



2025-2026 Rules Interpretation

Introduction

With support from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and other New England states, officials are encouraged to study, learn, and master the mechanics and signals outlined in the NFHS Wrestling Rules Book. Only the signals approved in the NFHS Rules Book are acceptable. Avoid creating personal signals or mechanics. Consistency is the key to becoming a successful wrestling official.

Officials should develop consistency in all areas from the beginning to the end of the season. The objective is to make correct calls every time, treating each match with equal respect, whether a wrestler is competing for the first time or in a tournament final.

Officials must conduct matches in an unbiased manner, uphold sportsmanship, and prioritize the best interests of the wrestlers. While in uniform or onsite, officials shall not fraternize with competitors or coaches. Be prepared both physically and mentally to administer matches and tournaments. Enforce rules firmly and fairly, ensuring attention is on the wrestlers rather than the official.

Importance of Good Signals & Mechanics

Signals are the primary means of communication. Clear, consistent signals reduce confusion for wrestlers, coaches, and spectators.

Key Principles:

1. **Know the Signals:** Execute every signal correctly and consistently. Practice until they become muscle memory.
2. **Practice:** Use mirrors, practice loudly, and receive feedback from fellow officials. Attention to detail includes hand placement, timing, and form.
3. **Timing:** Execute signals at the correct moment. Signals that are too early, too late, or misaligned with the action reduce effectiveness.



Consistency With Signals

1. Positioning: Stay in proper position to make calls. Being out of position affects signal delivery.
 2. Patience: Maintain distance and allow situations to develop before signaling.
 3. Poise: Confidence and comfort in each situation support accurate calls.
 4. Execution: Be patient, then deliver signals sharply and smoothly once in position.
-

Mechanics & Signal Sequences

1. Whistle Use:

- Blow the whistle loudly and clearly.
- The start whistle should be quick and short; stoppage whistles longer.

2. Hand Motions:

- Start signals (Neutral and Referee's Position) should be uniform.
- Hold points high and rotate your hand; fingers tight, thumb tucked.
- Avoid hands on knees or hips.

3. Stop Signal (#2): Use whenever stopping action for reasons other than out-of-bounds.

Examples:

- Stalemate (#16): Stop, signal thumbs up against chest, fingers tucked.
- Potentially Dangerous (#13): Stop and signal appropriately.
- Penalties/Infractions: Stop and signal with correct points.
- Stalling (Offensive Wrestler #16): Stop and signal.

4. Awarding Points:

- Reversal (#18): Award points before signaling; maintain focus on wrestlers.
- Escape (#8): Award points first, then signal Neutral. Raise correct hand first, then both hands.
- Near-Fall (#21): Award points before signaling; hold points visibly.

5. Choice of Position/Disc Mechanics:

- Use method that works best for you.
- Disc can remain in front pocket; wristbands may indicate choice of position.
- Stay in the 10-foot circle when flipping disc; call head table from the circle's top.



Official's Mechanics in Neutral Situations

2. Neutral Standing Position:

- Maintain distance to observe action, move closer for potentially dangerous maneuvers.
- Anticipate action and remain mobile; do not chase.
- Award points verbally and with hand signals (#22).

3. Boundary Line Situations:

- Beat wrestlers to boundary line to maintain proper observation.
- Use proper out-of-bounds hand mechanics (#10).
- Award points in sequence when possible.

4. Neutral Scrambles:

- Maintain optimal position; be patient.
 - Give verbal and visual “No Control” signals (#9) when appropriate.
 - Do not overuse No Control; prioritize reaction timing.
-

Official's Mechanics in Mat Wrestling Situations

1. Referee's Position Start:

- Use same hand movements as Neutral start.
- Alternate sides to avoid false starts.
- Maintain proper positioning between 10-foot circle and out-of-bounds.

2. Movement During Match:

- Stay near head/hands (8–12 feet) from wrestlers.
- Move closer for near-falls or potentially dangerous holds.
- Vary distance based on situation.

3. Defensive Wrestler Standing:

- Monitor hand control and offensive attempts to return wrestler to mat.
- Signal control with proper hand mechanics.

4. Near-Fall Situations:

- Position for optimal view of shoulders/scapulae.
- Use verbal and visual counts when criteria are met.
- Avoid premature signals.



Official's Mechanics in Near-fall Situations

1. *Directly from the Feet*

- Follow the flow of action. When the back of the defensive wrestler is exposed beyond Reaction Time, work to get down to the mat in the best vantage point to view both shoulders/scapulae. This position may not always be toward the head and shoulders.
- When necessary, cut off the mat to establish the best possible angle as the action moves from the feet to the mat.
- Continuously adjust your position while on your feet to reduce the need to chase fast-moving action. In some situations, it is more effective to move counter to the action and allow it to come to you.
- The Near-fall count does not begin until the defensive wrestler meets Near-fall criteria beyond Reaction Time.
- Use both a verbal and visual count whenever possible.
- Do not place or reach a hand under the defensive wrestler's scapulae or shoulders.
- Continue adjusting your angle to maintain the best possible view of a Near-fall or Fall.
- Look underneath to confirm criteria while simultaneously monitoring action near the face and hands.

2. *From the Mat*

- As the defensive wrestler is being put into Near-fall criteria, begin lowering your body. Be prepared to view when criteria are met, maintaining mobility and distance to adjust as the direction of action changes.
- The Near-fall count does not begin until the defensive wrestler is in Near-fall criteria beyond Reaction Time.
- Once criteria are met, provide a clear, consistent verbal and visual count: "thousand one, thousand two, thousand three, thousand four, thousand five." The visual count should be performed with the arm extended at a 45-degree angle, fingers together.
- The verbal count is essential for both wrestlers, while the visual count communicates to coaches, spectators, and the scorer's table.
- Be down on the mat when the Near-fall occurs and recognize when the situation remains a continuous Near-fall to avoid awarding points prematurely.



Official's Mechanics in Near-fall Situations

3. *Prohibited Hand Signals*

- Officials shall not use improvised or unapproved hand signals.
 - Do not gesture with fingers or thumb to indicate proximity of the back to the mat.
 - Do not signal with a hand straight up and down to represent a 90-degree angle.
 - Do not wave a hand back and forth to indicate that a wrestler moved in and out of Near-fall.
 - Do not nod or shake your head to communicate whether the wrestler is in or out of Near-fall criteria.
-

Preventive Officiating

- Use verbal commands to prevent potentially dangerous situations (e.g., “Action,” “Center,” “Offense,” “Improve,” “Engage,” “Keep it Legal/Safe”).
 - Never turn your back on wrestlers; always maintain sightline.
 - Stop action if aggression escalates and communicate clearly.
 - Maintain proper positioning for Neutral starts and potentially dangerous maneuvers.
-

Pre-Match Responsibilities

- Arrive 30–60 minutes early.
- Inspect mat and notify home management of issues.
- Coordinate with table workers/timers.
- Manage warm-up times: 10 minutes per team.
- Conduct pre-match discussion with coaches and athletes:
 - Head coach must be present.
 - Keep discussion brief (1–3 minutes).
- Confirm starting weights, special equipment, and rule interpretations.
- Review stalling, neutral out-of-bounds, and injury protocols.



Injury, Recovery, and HNC Timeouts

Refer to NFHS Rules Book for proper hand signals.

- Injury Time (1:30 cumulative): Signal #4, restart in correct position.
 - Blood Time (5:00 cumulative): Signal #5, restart properly.
 - Recovery Time (2:00): Signal #6, used after illegal acts or injury.
 - Head/Neck/Cervical (5:00): Signal #28; document clearance by Athletic Trainer.
-

Stalling Guidelines

Neutral Stalling:

1. What to Recognize (The following actions in the neutral position may indicate stalling and should be monitored closely by the official):

- Backing out of the circle from the neutral start without attempting to make contact with the opponent.
- Continuously avoiding contact with the opponent.
- Preventing the opponent from returning to, or remaining in, the in-bounds area.
- Playing the edge of the mat to avoid wrestling action.
- Continuously pushing or pulling without making any legitimate shot attempt.
- Repeatedly faking contact or motion without meaningful follow-through.
- Using an underhook or wrist control without initiating an attack.
- Engaging in collar ties with pushing or pulling but no follow-through toward an offensive attempt.
- Maintaining a single or double underhook without progressing toward a shot attempt.
- Controlling wrist ties (single or double) without an attempt to create an offensive opportunity or to prevent the opponent's attack.
- Blocking with a forearm or head in a tie-up, with no subsequent attempt to initiate an offensive action or prevent the opponent's attack.
- Repeatedly grasping or holding a leg without an attempt to improve position or finish an offensive move.
- Repeatedly grasping or holding a leg solely to prevent the opponent from scoring.
- Standing behind the opponent while controlling the torso, yet making no attempt to bring the action to the mat for a finish.
- Controlling a 2-on-1 Russian Tie without progressing to an attack attempt.
- Slowly and deliberately straggling back from out-of-bounds to avoid engagement.
- Either or both wrestlers interlocking fingers in the neutral position.
 - The official should verbally instruct the wrestlers to stay out of the finger lock (“Fingers!”).
 - If the wrestlers do not release, the first offense is a stalemate and serves as a warning to both wrestlers.
 - Subsequent occurrences may result in a stalling call on either wrestler.
 - Officials should remain clear and verbal in providing these warnings.

Stalling Guidelines

Offensive Stalling

It is considered stalling when the offensive wrestler does not aggressively attempt to secure a fall, except when the wrestler intentionally releases the opponent in order to immediately attempt to secure a takedown.

1. What to Recognize

The following actions by the offensive wrestler may indicate stalling and should be evaluated by the official:

- Keeping the defensive wrestler's heel held to the buttocks legally while the defensive wrestler is broken down on the mat for more than five seconds without attempting to improve.
 - Maintaining a deep waist and wrist ride with no attempt to improve position or create scoring action.
 - Hooking the back ankle of the defensive wrestler for an extended period with minimal effort to break the opponent down (commonly referred to as the "Western Hook").
 - Remaining behind an opponent in a rear standing position without attempting to return the wrestler to the mat.
 - Repeatedly using two legs in an attempt to turn the opponent with no success, resulting in a stalemate; or repeatedly using a cross-body ride without any attempt to improve position.
 - Running an arm bar while the opponent is broken down on the mat with minimal effort to improve or create scoring action.
 - Holding an opponent's leg using two hands on two legs, or two hands on one leg, when the action is not designed to break the opponent down, secure a fall, or prevent an escape or reversal.
 - Repeatedly grasping and holding the opponent's leg or legs with both hands or arms solely for the purpose of control, without an attempt to improve position.
-

Stalling Guidelines

Defensive Stalling

The defensive wrestler is required to work aggressively to escape or reverse their opponent. The following indicators may assist the official in determining whether the defensive wrestler is stalling.

1. What to Recognize

- Does the defensive wrestler initiate an escape or reversal attempt?
- Once broken down to the mat, is the defensive wrestler working to build a base?
- When the offensive wrestler comes off the hips and creates space, does the defensive wrestler attempt to take advantage of the opportunity, or remain content to stay flat?
- Does the defensive wrestler make attempts to improve position in order to score?
- Lying flat on the mat with elbows tucked tightly into the body.



- Lying on the mat with arms and legs spread out to avoid action.
- Grasping the opponent's hands or arms and simply holding on without attempting to improve position.
- Keeping the forehead on the mat and/or balling up to avoid action.
- Repeatedly crawling out of the 10-foot circle, crawling to the edge, or working toward out-of-bounds with no attempt to improve position. These actions may constitute stalling.

Note: The official does not stop the match when penalizing the defensive wrestler for stalling. Stalling should be called promptly and consistently when warranted.

Injury, Recovery, and HNC Timeouts

Refer to NFHS Rules Book for proper hand signals.

- Injury Time (1:30 cumulative): Signal #4, restart in correct position.
 - Blood Time (5:00 cumulative): Signal #5, restart properly.
 - Recovery Time (2:00): Signal #6, used after illegal acts or injury.
 - Head/Neck/Cervical (5:00): Signal #28; document clearance by Athletic Trainer.
-

Conference Requests & Coach Misconduct

- Avoid chest-to-chest positioning; remain professional.
 - Penalize improper questioning per NFHS rules.
 - Sequence: warning → point deduction → further penalties.
 - Maintain composure regardless of infraction severity.
-

Unsportsmanlike Conduct & Hands to Face

- Monitor match intensity; prevent conflicts proactively.
- Penalize unsafe or illegal contact to the face; verbal warnings for minor infractions.
- Distinguish between inadvertent contact and intentional violation.



Professional Development

- Good officiating is developed over years through observation, practice, and analysis.
 - Focus on continuous improvement, humility, and quiet confidence.
 - Work collaboratively with peers, seek constructive feedback, and study match footage.
 - Confidence is earned through preparation; ego is the enemy.
-

REMEMBER:

Excellence is achieved through consistent preparation, awareness, and professional conduct. Mistakes are part of learning; teamwork and continuous improvement define a high-level official.
