

On Being An APF Judge

Former APF Vice President Mike McDaniel offers a series of guidelines on what it takes to be a judge in the APF. McDaniel's discusses some general principles of judging that the federation promotes. He says that it's important "for the judge to have the desire to effectively work with people, and a commitment to continuously improve interpersonal skills. A judge should always work in a manner such that every individual and situation is treated with as much dignity and respect as the individual or situation allows."

He continues, stating that there is "no room at a competition for a judge's ego or a judge with a self-serving agenda" McDaniel's says a judge must be willing to admit and correct their mistakes. McDaniel's also cites specific requirements, responsibilities, and expectations for judges in the APF.

Recently I posted my typical content for a rules meeting for lifters at an APF meet. Feedback was that the info was additive. I committed to do similar for a judges' meeting. Info to follow will to some degree be from the perspective of judging at an APF meet but not exclusively so. It isn't in the format of communication at a judges' meeting but instead just my perspectives and general opinions on judging. Input from others (lifters, judges, coaches, and spectators) as upgrades or to correct my perspective is welcome.

General Thoughts

There continues to be a need for more good judges. Quite often some of the best judges are or were competitive lifters. That's not to imply that all lifters will necessarily make good judges. We don't. That's also not to imply that someone without a competitive lifting background can't be a great judge. They can.

There are many reasons to get involved judging. My initial judging started with high-school competitions the year I started powerlifting. It was an expectation of the group I lifted with to do so as a way to give back to the sport. My later interest in judging was to influence the sport from the inside.

There's much more to being a good judge than just knowing and enforcing the rules. If the responsibility was that limited we'd probably instead be called enforcers. "Judge" implies that there will be personal judgments expected and/or required periodically. Not every situation can or should be covered in a rulebook.

A judge knowing the rules for a specific federation and how to consistently enforce them is important but only a starting point. As important is for the judge to have the desire to effectively work with people, and a commitment to continuously improve interpersonal skills. A judge should always work in a manner such that every individual and situation is treated with as much dignity and respect as the individual or situation allows.

There's no room at a competition for a judge's ego or a judge with a self-serving agenda. A judge's only internal focus should be as self-assessment to ensure performance is consistent with requirements. All apparent energy should be externally focused. At the end of the event, lifters, coaches, and spectators should leave feeling treated fairly and highly valued. If asked about the quality of the judging, responses will hopefully be along the lines of being fair, consistent, strict, and no issues. Being assessed as strict doesn't imply that more is required than defined in the rules. It only means the rules are consistently enforced.

A judge shouldn't assume that some amount of conflict is inevitable. There will be periodic disagreements. If handled appropriately none will escalate to conflict. Be willing to admit and correct mistakes. When listening to the perspective of others, explaining differences in the perspectives and why a call was made, or correcting a mistake, if at all possible do so without negatively affecting the flow of the meet or concentration/performance of other lifters.

Every lifter on every attempt should get your undivided attention as though their attempt is the most important thing in your life at that moment. It is to the lifter, and we as judges are only there because of them. Within the limits of fairness required by the rules work as hard as you can to help every lifter be as successful as they can be.

Responsibilities of/for Judging and Routine Considerations

State Directors should ensure they have enough certified judges to meet the needs of all their meets. Certified judges also have responsibility to grow the pool of judges. Those wishing to become certified should go through an apprentice program of sorts for practical learning from those considered good examples of what a judge should be. The apprenticeship content/duration should be determined by the mentoring judge. Written and practical testing shouldn't be scheduled until approved by the mentoring judge. New judges shouldn't make unsupervised lift assessments

until released by a mentoring judge to take the certification test, and until the test is successfully completed.

If valued by a State Director, informally designating a Chief Technical Officer/Referee for the state can be additive pertinent to having a focal point for judging standardization and referee pool growth.

Meet Directors should make initial contact for judging commitments as soon as the decision to promote a meet is made. At initial contact the Meet Director should confirm federation membership and judges' certification status to ensure both are current on the date of the meet. Judges' compensation if any (hotel room, meals, travel, fee) should be agreed to at initial contact. The ability to compensate varies by meet and promoter. The need for compensation varies by judge. There is no standard. Quite often there is minimal to no financial compensation.

Either the Meet Director or a designated Chief Referee should know the strength and weaknesses of the judges that will be used. Every judge will perform to the best of their ability but not every judge has the same ability. Judging assignments should be determined in advance of the meet and communicated to the judges at the Judges' Meeting either by the Meet Director or Chief Referee. Depending on individual judge's strengths, assignment location may vary on each event. Unless there's a performance issue or unexpected problem, judging assignments should be static through each event. The Judge's Meeting should be prior to the Lifter/Rules Meeting. Some (not all) examples of strengths and weaknesses I've seen and addressed by judges' assignments include but are not limited to:

- Poor eye sight (may do well as a head judge on squat but not side)
- Weak squat and press command (use as side judge on squat and bench but OK in head seat on deadlift)
- Excellent multi-tasking (use as head judge and/or to call weights and time regardless of location)
- Holds lifters too long at top of deadlift (correct the situation with the judge and audit performance or use them at the side on that event)
- Calls depth inconsistent with the federation rule requirements (correct the situation with the judge and audit performance or use them in the head judge position on squats not calling depth from the head judge position in the APF)

- Timing for press command inconsistent with federation requirements (correct the situation with the judge and audit performance or use them in the side position)

The State Director or his designee (Chief Referee) needs to assess judging performance and provide prompt feedback to the judges. Deficiencies with immediate/direct affect on a meet need immediate respectful correction. Areas for long-term improvement need to be communicated consistently and effectively.

The Chief Referee needs to conduct a Judges' Meeting 45 minutes in advance of the start of the competition. The Judges' Meeting should be complete in less than 10 minutes. Judging assignments by event are given at the end of the Judges' Meeting. The Chief Referee needs to conduct the Rules Meeting 30 minutes in advance of the start of the meet. The Rules Meeting should be attended by all judges. The rules meeting will typically be complete in less than 10 minutes. After the Rules Meeting the judges should ensure they're available to lifters for assistance as needed, and to build a relationship of mutual trust with the lifters.

Enough in advance of a meet so that if problems are found there's opportunity for correction without delaying the meet, judges should check to ensure:

- Equipment meets rulebook requirements
- Judges' lights work properly
- Lifting charts are available and accurate versus bars and collars used in each event
- The scoring table knows who will be in the Head Referee position on each event
- Scorekeepers know the rules pertinent to attempt timing, bumps/changes, records, etc.
- Jack stands and/or monolifts function properly
- Cleaning supplies/disinfectants are available at each platform

Prior to the start of each event, the Head Judge for that particular event should discuss their performance expectations with spotter/loaders.

Judge location and typical responsibility by event should be as follows:

Squat

The head judge should set in front of the lifter such that when the arm that's giving the visual aspect of the squat command is raised it's centered in front of the lifter. For a right-handed judge this means you'll shift your chair approx. $\frac{1}{2}$ the width of your body to the left. For a left-handed judge it's a $\frac{1}{2}$ body width to the right. This shift gives an improved line of sight to the crowd, results in the visual aspect of the signal being more easily seen by the lifter, gets the head judge slightly out of the line of fire for projectiles from the lifter's nose or mouth, and improves the judges perspective to assess whether the lifter is control of the weight/not slowly losing balance forward or backward prior to giving the squat command.

Once the lifter has broken the weight and achieved the proper starting position as defined in the rulebook, a simultaneous loud/crisp audible "squat" command is given as the arm is quickly lowered. The lifter descends, recovers at will, and when at the fully upright position as described in the rulebook, give the audible loud/crisp "rack" command while bringing the arm from the lowered position back through an arc indicating a signal to return the bar to the rack. Things the head judge looks for are:

- Compliance with the one minute rule
- Lifter attire compliance
- Start and finish positions
- Ensuring the arms don't come in contact with the legs when at the bottom of the squat
- Ability to achieve proper start position without spotter assistance
- Ensuring no spotter/loader contact with the lifter or weight after the lifter removes the bar from the rack until the rack command
- Ability to initiate return to the rack without spotter assistance
- Following the judge's signal
- No lateral shifting or forward or backward movement of the feet between the squat and rack command
- No downward movement after initiating the ascent.

In the APF the head judge should not call depth. Considering the legal definition of depth in the APF as the top surface of the leg at the hip being below the top of the knee, based on experience I have no confidence a

judge in an APF meet can consistently make an accurate call on depth from the front thus no calling depth from the front.

Side judges on squat should be directly beside the lifter. The judge's line of sight should be at the top of the knee. The rulebook says the judge should remain in their chair. I disagree, and with the statement worded as "should" instead of "must" or "shall", direct judges when appropriate to be out of their chair in the best position they can attain beside each lifter to call depth, with line of sight at the top of the knee. Duplicating line of sight at the top of the knee for each lifter improves the probability of making consistent calls.

My experience is also that getting eyes level with the top of the lifter's knee results in a perception of legal depth slightly higher than the perspective from sitting in the chair/higher. This isn't an effort to allow the lifter to do less than required by the rules. It is an effort to be fair and consistent versus the rules for every lifter. It's the judge's responsibility to work however necessary to ensure the lifter gets full credit for everything accomplished versus the rules, not the lifter's responsibility to make it easy for the judge to make a call.

The side judge makes the same assessments as listed above for the head judge, plus depth. It will quite often be difficult because of line of sight for the side judge to effectively determine if a lifter's upper arm comes in contact with their leg. Only call infractions that you witness. Don't assume anything. Within limits, the side judge should move the spotter/loaders as necessary to ensure they have an unobstructed view to assess the lift. The limit of moving them is to ensure they aren't out of position to effectively spot the lifter if needed. If necessary the judge may have to move around as the lift progresses to call depth. An example could be easily seeing around the spotter/loader ensuring the lifter is in the appropriate starting position at the "squat" command, but having to shift to have proper position to call depth. Making the depth call from a view between a spotter/loader's legs isn't uncommon. The side judge should ensure the plate tree is not in a location that hinders their ability to get into proper position to make a call.

Bench

For a lot of the same reasons as on squat, the head ref. on bench should shift slightly off-center (half a body width) to one side. On bench this

gives the head judge an improved position to judge lifter footing requirements. The judge should set close enough to the lifter for the lifter to easily hear the commands, but far enough back to do an overall assessment of the lift versus being so close that the only thing they can see is mid-bar movement. Rule requirements have been covered in a previous posting. The instant the bar is motionless on the lifter the head judge should give a clear and crisp “press” command.

After the press command, per the rulebook any downward movement of the bar disqualifies the lift. I suggest limiting the assessment for downward movement to watching just at and between the hands. With the allowance in the APF to have uneven extension and/or lockout that isn’t “pronounced”, the uneven extension or lockout could result in a hand filling the role of pivot point resulting in slight downward movement of either end of the bar but with no downward movement at or between the hands. On the requirement for the bar to be motionless, there is no defined duration/pause. Do not require more than is defined by the rules. Upward movement of the lifter’s body can result in the bar being deeper into their body than when the press command is given. If the increased depth into the body isn’t the result of the bar sinking, no problem.

Finished completion is with the arms fully extended and elbows locked. Elbow hyperextension is not required. Ensure the lifter is in control of the weight and the weight is motionless prior to giving the rack command, but give the command immediately after the assessment. If the weight is at full arm’s extension but drifting back to the rack, no “rack” command until the bar is either motionless or the bar goes into the rack prior to a command resulting in disqualification of the lift.

The side judge on bench watches the same thing as the head judge but also looks to ensure the lifter’s hips don’t break contact with the bench between the press and rack command. The head judge will rarely be in a position to call the hips breaking. The side judges should be located 4’ or so away from the lifter’s side directly across from the end of the bench. On bench there’s a lot to judge in a short period of time. Between the “press” and “rack” command a judge will step through ensuring:

- No heaving/downward movement into the chest at the “press” command
- Hips don’t break contact with the bench at lift initiation
- No downward movement or pronounced uneven extension in the course of pressing the weight

- Hips don't break during the press
- Surface contact area of the feet remains constant
- Feet don't shift laterally or forward/backward
- The lifter doesn't have their feet in contact with the bench base or its structure
- There isn't contact with the rack in the course of being pressed out that results in downward movement or saves the lift
- The lifter follows the commands of the head judge
- There isn't pronounced uneven pressing or lockout

One thing that continues to get attention on bench is when the lift starts. Judging the technical aspect of the lift starts at hand-off. The lifter must receive the bar from the spotter/loader at arms length. The bar does not have to be held at arm's length, just received. Judging all other aspects of bench are between the "press" and "rack" command, other than the lifter not following the head judge's signals. The lifter not receiving the bar at arm's length as determined by the judges can disqualify a lift.

Deadlift

The head judge position is the same as on squat, for similar reasons. Things that I routinely see as areas for improvement from the head referee position are:

- Explanation for disqualification of the lift
- Routinely lifters are told they lost a lift because they "hitched", but the term doesn't show in the rulebook. What I typically see that appears to fall into the "hitch" definition is downward movement of the bar, and resting the bar on the legs (leg assist) to change into a stronger position to pull. The more experienced lifters seem to routinely accept being told they hitched without questioning the term. Best I can tell they accept it to mean downward movement or leg assist. I've heard quite a few young lifters though leave the platform after being told they hitched, questioning what it meant. I suggest giving reasons for disqualifying a deadlift consistent with rulebook content, downward movement in the course of being pulled prior to reaching final position, leg assist as indicated by temporarily sitting the bar on the legs to adjust position/quite often as determined as a position that could not be maintained without having

the weight as counterbalance, failure to finish fully upright with knees straight/locked, lateral or forward/backward shifting of the feet, not initiating the pull within the 1 minute time requirement, lowering the bar prior to receiving the “down” command from the head referee, and not maintaining some measure of control of the bar with both hands lowering the bar to the floor.

- Timing of the “down” command inconsistent with requirements in the rulebook. The command to lower the bar should be given as soon as the lifter is motionless and/or in their final position. I continue to see judges give the “down” command prior to completion of the lift. On fewer occasions I see head judges require the lifter hold the bar some given amount of time after reaching a legal finished position and in motionless control of the weight. Neither are consistent with the rules or acceptable. By shifting the $\frac{1}{2}$ body width as previously defined as the location for a head judge, a partial view of the lifter from the side is attained versus the perspective from directly in front of the lifter. This shift allows the head judge to better determine if a lifter is losing their balance forward or backward at the top of the lift and thus allow for no signal if not motionless and in control of the weight, or a quick signal if the finish position is quickly attained.
- Inconsistencies on calling whether a lifter is or is not fully upright with knees straight/locked. Finished position should be called from the front/by the head referee when the referee is confident of making the call. The head referee should stay sensitive though to not being in as good of a position to make that call as the side referees, and at any point where their thought process includes doubt, favor the lifter with the call and depend on the side judges in the better position to make the determination.

Side position for referees on deadlift: If there was a line coming out each side of the lifter and we marked it at 0 degrees, each side referee should be located toward the front of the lifter by approx. 15 degrees. This allows for the side judges to be in a position to consistently and fairly call all aspects of the lift in an additive manner versus what's seen just from the head judge position. Judges should not sit behind the lifter. The position from behind disallows being able to consistently and effectively call leg assist, and compromises the ability to make a consistent and fair determination as to whether a shoulder is or is not in the correct finished position (lifter fully upright, shoulders not required to be rolled backward, but not

allowed to be rolled forward as a finishing position). Judges should also not all line up across the front of the platform. Doing so puts all 3 judges at the same disadvantage as the head referee, not in a position to consistently and accurately call as to whether the lifter is in the required finished position.

On deadlift, the lift is not over until the bar is back on the floor. Wait until then to make the call/turn on the light.

More Thoughts

- Throughout the course of the day, stay available to and interact with all at the meet in a positive way.
- Be supportive of every lifter.
- Look for ways to make positive contributions.
- Keep the platform clean and dry, equipment square, and bars clean.
- Behave in a manner that clearly indicates you want the lifters to be successful.
- Ensure that every lifter is in a respectful way made aware of why a lift is missed. Include suggestions for correction if appropriate.
- Stay long enough after the meet to sign record applications.
- Thank the Meet Director for the opportunity for involvement. Request feedback on any area for improvement.

No doubt I've missed a lot that should be included. Additions and comments are welcome. Please disregard typos.

- Mike McDaniel, Former APF Vice President