

JUDGE AND BE JUDGED

Poor judging can make or break a tournament. With rampant complaints about judging at events, is there anything that can be done to improve it?

Judges are an essential part of competition. Without Judges, there would be no winners. Yet in a recent survey taken by SportMartialArts.com, over 95% of respondents indicated that bad judging is one of the main reasons for not returning to certain events. A poor experience with judging has caused some competitors to quit the sport all together.

There are some excellent judges who participate in the sport but at the same time, there are some true horror stories. Judges have been observed taking on cell phones during competitor performances or turning to speak with friends while a competitor is in the middle of a routine. One center referee was observed video taping the division while judging. It sometimes seems that even the best judges cannot counter the effects of those who are poor.

The blatant examples are the easy problems to spot and perhaps fix. More troubling are judges who want to do a great job but are not equipped due to poor training and inexperience. Being a judge is not easy. While in charge of determining the fate of the competitors, the judge is being observed by everyone interested in the event.

A poor move by a judge can result in complaints, threats and in worse case scenarios, physical violence. And what makes the judging experience even more precarious – 99% of the judges are unpaid, many spend their own money to travel to events, stay in the event hotel and eat. The result – the judges that everyone complains about are in essence, paying to help make events run successfully.

At this point many might ask, why in the world would people pay to travel to events, and then be yelled at by disgruntled parents and competitors? For many judges, it is how they give back to a sport that the judge was a part of in times past. Others are there with their students or children and are helping judge to make the tournament run on time. Some judges are part of a particular league and are required to judge per league rules. And Finally, there is a small group who go because, just like competitors, martial arts tournaments are a social outlet for them – a place to connect with friends in a sport that they love.

With all the problems with the judging and the complaints about judges, is there any way to fix the issue? It seems logical that if judging were fair and impartial most of the time, competitors would be happier and the sport would grow.

1. KNOW THE RULES

Almost every tournament offers a judges meeting to review tournament rules but few judges actually attend, therefore competitors and parents should know the rules of the competition and how to deal with poor judges.

Most leagues offer rules on how to have judges removed. The two major leagues, NASKA and NBL provide the following rules.

NASKA

REMOVAL OF OFFICIALS: If a competitor feels that an official should be removed from a form or weapon division for good reason, he/she must file a protest at any time. It is totally up to the center referee and the rules arbitrator to determine if an official be removed.

NBL

JUDGING/REMOVAL OF JUDGES – A player cannot protest a judgmental call to have it changed. A player may, however, ask the Arbitrator to scrutinize any judge for possible removal. A player may request to have one or more judge (including the Center Referee) removed from his division from the onset. This protest should be made before the division starts (starts choosing order of performance). Removal of judges is an the discretion of the Arbitrator based upon statements by both the player and the judge and any Chief Referee.

If a judge is not qualified, politely ask the tournament arbitrator or director to have the judge removed. Be sure to have specific examples and evidence to support your request. Just because you or your child is losing does not mean the judging is poor.

Tournament administrators should do their part to assure that the judges are competent and fair. If good judging does not seem to be a concern at an event, it is always your prerogative to no longer support the event in the future.

2. APPRECIATE THE GOOD ONES

It is easy to complain about the bad judges but the good judges need feedback too. If you observe a judge that does a great job, give him or her a compliment or, better yet a snack or bottle of water. If you want the good ones back – show them that they are appreciated!

3. SPORTMARTIALARTS.COM PROJECT

Sportmartialarts.com is working with selected tournaments to introduce a pilot project to rate judges and provide online testing to help improve judging. So far the New England Open , US Open and Diamond Nationals events in the NASKA circuit and the Pacific Jewel Nationals, Golden Gate Internationals and Battle of the Champions in the NBL circuit are on board to help test the new program.

The goal is to rate and reward judges who participate in and score well in online testing on rules and who then go to participating tournaments. The promoters who have agreed to participate in the pilot project will assure that judges in the project will get special benefits at the tournaments like staff clothing, food, discounts and prizes.

Top judges each year will be recognized by Sportmartialarts.com and the promoters. More details about the project will be revealed in early 2009 on Sportmartialarts.com.

Judging is one of the hardest jobs in the sport of martial arts. And good judges are the key to a thriving and successful sport. Competitors and parents can help hold poor judges accountable. They can also assure that good judges are acknowledged. Sportmartialarts.com is going to do its part to change judging into one of the positive parts of this sport we love.

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