

Wrestling

Who is Making the Decisions?

Part I

By Mark Osgood



After returning home from attending the usual mandatory preseason meetings regarding rule changes and how specific rules will be interpreted by the officials, I sat back in my chair at my computer and decided to express my concerns about the sport before organizing my first practice plan of the year. I realize by doing this I open myself up to criticism and disagreement on each point. However, food for thought is always good to get the wrestling community thinking about change.

About Weight Classes

First on the list is my concern about the present high school weight classes. We designate 14 weight classes to be wrestled in a dual meet and tournament competition throughout the wrestling season. But when we do this, numerous forfeits emerge that take away from the enjoyment for the spectator and the flow of the match. As a matter of fact, I watched a match where two mats were set up for a junior varsity and varsity match to be wrestled at the same time. I am sure set-up took at best 1 to 1-1/2 hours with transporting the mat, taping, washing, chairs, bleachers, tables etc. prior to the match. When the match finally got under way due to late arrival of one official neither team matched up in weight classes due to forfeits at both the J.V. and varsity level. So coaches did what they could to move kids up in weight class to get a match. When everything was said and done, out of a potential 28 matches only 4 matches were wrestled. If you were the unfortunate wrestler that got moved up to get a match your fate was sealed with a fall. The entire meet took approximately 25 minutes which was probably exaggerating a little because one of the wrestlers got a nose bleed for 4-5 minutes of blood time. I mentioned to a friend next to me why didn't the coaches communicate prior to the match and know this was going to happen? He said, because the match probably would not have taken place and those few

wrestlers would not have had the opportunity to wrestle. Needless to say admission was charged, causing me to empathize with the parents/spectators for waiting longer than it took to wrestle the match. I know this is only one situation, but as the season went by I noticed it was maybe not quite as extreme but very evident in many programs throughout the state. You are talking about one of the best states in high school wrestling, OHIO! Because of this type of situation, I see a trend that has emerged with coaches to go only to tournaments or dual meet tournaments because their kids are assured of more matches due to teams with incomplete line-ups. Many schools are also inviting extra teams to their tournament just to get enough wrestlers to fill a full bracket. My point is we have too many weight classes or the weights need to be adjusted to include a greater segment of the teenage population. I hear repeatedly by coaches that there squad sizes are not big enough to handle a full freshman, J.V. and varsity team let alone a wrestler for each weight class at the varsity level. In the same breath, they will say I'm two and three deep from 125 to 145 pounds. We try to be a sport that includes all shapes, sizes and weights, however, let's face it, if more and more teams are not filling fourteen weight classes, aren't we doing as much a disservice to those kids that are two and three deep as we are by keeping such a broad range of weights to include every size kid. For example, if we surveyed the 103 pound weight class nationally, I would bet that 85-90% of the kids participating would be freshman. In some state's eight graders are allowed to compete for a high school varsity position and state championship. What's wrong with those kids wrestling J.V. status? Could we have the first weight class start at 110 pounds for varsity and adjust the J.V. weight class to 105 pounds. Coaches are scrambling to fill 14 weight classes and consequently pull kids up to the varsity level when they should be at the freshman and J.V. status.

Years ago in the 60s it was not uncommon to field a full freshman, J.V. and Varsity team with only 11 weight classes. Now we are asked to do the same with 14 weight classes, nine more wrestlers at the freshman, J.V. and varsity level. That's 42 wrestlers on a team just to fill every weight class (no extras). We boast that the sport has grown; I would have to agree with population growth, more schools and most importantly more buddy programs. However, many factors can be involved with smaller squad sizes today, such as, the addition of more sports being offered to the student body thus spreading out the number of available participants, athletes choosing to specialize in one sport instead of being involved in two or three sports or coaches that emphasize the necessity for out of season training to be ready next year, and most importantly the difficulty excelling in a very individualized sport. The way I see it, reduce the weight classes to 11 from 14 with ten pound increments other than the last two weight classes. For example, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 215, and Unlimited. This would shorten dual meet matches to about 1 to 1-1/2 hours in length. This would provide a reasonable amount of time for entertainment in duals and more importantly tournaments would provide wrestlers, officials, spectators, workers etc. decent time to get home and rest for the next day of competition. If that's out of the question, another option might be to move the middle weight classes closer together to accommodate the more age appropriate teenage sizes and weights. For example, 110, 120, 125, 129, 133, 137, 141, 145, 152, 160, 171, 189, 215, and Unlimited.

We need to look at a possible change. Collecting wrestling data nationally from the junior high and high school level will help to look at weight classes and actual lineups. Look to see what's happening with dual meet and tournament competition and if positive changes are needed. Each host coach for a dual meet and tournament should be required to submit wrestled weights for state and national review.

I'm sure this could be done on-line as possibly a school eligibility requirement for participation. When it's all said and done justified decisions could be made to better the sport. I love wrestling, but when I see matches having 6-8 forfeits and tournament after tournament with only three to four schools carrying a wrestler at every weight class..... Something needs to be looked at to fix a growing problem. Maybe rule changes at the state level to limit tournaments and require a certain number of dual meets on the schedule would encourage a greater need for the coach to fill a complete line-up. I remember one year at the Ohio state tournament a high school team won a state championship with only six kids on their entire team and yet never won a dual meet that season. Their local fan base at the state was minimal to say the least, and I'm sure the few dual meets they had that season were poorly attended. Oh, by the way that school's team was practically non-existent in years following their state title, and just recently started to build a team again. I realize coaches want strong competition to improve their team development throughout the season, but dual meet competition can develop school spirit, tradition, and community enthusiasm.

Local rivalries encourage growth and excitement in a school's community. At the state level we don't see a problem because it's the best of the best knocking heads and holes in line-ups are no longer visible. That's great, but what about at the local level where I see a 16 team tourney and only 3 and 4 teams bring a complete team. I understand factors come into play such as sickness, injury etc. during the normal course of the season, but teams seem satisfied to wrestle a complete schedule of tournaments or dual meet tournaments never once wrestling at home for their own students and community to enjoy. This has become more the rule than the exception in the sport. Many coaches I have talked to agree their squad sizes have diminished over the years. They even go as far as to say why this has happened out of frustration such as; society has changed, kids aren't as tough as they use to be, the sports are too tough for them, too many sports are being offered, kids are concentrating on one sport, outside influences pull kids away. I don't buy into that type of thinking. Yes, I agree new challenges face coaches today that were not there years ago. However, kids like to wrestle in front of their own peers, kids develop a sense of pride in the

school when their peers, teachers, and people from the community are able to personally see them compete and do well. Today, many programs travel all over the state or should I say even outside the state to compete. Coaches feel the need to do this for better competition, national rankings for their team, or the need to get exposure for their best athlete in hopes of a college scholarship. Coaches in turn minimize the opportunity for the student body and community to become interested or involved in the sport. Local news papers report the news following the event, but little is written anymore to build up the local rivalry across town because they are in a tournament with 35 other teams instead of an exciting dual. Today the student body has to read it in the paper or listen to the Monday school announcements to get the news on how the team is doing. I believe many kids want to become involved with a program when they can personally see their peers experiencing success and feel the pride within the school and community. This type of spirit is contagious and builds more success.

Next Issue: On Rule Changes



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