

Referee Column: Australasian Taekwondo magazine.

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Everybody wants his cake and eat it too

Sporting success or more precisely the desire to win all the time has engulfed many taekwondo practitioners including coaches, athletes, supporters and parents. Sport is a contest of two or more participants (athletes) and there can only be one winner. There is passion, but if misplaced can turn ugly. There is sportsmanship and this must be embraced if sport is to remain attractive to all. The success and growth of any sport, and taekwondo is no different, relies on rules and ethics and exemplary behaviours by all.

The higher the stakes the more emotional the ride. The expectations for some are too high and at times unrealistic and unachievable. When results do not meet expectations, some participants resort to uncontrolled bad behaviour to the extremes. It is unbecoming of any taekwondo practitioner as one of the accepted behaviours expected of a martial artist is controlled behaviour not uncontrolled behaviour. Sport loves a winner, and it equally hates a bad loser.

Sports demand that participants exhibit excellent ethics, be they coaches, players, officials, referees, spectators and supporters. Nobody is bigger than the sport, and those who think so have no place in the sport.

Ethics and behaviour:

While it is great to win, nobody can expect to win all the time. Taekwondo sparring sport is contested by 2 players and only one can win, the rules do not allow for a draw, there must be one winner and one loser. Typically there is a clear winner, but sometimes matches are that close that any player could win. To win a sparring match, one player must score more points or have accumulated more points than the other player at the end of the match, or in the case of a tied score, the winner who scores 1 point more than the other first as in a sudden death round or is determined by the referee and the judges to be the more superior player in the match after a final tied score even after sudden death round.

Coaches have a code of ethics that they have to abide by when they become qualified with NCAS qualifications. Referees have a code of ethics that they have to abide by when they become qualified with NOAS qualifications. Failure to observe these codes can place their qualifications or eligibility to coach or referee in jeopardy, including suspension, re-education or other disciplinary measures.

An example of bad behaviour would include coaches abusing referees verbally or physically. There has been some examples of such bad behaviours exhibited in real life situations including such as a coach physically manhandling a referee after a match, a coach threatening a referee physically, verbally or using an implement, a coach ripping up the floor mats, a coach stepping onto court to hinder the progress of a match, a coach in a sit-in protest and a coach lining up the referees and launching into verbal tirades at the referees or anybody they think caused their player to lose. Such behaviour is unwanted in taekwondo

sport. Such behaviours while it seems to vent off emotions actually have a downside and this turns away the spectators and potential recruits to the sport. These sort of behaviours is usually looked upon negatively by all and sundry. Fortunately there are processes in place that handles these types of bad behaviours.

There are excellent and exemplary behaviours from coaches too, and they generally accept the results as the rules were being applied. Win or lose they always display excellent sportsmanship and what our martial arts embraces, an excellent spirit for taekwondo competition. Fortunately there are more better behaved coaches than there are bad behaved coaches.

In world standard competitions, there has been coaches that have been suspended from coaching on the floor for up to 2 years, some even “sacked” from their roles as national coaches. In Australia we have a complaints and disciplinary process that we follow through.

All referees have a strict code of ethics to abide by. Any referee found guilty of manipulating scores or causing bias judgment are disciplined accordingly. Referees exhibiting bad behaviour are unwanted but fortunately there are very few or hardly any. In Australia we have referee evaluations put in place that monitors performances. Bad behaviours from referees include a referee having a go at the spectators, a referee having arguments with the coaches or officials (not to be mistaken by a referee cautioning a coach or player) and a referee refusing to continue judging or refereeing a match. Fortunately these actions are very rare.

In world standard competitions, there have been referees who had been sanctioned and suspended for up to 2 years. In Australia we have a complaints and disciplinary process that we follow through.

All players are generally well behaved, but there are the few that overstep their mark and cause interruptions to the match. The competition rules prohibit any bad behaviour from the player or his coach for they can be penalized by the referee with warnings or deduction points, and this could translate to a loss, as happened in matches. Arguing with the referee is not a smart move and players can get penalized. There has been one very good player in an international competition who lost an important match when he removed his head guard and waved it around during a match when warned by the referee not to. This player lost a deduction point as a result and then also lost the match. There was the case of a player who took off his head guard and kicked it into the stands after losing a match, this player was cautioned. There was also the case of a player who swore at the other player and ran off court; this player lost the match by referee stop contest rule.

Expectations:

Winning is not everything. Unfortunately there are those, including coaches, players, spectators and supporters who want to win so badly that their emotions take hold of them and they “spit the dummy” so to speak. Sport is for everyone, and is meant to be cultured. Martial artists are meant to exhibit great mental and self control of themselves, so let us practice that.

The expectations are sometimes way beyond the reality of what the player or coach to achieve. Sometimes bad behaviours are acted out to display displeasure or to hide their own inefficiencies or mediocre performances. The referees are the easy target to blame, but after all the referee is the one who manages the match, so who else can they blame, certainly not themselves or the other player or the other coach.

Coaches, players and referees alike must assess their performance and improve themselves in what they do. Expectations must be realistic. Look at winning in other ways, not only on the match result or the medal or trophy won or even the dollars gained. Example, a player or coach could “win” by say scoring up to a certain number of points, a “win” could also be how many matches the player could win and advance through, a “win” could be executing better

techniques, more techniques, or “winning” could also be how spirited or how humble a player and coach could accept a loss – this must be the greatest “win” for anybody.

The stakes are too high nowadays, as players and coaches and even nations strive to win medals at an Olympics, a World Championships, a World Cup, a continental regional medal, an international medal or even a national or state medal. Governments invest big money into taekwondo results for some countries, and this adds more pressure for the players and coaches to produce winning results.

As the sporting side of taekwondo advances, let us not forget the martial arts spirit of taekwondo which is the foundation of our art that progressed into sports. Sportsmanship must be displayed, and the martial arts spirit of taekwondo must be cultured. The code of ethics must be abided. Above all it is not the winning that makes a great sportsperson; it is the struggle that takes us there that makes us even greater.

In Australia, the National Referee Committee has invested in a project to review some of the drivers that turns the ugly side of taekwondo sport and hopefully this will lead to improved relationships with the referees and coaches and the players.

Kim Seng
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