

Tips for effective coaching strategies from the corner

An important topic within wrestling, regardless of the level of competition, is how a coach can be most effective when in the corner and guiding a wrestler during competition. The skill of corner coaching is much different than the skills needed to be an effective coach during practices.

Here are some tips on how to do your best job while coaching in the corner.

Know the Facts about Coaching from the Corner

- **Standard # 1** - It is a PRIVILEGE to be in the corner with your wrestler.
- **Standard # 2** - WATCH your athlete and assess how your preparations in practice have helped your wrestler prepare for this moment. You can't really teach anything new from the corner.
- **Standard # 3** - ENCOURAGE your athlete during the match to help him/her do their absolute best at this moment.
- **Standard # 4** - TAKE NOTES on things your athlete does well and ways they can improve. Improvements should be made in the practice room or once your athlete has had an opportunity to cool down and become receptive to critiques from a coach or parent.
- **Standard # 5** - DEVELOP short "commands" that allow you to quickly and effectively communicate strategy to your wrestler.
- **Standard # 6** - If you don't UNDERSTAND the rules, don't argue their application.

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions):

How do I approach the official if I have a concern about a call or a question about scoring?

Understand that you have tons of adrenaline coursing through your veins as you approach the table or official. Allow yourself a few deep breaths (for perspective) before you approach the official so you can communicate your concerns clearly and professionally - not abusively.

Coaches expect officials to make professional calls. Officials have a right to expect coaches to ask professional questions. Asking a question usually gets a better response from an official.

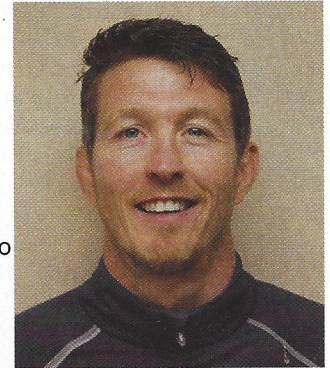
- Remember, both coaches and officials are modeling behaviors for our young athletes.
- Part of competition for athletes and coaches is to learn to overcome adversity.
- If you feel an official misapplied a rule, talk with the head official, ask them to discuss the call and move on with their decision. Our job is to coach the athlete, not the official.

Should my athlete ever talk to an official about a call?

The standard answer is that an athlete should not communicate with the official during the match. If the official asks your wrestler a question, they can reply. An occasional question from a wrestler asking for clarification of a rule may be allowed but typically that is the coach's job.

What are some common mistakes top coaches feel they have made in the corner?

- "I talked too much."
- "Way too much instruction mat-side... should keep that for practice."
- "I've been too critical of the official and took a bad tone with me to the head table."
- "I've been too critical of my athlete and discouraged him during the match."
- "I let my negative body language discourage my wrestler."
- "I should have picked my battles better...I know I won't win every call."
- "I allowed myself to dwell on a bad call and it distracted my athlete."
- "I need to organize my staff so that only one coach instructs the athlete at a time. He can't listen to two coaches at the same time."



Mike Clayton

How do your athletes like you communicating to them during a match?

- Set expectations in practice for how we will communicate during competition.
- Just like in practice, short, precise and effective communication.
- In between periods or walking back from out of bounds, coaches should remain positive - try not to dwell on negatives and use positive encouragement.
- They want me to coach them "up" to win, regardless of how the match is going.
- Few youth matches are "career defining" moments. View competitions as a method to improve long term skill development.
- Suggest positive ways for the athlete to avoid "questionable" calls for the rest of the match.
- Tell me what to focus on during my match, "Focus on the takedown" or "Stay with the plan."

I like this quote from an experienced and respected USA Wrestling referee, who works with athletes of all ages. It is appropriate for any level of the sport.

"Coaches with good perspective have the realization that age group tournaments are a way of honing skills, building character and are only a small part of the process of becoming a competitive athlete." - Tom Kuisle, USA Wrestling Official

Mike Clayton is USA Wrestling's Manager of Coaches Education and has successfully coached on the Senior, college and youth levels.