

CWOA Rule Clarification

Coach Misconduct and Coach Unsportsmanlike Conduct

There was a significant increase in the number of penalties for coach misconduct and for unsportsmanlike conduct by coaches during the 2015 State Wrestling Tournament. Although there are various theories on why this occurred, it is clear that coaches and referees need to work together to better understand the NFHS rules, and to strive to be good role models and examples for our student athletes.

Rule 7-5-4 Coach Misconduct. “Coach Misconduct is called when a conference is requested with the referee at the scorer’s table regarding a misapplication of a rule, and the referee determines there is no misapplication involved, or when, during a conference, a coach questions the judgment of the referee.” 1st Infraction = Warning; 2nd Infraction = Deduction of 1 team point; 3rd Infraction = Deduction of 2 team points and removal of the **head coach** for the remainder of the event.

Discussion. The coach has the right to request a conference with the referee during the match, and the referee has an obligation to meet with the coach.

- If the coach is requesting the conference to point out what the coach believes is a misapplication of the rule by the referee, and upon review the referee agrees with the coach, the referee then corrects the misapplication and the coach returns to the team bench or coach’s chair. If the referee does not agree with the coach, the coach has committed misconduct and shall be penalized accordingly.
- If the coach is requesting the conference to question the referee’s judgment on a call, or to argue a call made by the referee, then the coach has committed misconduct and shall be penalized accordingly.
- If the coach is requesting the conference to seek a *clarification* of a rule or application of a rule, the referee shall provide a brief explanation of the rule and/or its application and the coach shall return to the team bench or coach’s chair. There is no misconduct in the coach’s actions in this situation provided:
 - 1) The coach approaches the referee calmly and respectfully;
 - 2) The coach does not then argue or otherwise question the referee’s clarification;
 - 3) The coach promptly returns to his chair without further comment when the referee indicates that the conference is over; and
 - 4) The coach does not seek multiple or repeated clarifications which (i) cause a disruption in the orderly flow and rhythm of the competition, or (ii) are being sought to harass or otherwise circumvent the intent of rule. Such actions by a coach may be deemed unsportsmanlike conduct.

If a coach misconduct penalty is given, the penalty is assessed against the head coach even though the requested conference may have been held with an assistant coach. By CHSAA rule, if the head coach is removed from the event, he cannot return for the remainder of the entire event, including multi-day tournaments. (Note that the removal of the coach for the remainder of the multi-day event varies from the NFHS rules.) A removal of the coach for misconduct shall be reported to CHSAA just like a participant disqualification.

See Questions and Answers below.

Rule 7-5-3 Unsportsmanlike Conduct of Coaches and Other Team Personnel. “Unsportsmanlike conduct of coaches and other team personnel is any act which becomes abusive or interferes with the orderly progress of the match. These acts could occur prior to, during or after a match. This includes violations of the bench decorum rule (7-5-2), taunting, acts of disrespect or those actions which incite negative reaction by others. The offender shall be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct in accordance with the penalty chart.” 1st Infraction = Deduction of 1 team point (There is no warning for unsportsmanlike conduct.) 2nd Infraction = Deduction of 2 team points and removal for the offending coach or team personnel for the remainder of the event.

Discussion. An unsportsmanlike act by a coach can occur prior to, during, or after competition, and includes any action that is or becomes abusive, disruptive, disrespectful to the referee or others, or which has the effect of inciting negative reactions of others (including negative reactions in the wrestlers on the mat). Unsportsmanlike conduct by a coach also includes a coach’s violation of the bench decorum rule (see below¹), when a coach yells disrespectful comments to the referee, the opposing coach or the opposing wrestler, or when a coach continues to question a call or the judgment of the referee from the team bench or coach’s chair. Unsportsmanlike conduct of a coach can also occur during a properly requested conference with the referee, if the coach’s actions during the conference become abusive, disruptive, or disrespectful.

There is no required warning before penalizing a coach for unsportsmanlike conduct. If a coach is removed from the event, he cannot return for the remainder of the entire event, including multi-day tournaments. A removal of the coach for unsportsmanlike conduct shall be reported to CHSAA just like a participant disqualification.

See Questions and Answers below.

Summary. Coach misconduct and coach unsportsmanlike conduct needs to be called immediately when it occurs and consistently during the wrestling season. Coaches need to be allowed to advocate for their wrestlers, but do it in such a way that is respectful to the referee and others. Referees need to recognize the coaches’ right to seek a conference with the referee, and to offer the same respect and composure expected from the coach. Together, coaches and referees need to work together to demonstrate good sportsmanship between them, and sets a good example for the student athletes.

Questions and Answers.

Question: Can a coach request a conference at the scorer's table, the referee not change his call, and the coach not be penalized for misconduct?

Answer: Yes, a coach can go to the scorer's table for a conference with a referee, ask for a “rule clarification”, and not be penalized for misconduct provided the coach does not question the application of a rule or the judgment of the referee.

Question: Can a referee refuse to go to the scorer’s table when a conference is requested by a coach?

Answer: No, the coach is entitled to request a conference and meet with the referee at the scorer’s table. However, if the coach then questions the judgment of the referee, or questions a misapplication of a rule

¹ **Rule 7-5-2 Bench Decorum Rule.** “Coaches and other team personnel are restricted to the bench/chairs while the clock is running and during normal out of bounds and resumption of wrestling. During this time the coach may walk behind the team bench to encourage wrestlers, or, when necessary for the team bench to be located in the bleachers, to walk in front of the team area parallel to the bleachers. The coach may approach the scorer’s table to request the match be stopped to discuss the misapplication of a rule. The coach may move towards the mat only during a charged time-out or at the end of the match.”

and the referee does not change his call, then the coach shall be penalized according to the NFHS rules for coach misconduct.

Question: Can you give examples of what a coach might ask that does not constitute coach misconduct?

Answer: Questions such as "What did you see in that situation?", "What is the rule that governs that situation?", "Can you verify the score?", "Can you explain what you saw in that situation?" are examples of "clarification" type of questions that do not justify penalizing a coach for misconduct, *unless* the coach wants to then argue the referee's explanation, or then questions the judgment of the referee, or becomes disrespectful, or refuses to allow the referee to terminate the conversation. In such event the coach's actions become coach misconduct, or possibly unsportsmanlike.

Note: In this situation, coach misconduct often depends upon a coach's response to the answer the referee provides. ***It is not appropriate for a referee to interpret the rule in a manner that simplifies administration of the rule to the point the referee simply penalizes a coach for misconduct anytime a call/ruling is not changed.***

Question: Can coach misconduct be called on a coach who is in the corner or on the team bench?

Answer: No, coach misconduct can only be called as the result of a conference at the scorer's table. If a coach questions the judgment of the referee or the misapplication of a rule anywhere other than at the scorer's table, the appropriate penalty is unsportsmanlike conduct.

Question: What if the coach is frequently requesting a conference, but does not violate the coach misconduct rule?

Answer: Although the coach cannot be penalized for misconduct, it is appropriate for the referee to remind the coach that continued requests for conferences "interferes with the orderly progress of the match" (Rule 5-30) and may be penalized as unsportsmanlike conduct.

Question: If a coach is verbally addressing the referee from anywhere other than the scorer's table during a referee/coach conference, what is the appropriate ruling?

Answer: The coach may be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct. This situation could be viewed as "abusive", and/or as an action which "incites negative reaction by others".

Question: What is the penalty for a coach who does not stay in the coaching corner or on the team bench during wrestling action?

Answer: The coach may be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct. This is a violation of the bench decorum rule (7-5-2). The CWOA feels it appropriate that a "reminder" of the bench decorum rule be given to coaches prior to the penalty sequence being initiated. The appropriate forum for a "reminder" would be at a pre-dual meeting with the coaches, or at the coaches meeting prior to the start of a tournament. The goal is to educate and work with coaches in a good faith attempt to prevent problems and change behavior so as not to be forced to penalize a coach for misconduct or unsportsmanlike behavior.

Please contact Rob Ververs at 970-405-0840 or Scott Tarbox at 303-898-6592 with questions.