

# The High School Fighting Rule

Each year there continues to be a great deal of confusion concerning the High School fighting rule. The principles listed below are an attempt to simplify an understanding of the rule. Fights happen infrequently, but when they do it's generally traumatic. We stand back and try to evaluate the circumstances and determine who participated in the fight, who left the confines of the bench area, and how to maintain order and control as quickly as possible. To achieve these goals we should strive to act quickly with a keen knowledge of proper protocol and the ability to handle the issues according to the rules, with strong doses of commonsense and leadership ability thrown in. No one said it was an easy task. Below listed, are principles that may assist you in achieving success:

**Principle No. 1**—A fighting act is defined as any attempt to strike an opponent with fist, foot, or any other potentially dangerous body part *whether or not contact is made*. Taunting, or other unsportsmanlike acts that provoke a fighting response, is also defined as fighting.

**Principle No. 2**—Those engaged in the fight are each charged with a flagrant foul (personal if the ball is alive, technical if dead) and disqualified. Each foul counts as a team foul.

- No shots are awarded for double fouls or those that offset per rules 4–19 and 10.

**Principle No. 3**—Bench personnel who leave the bench *during a fight* commit flagrant technicals.

- All are disqualified. The kids stay on the bench, adults must leave the gym.
- All their fouls count for team totals.
- As above, no shots are awarded for fouls that cancel.

**Principle No. 4**—Penalties for the coach and suspensions for bench personnel (if applicable) depend on whether the people participate in the fight or merely watch.

- *If one or more only watch*, the head coach is charged with only one indirect technical (not added to team total), provided he/she is not an offender.
- *If they participate in the fight*, the head coach is charged with an indirect technical foul for each bench person that fights.
- *If the coach leaves the bench unbeckoned*, he/she commits a direct, flagrant technical foul (a team foul) and is ejected.

**Principle No. 5**—To apply these rules you must keep your brain working at maximum warp!

- If a coach comes off the bench and helps the situation there is an excellent chance you beckoned.
- Be sure to get the numbers of the fighters. You can't use the video, but the school or the State probably will. If you're not sure a player fought, he/she didn't.
- Be consistent and realistic about your definition of leaving the bench. If there's a fight, kids are going to get excited. Some benches are pretty close to the sideline. In my view, a step and a stop is not leaving the bench.
- Get together with your partner to make the best possible decision.

**Principle No. 6**—Don't get physical with the fighters.

- If you're right on top of a rough play, you might prevent a fight from starting. (Don't run off making a fancy intentional foul call.) Once a teenage athlete decides to fight, it is often difficult to stop it anyway, so concentrate on getting the data you will need.

**Principle No. 7**—Communicate effectively!

- Talk to both coaches simultaneously. (If you've ejected one or both, make sure the replacement participates.)
- Write the decision in the scorebook.
- Follow your State association procedures for further reporting if required.

As you may well comment, even an attempt to simplify things gets long. The best approach is prevention. Some fights start instantaneously, but many provide warning signals. Regardless of the quality of the game a good official will be sensitive to any signs of illwill and deal with them early. Remember that if the situation becomes uncontrollable, you can always suspend the game. I shall leave you with that pleasant thought.