

Wrestling Coaches Advisory Committee
Minutes
March 16, 2022

Committee in attendance: Curtis Fiedler (Mineral Point), Jade Gribble (Burlington), Justin Lancaster (Freedom), Mike Kelly (Amery), Jason Lulloff (Holmen), Matt Verbetern (Wrightstown), Wendall Bean (Coaches Assn. Rep.), and Mike Arendt representing wrestling officials. Shane Benitz (Trackwrestling/FloSports) was unable to attend. Mel Dow attended the meeting representing the WIAA. Curtis Fiedler Chaired the meeting, and minutes were recorded by Hydie Laidlaw (WIAA). The meeting began at 10:30 a.m.

I. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mel asked committee to identify what is wrong with wrestling in Wisconsin. Matt responded hot topics are division representation, and seeding the state tourn. Mike A. stated the main problem is declining participation. Jason agreed that numbers are declining, many have opinions but no real solution so frustration builds. Youth season from Oct to May or June; may impact the HS team. May be too long; middle school seasons operate at various times and affected by club teams. Wrestling has the highest rate of decline compared to other sports, lower numbers in pockets in others like FB. Other sports also have competition through clubs year-round. Mike K. shared that not a lot of coaches are teachers who can connect with the kids during the day – it's difficult to find coaches within the school, which would help overall representation in the schools. This is something that the coaches association may be able to help address.

Reviewing the minutes from 2021 – Need to remind others how the rule change process works. Jade questioned the season maximum changes, which were proposed as 16-match limit, but reduced to 14 as it advanced through the committee process. Jason explained how the 50-match limit was determined, which was allowed within the 14-event option. Curtis clarified that it was a way to open up the options for flexibility in scheduling, not to increase events. Mel indicated that the Medical Advisory also reviews this from a health and safety perspective. Mike A. indicated that the correlation between the injury rate and match limits increases, not necessarily with the 45/30-minute rest time. Jason suggested the Medical Advisory needs to look at matches actually wrestled, rather than byes; wrestlers received 3 byes in one tournament at times. Other notes on minutes – if something does not pass the Advisory Council, it will not go to the Board. Jade moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Jason. Passed 6-0.

II. SEASON REGULATIONS - Review of 2021-22 Season Regulations, Topics/Points of Emphasis and interest

Mel made the committee aware of the ongoing process to edit the HS Handbook, in order to clarify the rules and make them more user-friendly. The process will eventually extend to the season regulations as well, to eliminate confusion or redundancy. Mike A. asked about adaptations being outdated, such as eliminating letter C regarding lowering shoulder straps to comply with NFHS rules.

Jason Lulloff moved to remove the state adaptation regarding lowering shoulder straps. Seconded by Matt Verbeten. The motion passed 6-0.

- A. Rule Meetings** – Curtis commented that rule meetings along with WWCA clinic and referee groups around the state effectively communicate the rule changes. Mike A. stated that all officials' associations may combine to one state-wide wrestling officials association to increase efficiency and uniformity across state. All regional meetings will use the same agenda to be consistent.
- B. Ejections** – One coach was ejected this year and fifteen players were ejected. There is concern of an increase, though not the largest number historically. Jade commented that foul language in schools is becoming more common.
- C. Participation** – Co-ops cause a decrease in the number of schools. Numbers were the same from 2019-20 and 2020-21.
- D. NFHS Rules Proposals** – Mike A. identified a handful of things; many proposals deal with laces and shoes. 30-minutes rest time will need to go through the NFHS Medical and Legal departments. What advances to actual voting will be less than shown, i.e. one shoelace proposal. Data addressing rest time is needed from USA and NCAA wrestling to have more extensive review by the NFHS Medical committee. Mike feels it would benefit Wisconsin, since rest time does not affect injury but number of exposures would. Replay during a state association tournament likely won't pass, but may be added by state association adaptation. This would increase the number of support staff needed at events. Mike's vote will be the collective wishes of the section (MN, WI, IL, IA, IN, MI). If the 30-minute rest does not get approved, he would ask to conduct an experiment with IA to gather data as done with the injury rule in the past. The NFHS meeting is April 3-5 in Indianapolis; March 1 is deadline to submit rule changes, with notes showing all parts of the rule book the change affects. Coaches are able to submit requests directly to NFHS.
- E. Season maximums** – This was the first year with 14 events and 50 matches maximum. A few problems occurred due to not understanding or clearly tracking. It is a maximum of 14 events allowed per level of the program, and 14 events per wrestler. The schedules need to be clearly identified on the school website and only varsity-level competition is counted for seeding. When a school has a varsity reserve, or sends JV teams to varsity events this creates an issue within Trackwrestling where a schedule appears in violation. He would request additional event labels be added for Varsity/V-reserve or V-reserve/JV. Mel clarified that if one wrestler considers a match to be varsity, then it counts as varsity for individual records for both athletes. Additional labels may be needed for seeding purposes (later on the agenda).
- F. Weight Class Selections** – This will be a detailed discussion in 2023. Curtis asked for feedback on other states; Mel has reached out to MN, IA and IL to see what they are considering, and the general consensus is to stay at 14, but it doesn't mean Wisconsin must do that. Mike A. added that MI should also be considered. Curtis commented that after looking at the data for declining participation, it may be difficult to fill 14 weight classes. WWCA data provided by Ryan Gerber showed that the

percentage of teams with full rosters at regionals was 27% at D1, 18% at D2 and 11% at D3, which affects the level of competition. Curtis prefers 12 classes even though his team is one of 10 in the division that can consistently fill 14 classes. Using 13 classes would make criteria in a dual format easier. Mike K. commented that in reality it may not be a good idea to align with the bordering states. Jason stated that the topic requires a lot of thought and attention, where he has changed his opinion many times. Half of the Holmen schedule is out of state due to geography, which may be the same for other schools near state borders so other states need to be considered. Coaches will need to consider the options in depth this year and provide feedback for the next meeting. MN has not responded to surveys since they are not in compliance with NFHS rules.

G. Update Wisconsin Adaptations – This was already discussed.

H. Weigh-ins / Weight-class eligibility – Mike A. shared that it may be a point of emphasis next season to weigh-in with a legal school-issued uniform. It should not be up to the official to make wrestlers change a singlet or be in compliance with undergarments. Coaches need to enforce this rule – an undergarment is required. Officials will involve the coach if there is a concern for a suitable undergarment and request the wrestler to become compliant. Matt questioned if socks are part of the rules; NFHS rules do not allow removing socks after stepping on the scale.

I. 7% committee – The committee will meet on April 6 this year. Jason asked about weight loss plans; specifically if 1.5% per week is the NFHS rule. Curtis commented that the weight loss plans switched from .5 lb. per day to 1.5% per week to allow coaches to be able to look ahead, and those struggling with this are struggling with technology. Steps are identified in the Trackwrestling help menu to share the plan with wrestlers. Jade expressed concern with tracking this if other states adopt different classes. If the 7% committee proposes a change, it would go forward to medical advisory, sports advisory, etc. but not back to the wrestling coaches advisory. Justin requested a review of the weight loss plans since it has added frustration using the 1.5% plan. His wrestlers feel they are cutting more weight in order to drop. Can other options be explored, such as making scratch weight a set number of times. Mel explained the rationale of 1.5% plans, and responded that a requirement of making scratch a number of times would eliminate the appropriate gradual weight loss. Justin requested a review of other states' rules and whether weight loss plans should be guidelines for education rather than a requirement. Some states don't weight test until January to allow for fluctuations and delay monitoring weight loss. Jason agreed and would be interested to see if there might be something that is more clear and easier to manage. The coaches would like the 7% committee to look at what other states are using. Mike A. commented that 1.5% per week is the NFHS recommendation.

Curtis asked about appeal options – only La Crosse is available for appeals at this time. Should appeals continue to be an option knowing sites are limited? The logistics were discussed, as well as the requirement for hydration and weighing in at the appeal. Jade and Curtis would like to continue to have the option to appeal. Mel commented that it will be difficult to ask for changes that would not be healthy for athletes.

J. Trackwrestling – season entry information by coaches – Mel asked if a rule should be added within the season regulations to enter results into Trackwrestling. This now affects seeding at the end of the season. Jason commented that hosts of large events should import teams from the OPC so abbreviations are the same and results of team matches can be linked on the team schedule. New instruction/reminders to tournament hosts may be needed, as it would be the host school's responsibility to make certain the results are entered. This will need to be clarified during the season. The WWCA could add as a highlight, and WIAA preseason information should include this reminder. Shane/Trackwrestling may be able to add FAQ on this topic.

III. TOURNAMENT PROCEDURES

A. Review of TrackWrestling Program – Regional entries. No discussion.

B. Regionals – Super regional option – Mel identified issues in D2 and D3 regionals unable to fill weight classes, with regional groups of 6 or 7 teams. He shared a concept to combine two regionals into one and mimic the format used in D1, where the top 4 individuals qualify for sectionals and the top 2 teams qualify to team sectionals. A draw determines the matchup at the sectional level. This would use a 16-wrestler bracket with wrestle-backs to 5th, placing to 6th. Three mats would be required, with four preferred. Mike A. stated true 2nd would impact time and should be consistent with D1. All weights will have contested matches at state. The proposal allows 2 teams to advance from quality regionals, reduces the number of regional officials needed and allows using higher level officials. This also increases the number of team sectional officials needed, which may be beneficial. This plan would provide a consistent number of sectional qualifiers across all divisions. D1 individual qualifiers would remain the same, but top 2 teams would advance to address concerns for consistency and quality of competition. Groups would still be formed geographically. Mike A. expressed concern for facilities that are large enough to host a super-regional, which could limit who can host or where. Gym availability and space is a real concern and this may require schools to use other facilities.

Jade inquired about equal divisions; Curtis offered perspective – the format began with one division in a 32-wrestler bracket, then went to the same number of qualifiers advancing from sectionals across 3 divisions in brackets of 16/8/8. After WISAA schools joined this was reassessed and D2/3 increased to 12 qualifiers. Since that occurred, 30 schools have been lost in D2/3; Division 1 has not changed. Data does not support that the number of qualifiers needs to increase. Jason questioned whether equal divisions or a similar qualifying process is the goal. The percentage of wrestlers making it to state is currently 22.5% of D3, 18% of D2 and 16% of D1 respectively. If there were 14 qualifiers at every weight it would be 13.5% in D2/3 and 12.5% in D1. Declining numbers of teams affects D2 and D3 but not D1 with the current tournament format. Ultimately, it is a difficult request to change the qualifiers, so a similar qualifying process would be the best answer. Only 3 sports do not have more qualifiers in D1 than other divisions – basketball most recently went to an equal number of qualifying teams. Any change

needs to be well-vetted and have data to back up the request to ensure they don't actually take away opportunity. The super-regional plan addresses equality for representation, rather than equal numbers in each division.

Justin questioned whether seeding would occur at the sectional level, not just prior to regionals. Regional representation is the primary goal in the tournament plans. Schools currently may not want to host a D2/D3 regional due to loss of money, and more teams/more fans may remedy this issue. Matt stated this step makes sense; the WWCA needs to educate the coaches on true opportunity in this system vs. equal numbers in each division. Jason requested consideration to move team sectionals from a Tuesday due to weigh-ins, time and travel. He proposed determining the team sectional location after qualifiers are known; however, assigning officials would be very difficult without a pre-determined host. This would be difficult for WIAA, schools and staffing. It would be a better option to move certain sectional sites only if needed.

Matt Verbeten moved to accept the super-regional option for divisions 2 and 3. Second by Mike Kelly. passed 5-0 (Jade Gribble left the meeting). Mel commented that further consideration will be needed for a 16-wrestler bracket and what wrestle-backs could be done. Wrestlers may not exceed the maximum matches per day in NFHS rules.

Discussion continued regarding extra teams at Division 1 team sectionals and the effect on time schedules. Jason Lulloff moved to advance the top two teams out of Division 1 regionals to team sectionals. Matt Verbeten seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

- C. Sectional tournaments** – Team sectional pairings would be the same in all divisions if the proposals are implemented. Jason questioned what individual sectional format is used since currently in 8-man brackets a first round loser is done. The committee discussed the individual sectional bracket and whether to keep the current format which is different in Division 1 vs. D2/3. A change in D1 would add 3-4 more matches per weight class. This topic may be revisited in the future.
- D. Team Sectionals – Add Assistant Referee** – Is this an option for team sectional finals? Mike A. stated this would require one semifinal official to be the AR for finals. If the D1 format changes it would be the same; if no change it would add 8 more officials at the individual sectional. There is always a concern at Div. 1 sectionals if the one official gets hurt. Jason Lulloff moved to add an Assistant Referee at all team sectional finals matches. Justin Lancaster seconded; the motion passed 5-0.
- E. Girls Individual State Tournament** – The coaches agreed that the Girls State Tournament went well. Feedback surveys were sent to assist in identifying the best way to grow girls wrestling. Curtis shared that his team does not have many girls, and it's difficult to find girls tournaments that don't also conflict with boys events. Considering just the state event, responses were very split with no clear answer. There is concern about media coverage at the Kohl Center if using a combined event; media coverage at Girls was great. Jason commented that head coaches were torn between their regular season schedule and coaching their girls. It was perceived that the girls season was cut short, though they were allowed to continue in conference tournaments and team sectionals. Holmen had about 20 girls and the current season format was enough. Jason shared his thoughts on coaching girls, growing interest and increasing opportunities during the regular season. Mel would request a qualifier since having an open tournament was difficult. Declaring 3 weeks before was the same as the boys regional entry requirement. One concept would have girls qualify at the sectional where currently assigned, with winners advancing to represent their region at state.

Jason proposed a change to the WWCA Challenge Series; to divide the state into four sections and use it as the qualifier. They could allow eight individuals to advance from each section. Mike A. questioned if it would be demeaning since the challenge series is a JV event and it would be better to use varsity sectionals. There was discussion to run qualifiers on Jan. 21 in 4 locations with a state tournament on January 28th or to move both one week later with Girls State on the first Saturday in February – this would make assigning officials to the girls state event easier. Traditional conference tournaments may also be eliminated in the future. It was noted that whatever is chosen would affect regular season schedules. The committee needs to determine a date/location for state before determining how to do a qualifier. Jason proposed moving team state to La Crosse to combine with Girls Individual State. Current contracts with UW-Madison are locked until 2025, however. There may be some flexibility with the time schedule at the Field House to do this. Jason felt that it could be done on 4 mats in 2 days, with consideration of moving it to La Crosse in the future. Mel has worked out a plan to add girls competition to the Kohl Center on 2 additional mats with 16-wrestler brackets in 12 weight classes. Justin questioned the option for consolation wrestling since the option was previously denied due to the additional mats. Mel clarified that UW-Madison would not allow 8 mats in the past, and double-elimination adds a huge amount of extra time to wrestle. No other sports allow for consolation competition in the tournaments. Girls need to be considered first.

Survey results – Looking at administrators, 17 prefer a stand-alone tournament/10 prefer combined. Of the athletes, 25 prefer stand-alone vs. 13 preferring combined. Coaches overwhelmingly prefer combined – only 29 of 80 chose stand-alone. The separate event would not be quite the same with a qualifier, and may not have as much attraction without the Title IX celebration. Mike K. felt that combining them might bring more attention and awareness to the girls. Mel proposed to keep it as a separate event one year with a qualifier, then combine it at the Kohl Center.

Matt Verbeten moved to combine the girls state tournament at the Kohl Center in 2022-23 with a 16-person bracket and a qualifying process. Mike K. seconded. Passed with 4 in support – Justin L. abstained from the vote. Adding girls at the Kohl Center may help with attendance. The date of the girls qualifier should be communicated well in advance so schools know to allow for that in the schedule. If the proposal is defeated, the tournament would continue for another year at the La Crosse Center, using an open format over 2 days, but moved one week later. The logistics of an open tournament is difficult as participant numbers are not known until the last minute.

Mel commented that wrestle-backs for the boys could be discussed again in the future. It needs to be thought about further to work within the current schedule. Even with 8 mats it cannot be done with 14 weight classes.

Justin shared that the hotels in Madison require a 3-night stay for State Individual tournament. This may have affected attendance at state – WIAA should check into this with Madison CVB.

F. State Individual tournament –

1. **Seeding criteria** – Seeding criteria developed by the coaches advisory group in 2021 was implemented this year. Many coaches didn't understand how the Trackwrestling seeding system worked – it is a head-to-head comparison with a point system. Overall points were compared in order to seed. This resulted in some sectional opponents meeting in the first round at state. Final results were 87% accurate, which was more accurate than Iowa this year. If criteria is unable to break the tie, then it would be a random selection (similar to a coin-flip). Best wrestlers don't meet in the first 2 rounds of the state tournament. There were requests to eliminate the head-to-head criteria, which would likely not be a good change. Justin suggested moving up the sectional champ criteria; it was placed #6 due to the variation in strength of sectionals. Curtis commented that the common opponent part was an unknown variable and should be revisited. After discussion, no changes were recommended. The committee agreed that coaches simply didn't understand and will need to be educated. States beginning with only seeding sectional champs went to seeding the whole group. Jason proposed running different criteria on the results from this year to see if the order of criteria is correct. He also asked if Shane could define 'total activity points', 'average activity points', 'record using wins difference' and 'record using activity points difference' for more clarification. It was suggested to hold a meeting with Shane at the WWCA level to discuss re-ordering the criteria. Mel suggested to have the WWCA ask D2/D3 coaches what was wrong with the seeding this year and work through it from there. No changes advanced at this time.
2. **Double-elimination** – Timing and number of weight classes will need to be considered in order to discuss this option.

G. State Team Tournament -

1. **Seeding criteria** – This is the same process as the individual tournament seeding, with points awarded as wrestlers are compared. Meetings are conducted the Sunday after individual state to have the most accurate data. Trackwrestling preliminary seeding was extremely accurate. Jason questioned whether the coaches meeting is needed with seeding determined by Trackwrestling. This could be changed to computer seeding only and no coaches meeting if the committee wishes. Seeding language will also be revised to state that any seed change would need a vote even if conceded.
Mike Kelly moved to eliminate the coaches meeting and rely on electronic seeding results for the team state tournament. Jason Luloff seconded and the motion passed 5-0. Jason asked if there will be a reveal show like basketball to generate some attention if released on Sunday morning. Public release can be delayed but office preparations will remain on the same time frame.
2. **Team entries** – Trackwrestling will be used for the girls tournament entry instead of the google form. Jason noted that out of state schools could be pulled in unless it was a boys OPC. Shane is aware of the problem.

H. Other from Tournament Series –

1. **Playbacks of state tournament ordering on DVD** – NFHS Network vs. Trackwrestling – The coaches are interested in options to make a DVD from Trackcast.
2. **Thursday at Individual State after D1** – Coaches have inquired about the time for D2/D3 competition. More warm-up mats will be provided next year. Mel will be negotiating with UW-Madison for timing changes and more mats. Weigh-ins for D2/3 on Thursday may shift to a different location as well.

I. Miscellaneous – WWCA Items

Clarification for replacing a disqualified wrestler who advances. Jason proposed the WIAA insert language about replacements, for example up until 24 hours before. The committee discussed whether to re-seed or insert a bye. Concerns include programs going to print by Monday as well as how it affects the preparation by wrestlers if the bracket changes. The direct replacement this year was not a #1 seed and it showed. There was not agreement regarding direct replacement vs. re-seeding. Curtis recommended taking the question to the WWCA and coming back with a proposal in 2023.

Matt moved/Justin seconded to adjourn at 4:35. Passed unanimously.