

## South Carolina Wrestling -The "God Rule"

### How the SCHSL used NFHS rule 3-1-2 to Avoid Accountability

The wrestling playoffs have begun. Weigh-ins take place during a second round 5A State Dual meet. The teams report separately to the locker room for weigh-in (as directed by the SCHSL). The official takes the weigh-in sheet from the Coach and says "I am the only one that can write down the weights." The official proceeds to run the weigh-ins for both teams.

The match starts. 10 matches are wrestled without any issues. 11<sup>th</sup> match coming up, the 132 lb. bout. The team awarded choice must present their competitor first to the mat, they do. At this point, the opposing team realizes that the "actual recorded weight" of the wrestler on the mat is 136.6. Coaches approach the table to make the official aware of the situation. The first response by the official is- "You are correct, this wrestler is disqualified", "We were all present, this is the weight." The official starts towards the mat to disqualify the wrestler and award the match to the opposing team based on NFHS rule 6-2-2. At this point the opposing Coach asks "Can I bump him up?" The official answers: "No, he is disqualified." The opposing coach then makes statements such as- ' He is a 3X State Champion, he will never miss weight. You said his weight was 133.6.' At this point the official then says "I made a mistake."

The official rules that he made a mistake and the wrestler that was recorded on the weigh-in sheet at 136.6 is now eligible to compete at the 132 lb. weight class. The match resulted in a pin for the 136.6 lb. wrestler and an eventual dual meet victory for his team. End of match score: 31-30.

The next morning the losing team's Athletic Director appeals to the SCHSL that by rule 6-2-2 the results of the 132 lb. match should be over turned. The SCHSL takes over 8 hours to make a ruling. In the written response to the appeal by Daniel Brooks of the SCHSL, NFHS rule 3-1-2 is cited. In the following days Deno White, the South Carolina Wrestling Officials Association's Head rule interpreter refers to this rule as "The God Rule".

### NFHS Wrestling Rule Book

NFHS rule 3-1-2...On matters of judgement, the referee shall have full control of the match and decisions shall be final, based upon the NFHS wrestling rules and interpretations. **The referee has the sole authority for ruling on infractions or irregularities not covered within the NFHS wrestling rules.**

It is hard to believe that the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee would think that the application of rule 3-1-2 would be acceptable in this circumstance. Given the fact that the official and the coaches had verified the weights by signature prior to the start of

the dual meet. By the SCHSL applying this rule they effectively did not hold the official responsible for his participation in the weigh-in process nor did they hold the coach accountable for verification of his teams weigh-in sheet.

This application in the 11<sup>th</sup> match of the dual meet changed the playing field. Once a match has started the weights on the weigh-in sheet should not be able to be amended. Each coach makes strategy for the dual meet based on the “actual recorded weights” according to the opposing team’s weigh-in sheet. Any strategy that was created and implemented is null and void if weights are able to be adjusted after a match has started. This creates an uneven playing field for the adversely affected team.

It is apparent that the SCHSL must address these issues. There are two very important issues as a result of this ruling: 1. There must be a protocol for weigh-ins in wrestling competitions in SC governed by the SCHSL. 2. There has to be a “rule” established that prohibits the Officials and Coaches from making ANY corrections, additions or amendments to the weigh-in sheet AFTER a dual meet has started.

In a recent survey of South Carolina wrestling head coaches (44 responses):

Is it required for Coaches to produce a weigh-in sheet (printed from Trackwrestling) at the official weigh-in of a dual meet?

Responses: 44 YES

Are weigh-in sheets "binding" once signed by the Official and the Coaches?

Responses: 44 YES

Can weights be altered or changed AFTER the dual meet has started?

Responses: 44 NO

It is apparent that the validity, irrevocability and importance of the weigh-in sheet is lost on the SCHSL. The wrestling coaches understand the important role that this document has in their sport. Most officials understand this as well. These type of misapplication of rules create precedent that should never have occurred. Now, due to the SCHSL ruling, questions about the validity and contractual powers of the weigh-in sheet becomes apparent.

What will happen? Who knows? There have been multiple issues that have occurred over the years that the SCHSL have failed to address. Will this be another issue that seems to linger around? Will the SCHSL sit around idle and hope that the understanding of the coaches that weigh-in sheets can not be changed be enough? What about the officials? Will the officials continue to “run” weigh-ins as they see fit. If they do and there are issues, coaches, wrestlers and fans be prepared for the SCHSL to hide behind “The God Rule”. They can avoid accountability when this is applied. The

SCHSL can avoid holding the actors involved accountable and they can avoid addressing issues that they helped create by being idle as in the years past.