestler touches off the mat surface.

- b. Be patient; do not overly anticipate an out of bounds situation occurring. Control your whistle until you are sure a situation finishes Out of Bounds.
- c. Call out of bounds by the letter of the rule and be consistent from call to call. Use proper hand mechanics with simultaneous whistle (Signal #10). No stop sign is necessary in an out of bounds situation.
- d. Always keep safety in mind. You may have to sound a premature whistle when safety is a concern. For example, if walls, bleachers, chairs, tables, platforms, etc. are nearby.
- e. When possible, award the earned points before sounding your whistle. Award points in the proper sequence as they occurred.
- f. The official may verbally request that both wrestlers “work center” but keep comments short and refrain from “coaching.”

5. Neutral Scramble Situations

- a. Continuously work to maintain the best possible position to observe control, non-control.
- b. Be patient. Let the action unfold and remain calm. **LET IT BURN!**
- c. Take a deep breath and take a couple steps back. Officials tend to move in closer when the action picks up. Follow the action and work to anticipate where it’s going.
- d. *It’s better to be a half second late versus a half second early when awarding points in all situations.*
- e. When control is gained, loudly verbalize the awarded points.
- f. Likewise, verbalize no control with proper mechanics if scramble remains neutral, WHILE ON THE MAT. DO NOT show the no control signal if the wrestlers are on their feet. Show the no control signal (Signal #11) every 8-10 seconds. Avoid holding the no control signal for prolonged periods of time (“flying the airplane”). Being verbal is critical.
- g. In many scramble situations it is obvious that control has not been established. However, when control is close to being established, then that is when the no control signal should be used. The goal is to not over-utilize the no control signal.
- h. Circle in the opposite direction to catch up to the action.

OFFICIAL'S MECHANICS IN MAT WRESTLING SITUATIONS

1. Start of the Referee's Position

- a. The hand movement should be the same as the neutral start of the match.
- b. As with other hand signals, the hand motion is also for the table, coaches, and fans.
- c. Verbally "set" each wrestler, pause and then blow the whistle loud and clear!
- d. If your matches have an inordinate number of false starts, it is possible, YOU, the referee is causing the problem.
- e. Be stationary and alternate positions on the mat to avoid rolling starts.

2. Referee's Position (12 o'clock is in reference to the heads of wrestlers)

- a. The official should be at an angle (right or left of center) to the wrestlers. If the wrestlers are at 12 o'clock, the official should be at 10 or 2 o'clock. **Be to the opposite side of where the offensive wrestler takes his position.**
- b. Although altering sides may help, the official should be aware of the tendencies of the wrestlers throughout the match and set up accordingly.
- c. The official should stand. This gives the official the ability to see the placement of the offensive wrestler's head on the mid-line, the palm on the navel, the palm on the elbow, and the back foot. (Official may lower level to view the palm.)
- d. Do not be out on the edge of the circle; that is too far away. Stay in between the 10-foot circle and the out of bounds line.
- e. After the defensive wrestler gets in position and is "set," the official should direct the offensive wrestler to "cover." Once legal and stationary, the official will verbally "set" the offensive wrestler and then start the match with a simultaneous hand signal and whistle.
- f. Remember to pause for a moment before sounding the whistle.

3. Movement as Wrestling Continues

- a. After the start and throughout the mat wrestling, the official wants to be primarily at the head and hands of the wrestlers, suggested 8-12 feet from the wrestlers.
- b. As the offensive wrestler breaks his opponent down and applies bars, wings, power halves or comes closer to nearfalls, the official may move closer in position to stop potentially dangerous holds, or look for nearfalls and falls.
- c. Vary distance from wrestlers depending on the situation. The official should be in position to block or stop potentially dangerous situations BEFORE they become illegal.
- d. Being verbal here is critical to allow the wrestlers to adjust and prevent holds from

becoming Illegal or Potentially Dangerous.

4. When the Defensive Wrestler Comes to a Standing Position

- a. As the defensive wrestler makes it to their feet, the official should come to the side of the wrestlers, looking in at about a 30-45 degree angle, but be ready to change directions quickly. This allows for watching hand fighting, and the leg position/action of both wrestlers.
- b. The official should pay particular attention to hand control to determine if the offensive wrestler can attempt to return the defensive wrestler. If the defensive wrestler is holding the hands to prevent the offensive wrestler to improve, the defensive wrestler is the one stalling.
- c. Indicate who is in control with proper hand mechanics. Be verbal with “Improve.”
- d. The offensive wrestler has the responsibility to **attempt** to return the defensive wrestler to the mat, as per NFHS rules. If they are making no legitimate attempt, then they shall be called for stalling. Do not stop the match when making the stalling call in this situation.
- e. If the official feels that the offensive wrestler is incapable of attempting to return the defensive wrestler and/or neither wrestler can improve, then a stalemate is warranted.
- f. If the offensive wrestler is attempting to return the opponent to the mat, then there is no stalling – the key being a legitimate attempt.
- g. In a rear standing position, the official must anticipate the offensive wrestler’s movement in order to maintain best possible position to see all scoring situations.
- h. BE VERY WATCHFUL OF TRAPPED ARM SITUATIONS. Verbally caution the offensive wrestler when picking up or tripping the defensive wrestler in this situation. If they take the defensive wrestler to the mat with excessive force to the trapped arm side, be ready to penalize for unnecessary roughness.
- i. **With the 2025-26 rule clarification about how a cutback/leg block is defined, be very observant when a wrestler, from behind or at the side, leave their FEET to take the opponent to the mat!!!**

5. On the Out of Bounds Line

- a. The official should position themselves on the edge in order to view the heads/hands of the wrestlers while also maintaining a good view of the boundary line to see if or when they break contact with the inbounds area of the mat. Maintain enough space to see the whole situation.
- b. The official should continue to move and improve position to view best angle.

- c. If officials need to change positions on the edge, then switch to the outside of the wrestlers with the lead ref going towards the center area of the mat, and the SO on the outside. The SO should not switch to the inside of the mat (inside the out of bounds marking).
- d. Note: if there is no significant action taking place on the edge, then you may restart the wrestlers back in the center.

OFFICIAL'S MECHANICS IN NEARFALL SITUATIONS

1. Directly from the Feet

- a. Follow the flow of the action. When the pinning area of the defensive wrestler is exposed - beyond Reaction Time - work to be down on the mat in the best vantage position to view both shoulders/scapulae. It may not be toward the head and shoulders.
- b. In many cases the official may have to cut off the mat and, therefore, should take the best angle possible to maintain proper position when the action goes from feet to back.
- c. Continuously improving your position while on your feet should help to eliminate having to chase the action when it moves quickly in another direction. In some instances, it is more beneficial to move counter to the wrestling action and let it come to you.
- d. Your first nearfall count does not start until the defensive wrestler is in nearfall criteria beyond reaction time. Remember there are 4 criteria for NF, 1) Any part of both shoulders or both scapula of the defensive wrestler are held within 4 inches of the mat, 2) when 1 shoulder or scapula is **touching** the mat and the other shoulder or scapula is at 45 degrees or less to the mat, 3) defensive wrestler is held in a high bridge or 4) when on both elbows
- e. A verbal and visual count should be used whenever possible.
- f. Do not place or reach a hand under the scapulae or shoulders of the defensive wrestler.
- g. The official should continue to move to view best angle to see the nearfall or fall.
- h. Look underneath, while also looking at action happening around the face and hands.

2. From the Mat

- a. As defensive wrestler is getting put into nearfall criteria, start lowering your body. Get in a ready position to see when the nearfall criteria is met. official should stay

in a mobile position while maintaining distance because the direction of the action may change often.

- b. Once criteria has been met, give a clear, precise verbal and visual count: *“thousand one, thousand two, thousand three, thousand four”*. Visual count should be with arm up and out at a 45-degree angle with fingers tight together. The key here is whatever language you use make sure that it is 1 full second before you state the next count. Time yourself in the mirror and stopwatch of some sort.
- c. Verbal count is critical for both wrestlers, while the visual signal is important for the coaches, fans and table.
- d. The official should be down on the mat when the nearfall happens and understand when a nearfall is still the same situation so as not to award the nearfall points prematurely.
- e. WHEN A TECHNICAL FALL HAS BEEN EARNED DURING A NEARFALL SITUATION, and WHEN THE DEFENSIVE WRESTLER COMES OUT OF NEARFALL CRITERIA, THE MATCH WILL BE STOPPED AND NEARFALL POINTS AWARDED. The match has concluded at this point.

3. Do Not Make Up Hand Signals

- a. DO NOT make a hand gesture with fingers and thumb showing how close the back is to the mat.
- b. DO NOT make a hand signal with a hand straight up and down symbolizing a 90-degree angle.
- c. DO NOT wave a hand back and forth to indicate that a wrestler moved in and out of nearfall.
- d. DO NOT shake your head yes or no to indicate if wrestler is in and out of nearfall criteria.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SECOND OFFICIALS

- 1. The Second Official (SO) is the first on and last off the mat. Be active and assist with the same latitude of mobility as the Lead Official (LO). Movement and communication should be constant and are the keys for success.
- 2. One of the SO's primary responsibilities is the time. Make sure the clock starts and stops on the LO's whistle. The SO is also responsible for knowing the score, confirming that points get posted to the scoreboard, who scored first, who has

stalling warnings, and who has choice at the start of each period. Indicate to the LO who has choice of position in between each period.

3. The LO always passes on the inside path when crossing, and the SO should be no closer than the LO. The SO has freedom to move to seek their best position to complement the LO making calls and should move and be in position to see the action and/or potential violations. Anticipation is essential for the SO. Drop to a lower level to look underneath in tie-up and headlock situations. DO NOT drop looking at the shoulder/scapula pinning area, as that is not your responsibility.
4. In Referee's Position starts, the SO should position themselves perpendicular to the LO.
5. The SO should not yell across the mat; rather, move to circle behind the LO and make your statement, or move in toward the LO to voice your opinion of the situation.
6. If the SO questions a situation, both officials should conference at the appropriate time and away from coaches. Cover your mouth. Never be afraid to voice an opinion to the LO.
7. When disagreeing with a call, the SO needs to be direct and clearly communicate with the LO to improve the efficiency of the match. Approach the LO in a calm, rational manner and let the LO know you'd like to consult.
8. Bring infractions to the LO's immediate attention. Cover the front side (when action rotates toward you) and wait for the LO to catch up to the action before rotating 180°.
9. Police the designated coaches' area. Do not allow yourself to be addressed by coaches and never communicate with a coach. Direct the coach to the LO and keep moving.
10. Assist the LO with injury, recovery, and concussion protocols (discuss responsibilities before the match).
11. On boundary situations, be in position to see when the action goes out of bounds. If the wrestlers go out and the LO does not see it, then SO may yell "Out." If the wrestlers touch off the mat surface, then SO may yell "Out" so everyone knows why.

12. Be in position to watch the clock with wrestlers in your field of vision during the last 10 seconds of the period/match.
13. If the match goes into overtime, then the SO should know who scored first, who has stalling warnings and/or other penalties, and who will get choice of position in the ultimate tiebreaker.

SECOND OFFICIAL'S RESPONSIBILITIES IN NEARFALL SITUATIONS

1. The SO should work to stay in the best possible position to see any potential infractions, to watch for out of bounds, and to watch the clock.
2. If there is a feet-to-back situation or if a nearfall situation moves quickly away from the LO, then the SO should be prepared to provide a non-verbal nearfall count until the LO is in position to see the nearfall and provide the start point for the LO to begin picking up their count at.
3. Make sure the defensive wrestler isn't doing anything illegal, the offensive wrestler isn't doing anything illegal, or to see if any hold becomes illegal through wrestling action.
4. If an illegal move occurs, the SO needs to notify the LO. The decision is predicated on if it became illegal by the defensive wrestler or the offensive wrestler. Then the LO will make the correct call.
5. The SO may count down "4, 3, 2, 1, Time" in nearfall or potential fall situations at the end of periods but should avoid using hand signals or fingers to count down.
6. Advantages of the SO watching the clock are as follows:
 - a. To see if enough time was remaining to score either two, three, or four nearfall points.
 - b. To help with the "Fall call" if the wrestler had the fall before the clock ran out.

Note: You are an officiating team, and your goal should always be to keep the wrestlers safe and to get the calls correct. This only becomes possible if both officials are fully engaged and communicate clearly and freely with one another throughout the match.

MECHANICS OF REFEREE'S, INJURY, RECOVERY & CONCUSSION TIMEOUTS

See the signal pages in the back of the 2025-2026 NFHS Rules Book for proper hand signals. Signals on the mat should be directed toward the table using the color for the stoppage time.

Referee's timeout signal (new in 2024). If the referee needs to address a situation not covered by injury, blood, or recovery time, a referee's time-out shall be charged. The signal would be both hands and fingers pointing inward to the referee's chest. See (signal #3, picture in back of this handbook).

Remember only the onsite mechanical provider can request Head Neck Cervical timeout.

Unless it's obvious, confirm with the wrestler that they need injury time.

The official should stay in a position to see both wrestlers, coaches, and the clock.

Tell the coach when there is one minute left, 30 seconds and 15 seconds.

Use signal #3 to indicate when the Injury or Recovery Time stops.

1. Injury Time (1:30 cumulative throughout match)

- a. Official will signal (Signal #4) to start the injury time once an athletic trainer or medical personnel has arrived on the mat. Stop injury time (signal #7) once the wrestler is ready to wrestle.
- b. It is critical that the official knows the proper sequence when a wrestler takes injury time in all situations. Make sure wrestlers restart in the proper position.

2. Recovery Time (2:00 per instance)

- a. Official will signal (Signal #6) to start the recovery time once an Athletic Trainer or medical personnel has arrived on the mat. End recovery time (signal #7) when the wrestler is ready to wrestle.
- b. Make sure wrestlers restart in the proper position.
- c. Recovery time is used when an opponent gets injured as a result of an illegal act, unsportsmanlike conduct, unnecessary roughness, a technical violation, or a false start in the neutral position.

3. Blood Time (5 minutes cumulative throughout the match)

- a. Official will signal (Signal #5) to start blood time. Stop blood time (signal #7) once wrestler is ready to wrestle. Cleanup time is not counted towards blood time.

4. Head Neck Cervical Time (5 minutes)

- a. Official will signal (Signal #28) to start the HNC Time once an Athletic Trainer or Medical Personnel has requested this time. If you started a standard injury time out, that time-out and accumulative time is erased and is no longer considered as being taken. HNC is it's own injury time. Keep in mind that the wrestler only gets 1 HNC per match, on 2nd HNC the match is over by injury default. End HNC time (signal #7) when the trainer has cleared the wrestler to continue the match. If the five minutes expire, or the trainer determines that the wrestler should not continue, award the match to the correct wrestler.
- b. **IF HNC IS THE RESULT OF AN ACT THAT WOULD BE DEEMED TO HAVE ACCURED THAT WOULD NORMALLY REQUIRE RECOVERY TIME, THEN THE HNC IS TECHNICALLY RECOVERY TIME AT THAT POINT. TWO MINUTES MAXIMUM IS THE AMOUNT OF TIME THE TRAINER HAS TO ASSESS THE WRESTLER TO CONTINUE! THE INJURED WRESTLER WOULD WIN BY DEFAULT.**

STALLING – GENERAL GUIDELINES

The most difficult aspect of officiating wrestling is to understand stalling. You must develop a philosophy that will assist in most situations. This is where the best officials are recognized above the good officials.

Each wrestler is required to make an honest attempt to stay within the center of the mat and wrestle aggressively, regardless of position, or the time, or the score of the match. Action is to be maintained throughout the match by the contestants wrestling whether in the top, bottom or neutral position, and **both contestants are equally responsible for initiating action**. Contestants must also work to stay inbounds and maintain action. It is the responsibility of contestants, coaches and officials to avoid the use of stalling tactics or allowing the use thereof.

Stalling is one of the most subjective calls in wrestling because:

- a. No two officials call stalling identically.
- b. No two officials recognize stalling within the same time frame.
- c. Consistency with stalling is tough due to different dynamics in each match.

Any delays directly related to shoelaces is an automatic stall call.

It is stalling when a wrestler backs off the mat, or when either pushes or pulls the opponent off the mat.

NEUTRAL STALLING

1. What to recognize:

- a. From neutral start backing out of the circle without making contact with the opponent.
- b. Continuously avoiding contact with opponent.
- c. Preventing opponent from returning to or remaining in-bounds.
- d. Playing the edge of the mat.
- e. Continuously pushing or pulling with no shot attempt.
- f. Repeatedly faking contact without follow-through.
- g. Using an underhook or wrist control without a follow-through shot.
- h. Collar tie pushing/pulling no follow-through.
- i. Single or double underhook without a shot attempt.
- j. Wrist control (single or double) without attempt at a shot or to prevent opponent's shot.
- k. Blocking with a forearm or head in a tie-up with no attempt at shot or to prevent opponent's shot.
- l. Repeatedly grasping or holding a leg with no attempt at follow-through to improve position.
- m. Repeatedly grasping or holding a leg to prevent opponent from scoring.
- n. Repeatedly causing a stalemate.
- o. Controlling a 2-on-1 (Russian Tie) without an attack attempt.
- p. Slowly straggling back from OB.

OFFENSIVE STALLING

It is stalling when the offensive wrestler does not aggressively attempt to break down the opponent.

1. What to Recognize:

- a. Keeping the heel held to the buttocks for 5 seconds when the defensive wrestler is broken down on the mat. Note this is the only time holding of ankle or heel has a SILENT, NO HAND MOTION five second count. Coaches will argue about any holding of ankle for 5 is stalling but that is no longer in the rule book and has been gone for a very long time.
- b. Deep waist and wrist with no attempt to improve.

- c. Hooking the back ankle of Defensive wrestler for an extended period with minimal attempt to break opponent down (Western Hook).
- d. Staying behind an opponent in a rear standing position without attempting to return to the mat. Remember the wrestler is not required to return the defensive wrestler to the mat in any amount of time. He/She must make an attempt to return. In theory lots of attempts could result in the rear-standing position for a very long time. Also watch the defensive wrestler if he is not allowing the offensive wrestler the ability to return (is he holding the offensive wrestlers hands, is he squatting and not attempting to get away). This is actually stalling on the defensive wrestler and should be called.
- e. Repeatedly using a two inserted leg ride and being unable to turn opponent resulting in a stalemate or repeated use of cross-body ride with no attempt to improve position.
- f. Running an arm bar with opponent broken down on the mat with minimal attempt to improve.
- g. In all offensive situations the match is stopped to award stalling calls except for rear standing situation (not making an attempt to return to the mat)

DEFENSIVE STALLING

The Defensive wrestler must work aggressively to escape or reverse their opponent.

1. What to Recognize:

- a. Does the defensive wrestler initiate an escape or reversal?
- b. Once broken down onto the mat, is the defensive wrestler working to build a base?
- c. When the offensive wrestler comes off the hips creating space, does the defensive wrestler attempt to take advantage or content to stay down?
- d. Does defensive wrestler attempt to improve their position to try to score?
- e. Lying on the mat with elbows tucked into the body.
- f. Lying on the mat with arms and legs spread apart (par terre style).
- g. Grasping the opponent's hands or arms and just holding on.
- h. Forehead down on the mat and/or balling up.
- i. Defensive wrestler repeatedly crawling out of the center of the mat, crawling to the edge, or working toward out of bounds with no attempt to

improve position would constitute stalling.

- j. The official does not stop the match when penalizing the defensive wrestler for stalling.

QUESTIONING CALLS & CONTROL OF THE MAT

1. Do not stand chest-to-chest as it appears more confrontational.
2. Ask the coach to address the situation at the head table, get them out of their comfort zone and in front of the head table.
3. Listen first. Let the coach be heard. Coaches are not always wrong.
4. If the coach questions a call – and no change is made –then the coach must be warned for coaches misconduct. If judgment is questioned, they still get their question, but the coach will get misconduct call, no matter how nice they were. Stall calls are 100% judgment calls.
5. If a coach commits an infraction that requires an unsportsmanlike conduct call (signal #23), then the official must penalize that coach accordingly. These happen when coach is doing things from the bench/chair, and not at the head table.
6. How the official penalizes the coach is critical:
 - a. Go to the center of the mat and calmly indicate and announce the infraction to the head table. Do not take your eyes off the wrestlers at any time if you are officiating alone.
 - b. Make sure the coach is aware that they have been penalized.
 - c. Do not get emotionally involved. Be professional at all times. It's just business. 😊
 - d. If a coach crosses the line and unsportsmanlike conduct (signal #23) is warranted, the official should maintain composure and penalize the coach in the same professional manner as a lesser penalty. (Signal #25)

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

The official needs to constantly monitor and assess the intensity of the match and identify whether the athletes are nearing a potentially negative situation. If a situation is identified, the official may stop the match and have a quick chat with both wrestlers in the center of the mat. Be preventive in these situations. It is critical that the official never turns their back to the wrestlers. Always keep the wrestlers in your view. If a situation

cannot be prevented, then the official is to penalize the offending wrestler(s) in a calm and professional manner (Signal #23-Unsportsmanlike conduct, #24-Flagrant misconduct, or #26-Unnecessary roughness) . The official should also make the table aware of the penalty and let the coach of the offending wrestler know that their wrestler has received a penalty.

CONCLUSION

Good officiating does not start the first day of an officiating career. Rather, it is acquired after many years and much time on the mat. Watch and learn from the top officials either in person, on video, and/or in meeting discussions. With advanced media it's now possible to watch hours of wrestling to improve your performance. Officials must put in the time to gain the valuable knowledge necessary to recognize all wrestling situations. Mistakes are inevitable, but the official should learn from those mistakes and work to prevent making them again. **Experience is the best teacher.**

Furthermore, there are additional factors that separate and produce high-level officials.

1. Attitude

Continuous improvement and growth is critical to an Official's success. Complacency is the enemy. An official is always learning, working to improve, and better themselves. Two things define you as an official: your patience when you have nothing and your attitude when you have everything.

2. Mindset

Ego is the enemy. Take the approach that we are all imperfect and we may not get everything right – the first time. However, we have tools around us to help us get the call right in the end. Try not to give your attention to what others do or fail to do; give it to what you do or fail to do. Focus on being the best version of yourself and controlling only what you can control.

3. The Team

Officials must strive to work together in a professional manner and treat each other with respect. It's not about us, it's about getting the calls right. Making a mistake is not the real mistake; not working together and using all the tools/resources to get it right is the mistake. Comparing, complaining and criticizing will get you nowhere.

4. Mentorship

Finding a mentor who you trust and who can provide you with constructive feedback can be critical to your growth. Share videos with each other, discuss calls, watch

matches together, and get constructive feedback to aid in your growth. It's OK to be vulnerable and unselfish. The goal is to plant trees for others to climb.

5. Quiet Confidence

Great officials are confident because they consistently prepare, analyze, and through experiences, always strive for improvement and excellence. Perfection is not attainable, but excellence can be achieved.

6. Humility

Great officials let their actions speak louder than their words. They understand the sport is first and foremost about the student athletes.



OFFICIAL WRESTLING SIGNALS

1. Starting the Match



2. Stopping the Match



3. Time-Out



4. Start Injury Time



5. Start Blood Time Out



6. Start Recovery Time



7. Stop Blood/Injury/Recovery Time



8. Neutral Position



9. Indicates No Control



10. Out-of-Bounds



11. Indicates Wrestler in Control – Left/Right Hand



12. Defer Choice



13. Potentially Dangerous – Left/Right Hand



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OFFICIAL WRESTLING SIGNALS

14. Stalemate



15. Caution – False Start or Incorrect Starting Procedure



16. Stalling – Left/Right Hand



17. Interlocking Hands or Grasping Clothing



18. Reversal



19. Technical Violation



20. Illegal Hold



21. Near-Fall



22. Awarding Points – Left/Right Hand



23. Unsportsmanlike Conduct – Left/Right Hand



24. Flagrant Misconduct – Left/Right Hand



25. Coach Misconduct – Left/Right Hand



26. Unnecessary Roughness – Left/Right Hand



27. Default Technical Fall Disqualification



28. Start Head, Neck, Cervical Injury Evaluation Time

