



January 7, 2026

NFHS Basketball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Rule 10-5 (Bench Decorum), Rule 10-6 (Head Coach's Rule), Rule 4-48 (Warning for Coach/Team Conduct), and 2025 POE: Bench Decorum and Sportsmanship

Purpose:

The purpose of this Point of Emphasis is to reaffirm the importance of proper behavior by coaches, substitutes, and bench personnel. The bench area sets the tone for a team's overall sportsmanship, and actions from this area directly impact game management and the perception of high school basketball. Emphasizing consistent enforcement of bench decorum prevents escalation of unsporting behavior, promotes respect for officials, and maintains the integrity of competition. This POE reminds officials to strictly enforce restrictions on leaving the bench area, standing, and engaging in unsporting communication, while holding coaches accountable for the behavior of their teams.

Interpretation:

- Rule 10-6-1 limits the head coach's privilege to remain standing within the confines of the coaching box for coaching purposes. Assistant coaches and bench personnel must remain seated, except under specific exceptions outlined in the rules.
- Rule 10-5 outlines unsporting conduct and includes actions such as disrespectfully addressing officials, inciting spectators, or otherwise engaging in behavior that discredits the game.
- Under the 2025 POE, officials are instructed to consistently enforce penalties for violations of these rules. Leniency in enforcement leads to inconsistent game management and undermines the authority of officials.

First infractions may result in a warning (when appropriate per Rule 4-48, (such as a first-time bench decorum issue) or a technical foul for subsequent or severe infractions. Coaches are ultimately responsible for ensuring substitutes and bench personnel demonstrate sportsmanship at all times.

Situation 1:

During the third quarter, the officiating crew issues a warning to Team A's assistant coach who is repeatedly standing and yelling instructions outside of the coaching box. Later, after a foul is called against Team A, the assistant coach again leaves the bench area, steps onto the court, and argues the call with an official.

RULING: A bench technical foul is assessed to Team A. This action falls under Rule 10-5 (bench decorum) and Rule 10-6 (Head Coach's Rule). The technical foul results in two free throws for Team B and the ball awarded at the division line. The head coach of Team A is also charged indirectly with the technical foul, as they are responsible for bench personnel.

NOTE: The head coach/team bench should receive only one warning which should be recorded in the scorebook for unsporting behavior. All other unsporting behaviors should be ruled as such and a technical foul assessed.

Contrast:

If, instead, the head coach of Team A respectfully questions the call from within the coaching box without gesturing or stepping onto the floor, no penalty is warranted. Officials should distinguish between respectful communication permitted under the rules and unsporting or excessive actions that disrupt the game.

Situation 2:

Following a goal by A1, the head coach of B confronts an official with language that is considered to be profane.

RULING: The official rules a technical foul on the head coach because of profane language.

COMMENT: A head coach/bench warning is not required to be issued before a technical foul may be assessed. If the behavior is considered major, a technical foul should be assessed.

Conclusion:

The 2025 POE on Bench Decorum and Sportsmanship reinforces that enforcement of these standards is not optional. Coaches and bench personnel must model the highest level of respect and sportsmanship. Officials are instructed to apply the rules consistently, using warnings when appropriate but assessing technical fouls without hesitation when behavior exceeds rule allowances. Strict adherence ensures fairness, minimizes game disruptions, and upholds the educational mission of interscholastic athletics.