

11-2-2016

## NFHS Wrestling Rules: Fleeing the Mat

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The north has for a few years now been enforcing "Fleeing the Mat" rather consistently. I will give just one example; if two neutral wrestlers are at the edge of the mat and even though they may have genuinely been working for a takedown, if one of those wrestlers (not because the natural force of wrestling) simply walks out of the outer circle the north is calling Fleeing the Mat.

The north has continued with the "Fleeing the Mat" procedures in response to Arizona Wrestling Officials Committee ("AWOC") emphasizing this in the statewide and local clinics approximately five years ago .

AWOC agreed to this because it had become a problem. You may remember we even considered asking the Federation to allow us to test the "push out" rule if our efforts as officials did not help in stemming this problem. AWOC's concerted effort helped in resolving this issue and we got better at it so it kind of went away. I raise this as a concern because it appears it may no longer be being applied consistently.

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1. Fleeing the mat (Section 3 – Technical Violation – Article 1)<sup>1</sup>
  - a. One of the biggest distractions from wrestling from the standpoint of action and excitement is the excessive stoppage of the match due to wrestler going out of bounds. When wrestlers are really going at it and end up out of bounds... no problem. Rather it is the endless out of bound situations caused because the wrestlers have no regard for the out of bounds. The flow of the match is key to many aspects of a successful match.
  - b. Why don't wrestlers make an effort to stay on the mat? Why do wrestlers repeatedly avoid wrestling by going off the mat? The reason should be obvious – because the referees are not enforcing the Fleeing the Mat call as intended.
  - c. Going out of the wrestling area or forcing an opponent out of the wrestling area, by either wrestler at any time as a means of avoiding wrestling, is a technical violation. The rule clearly states both wrestlers should make every effort to remain inbounds. The referee, according to this rule, should penalize the offending wrestler if he has failed to make every effort to stay inbounds, the offending wrestler shall be penalized. There can be no technical violation of fleeing the mat if near-fall points have been earned.

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<sup>1</sup> NAW Officials – Duties of Referees, Volume 2016, Issue 11, Article 1.

- d. Action should be maintained throughout the match regardless of whether a wrestler is in the offensive, defensive or neutral positions. There are too many occasions where wrestlers use the edge of the mat specifically to get out of a situation when, in fact, they should be penalized for going out of the wrestling area. The goal is to have continuous action with as few stoppages as possible. An official who maintains the flow of the match will experience more action as well as fewer penalties.
- e. Playing the edge of the mat or hanging out on the edge has to be recognized by the referee and the appropriate rules enforced. The referee has a new tool where he can stop the match and return the wrestlers to the center even if there is no out of bounds.
- f. Fleeing should and must be called according to the guidelines clearly stated in this rule. If either wrestler has failed to make every effort to stay inbounds, the offending wrestler shall be penalized. Wrestling will become much more exciting and a lot more scoring. Everyone benefits, especially the fans.
- g. There is nothing in this rule that states fleeing should be called only when it is obvious that a wrestler intentionally went off the mat. Rather, unless legitimate wrestling takes the wrestlers out of bounds, the referee should be looking to determine which wrestler did not make a concerted effort to stay on the mat.
- h. The NFHS stresses that wrestling should take place in the 10 foot circle. The actual wrestling area is a 28 foot circle. If a wrestler truly wanted to stay on the mat, he would be able to do so in many situations. If both wrestlers are attempting to wrestle inbounds, out of bound calls will be very limited.
- i. Let's look at common situations and use these as criteria to help officials make the Fleeing the Mat call consistently.
  - i. One of the wrestlers leaves the mat area by casually stepping out without being forced out by his opponent
  - ii. One wrestler is forcing his opponent out while that wrestler is attempting to stay on the mat
  - iii. Wrestler backs from the 10 foot circle out of bounds without making any attempts to circle in when nearing the OB line
  - iv. Wrestler in the defensive position stands up and goes straight out of bounds without making any attempts to circle in when nearing the OB line
  - v. Wrestler in the defensive position stands up and is moved out of bounds by the offensive wrestler. The defensive wrestler attempts to plant his feet and/or circle in.
  - vi. Wrestler picks up his opponent and has to take several steps before going out of bounds
  - vii. Wrestler's opponent has a single leg and has it lifted in the air. Wrestler turns towards the out of bounds.
  - viii. Wrestler's opponent has a single leg and has it lifted in the air. Wrestler turns towards the out of bounds.
  - ix. Wrestler has a single leg on his opponent and has it lifted in the air. Wrestler lifts the leg in such a manner to cause his opponent to go out of bounds.
- j. Things the officials should be looking for to verify if a wrestler is trying to stay on the mat
  - i. If a wrestler is backing up towards the line, the referee should watch to see if the wrestler attempts to move forward or circle in when he nears the OB line
  - ii. If a wrestler is being moved towards the out of bounds by his opponent, the referee should look at his feet to see if the wrestler is attempting to "plant" his feet. If this wrestler is facing out of bounds, then he would be up on his heels. If he is facing his opponent, he would be up on the balls of his feet.
- k. Remember, any time near fall points have been earned, there is no fleeing the mat. In fact, a wrestler has the right to intentionally go off the mat after near fall points have been earned without being penalized.