

The Basics of Taekwondo Refereeing

Everything you need to know to be a corner judge



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— Notes —

I. Foundations of Refereeing

What is the referee's job?

The referee in any sport exists to **protect the integrity of the competition process** and the **physical safety** and **trust** of the competitors.

What are the referee's responsibilities?

The referee's **primary responsibility** is for the **safety** of the competitors.

Beyond protecting the **safety** of the competitors, the referee is there to **ensure fair play**, and to **manage the competition fairly**—in a way that enables the players to perform at the best of their ability.

Everything you do as a referee or corner judge relates back to these basic principles.

It's simple—really!

Just remember these three things:

- Safety
- Fairness
- Common sense

... and you're already on the way to being a good referee.

II. The Competition Rules

The competition rules in use by the ECTC and NCTA are based on those adopted by the **USAT (USA Taekwondo)** and the **WTF (World Taekwondo Federation)**.

As a **corner judge**, you need to have a **basic understanding** of the Competition Rules, especially those that are referenced in this course. You should:

- Get yourself a copy of the complete [USAT Competition Rules](#)
- Read them through from time to time
- Observe their application in competitions you attend
- Ask an experienced referee to explain anything that may be unclear to you

If you want to become a **center referee**, you need to have a **thorough understanding** of the Competition Rules and match management procedures.

Here's how to become an expert center referee:

- Attend a USAT-sanctioned referee seminar
- Study the Competition Rules diligently
- Referee at ECTC, NCTA, USAT and other events
- Practice, practice, practice!
- Repeat #1, 2, 3 and 4, above

III. Terminology

Taekwondo having its origins in Korea, **Korean terminology** is used in Taekwondo competition. Fortunately, there aren't many terms you have to know.

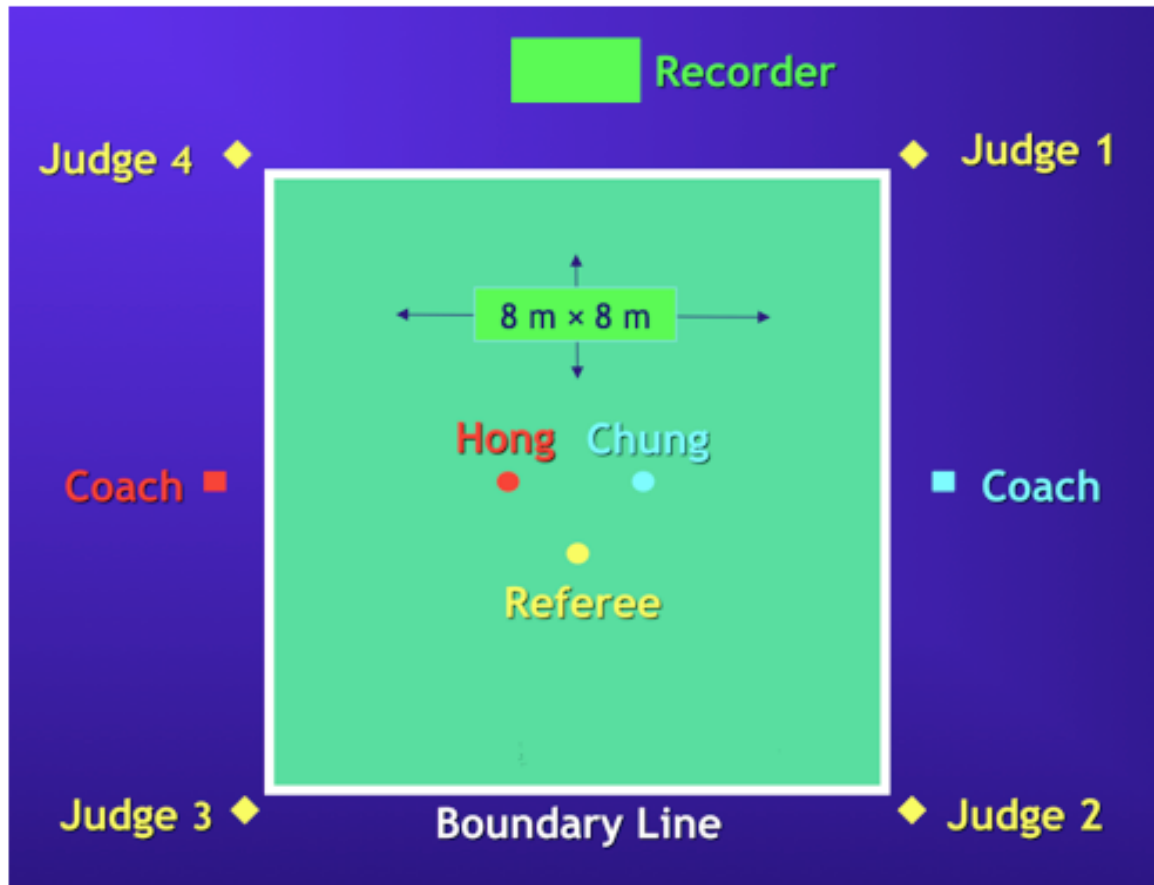
Chung	blue
Hong	red
Cha-ryut	attention
Kyung-re	bow
Chun-bi	ready
Shi-jak	begin
Kal-yeo	break
Keu-man	stop
Kye-sok	resume
Kye-shi	time out
Shi-gan	stop clock
Gam-jeom	deduction
Kyong-go	warning
Woo-se kirok	decide winner
Chung seung	blue wins
Hong seung	red wins
Jeom	point
Il	one
Ee	two
Sam	three

Pronunciation:

- "a" is pronounced as "ah"
- "i" is pronounced as "ee"

IV. The Competition Area

Here's what a single ring, or court, looks like:



The center green area is where the players compete, and is called the **Competition Area**. According to the Competition Rules, it should measure **8 m x 8 m** (roughly 25 ft x 25 ft). Depending on the venue (and how many mats are available), it may be slightly less.

As the referee stands facing the Recorder's table, the **red player (Hong)** will always be on the left; **the blue player (Chung)** will always be on the right.

There are **normally four corner judges**, in the positions indicated. However, **sometimes only three corner judges are used**; in that case, Judge #1 is positioned in the middle, usually on the boundary line nearest the head table.

V. Corner Judge Basics

By the book...

Judges

- a. The judges shall mark the valid points immediately.
- b. The judges shall state their opinions forthrightly when requested by the referee, authorized officials and/or Competition Supervisory Board members.

The judges **award points** by pressing buttons on an electronic scoring device; the device may be in the form of individual hand grips, or a single box.

A **judge must clearly understand:**

- The **criteria for a valid point** (i.e., permitted techniques, and legal scoring areas)
- **When to award** a point, and **when not to award** a point

A judge needs to be **reasonably skilled with the mechanics** of the electronic scoring device; this is not difficult, but it does require some practice.

Corner judges and the center referee are a **team**, and work together to **“get it right.”**

VI. The Hand Grips



RingMaster system shown; there are several others.

- If you have two controllers (some systems use a single box) **Red** is **ALWAYS** in the **left** hand; **Blue** is **ALWAYS** in the **right** hand!
- The **top button** is pressed to award points to the **head**, and to award points for **turning kicks**.
- The **trigger** is pressed to award points to the **body**.
- A point is recorded when **three of four judges** press for the same player within a window of one second; i.e., once the first judge presses, the others have one second to confirm. In a three-judge system, **two of the three** are required to confirm a score.

When you make a mistake...

Even the most senior judges make mistakes, and press the wrong buttons occasionally—for example, pressing for Blue when you mean to press for Red. When you make a mistake, immediately press the correct button.

If you see on the scoreboard that your error may have resulted in a no-score, or a score for the wrong player, stand up immediately to get the center referee's attention. **When one judge stands, all stand**, to make sure the center referee knows there is an issue. The referee will call the judges together to sort it out. When asked, state forthrightly what happened.

VII. Scoring the Match

Permitted Techniques & Permitted Areas

By the book...

Permitted Techniques

- 1) **Fist** techniques: Delivering techniques using the **tightly clenched fist**.
- 2) **Foot** techniques: Delivering techniques by using **any part of the foot below the ankle bone**.

Permitted Areas

- 1) **Trunk**: Attack by **fist and foot techniques** on the **areas covered by the trunk protector** are permitted. Attack to the spine, however, is not permitted.
- 2) **Head**: This is the area **above the collar bone**. **Only foot techniques** are permitted.



- The **colored** area of the trunk protector is a legal attacking area; not the straps. This includes the flanks, but not the spine itself.
- The **entire head**, including the neck, is a legal attacking area (foot techniques only).

VIII. Valid Points

By the book...

Points shall be awarded when **permitted techniques** are delivered **accurately** and **powerfully** to the **legal scoring areas**.

- **Accurately:** This means the proper aspect of a legal attacking technique, contacting the opponent within the designated limits of a legal target area. When **any part of the foot** strikes within a permitted area, it is considered a valid technique, and **may result in a point** if other criteria are met; the entire foot does not have to make contact.
- **Powerfully: Sufficient power** is demonstrated by the impact of the strike.

Unless electronic chest protectors are in use, **“accuracy and power” are determined solely by the judges**. To be awarded a point, a body technique, for example, typically requires a higher degree of power than a head technique. A relatively light, but very accurate, strike to the head should be rewarded with a point.

The criteria for power and accuracy is a **sliding scale**, and must be adjusted for the various weight classes. Expect more power from heavyweights, less from fin weights. Expect greater accuracy from black belt competitors, less from white or yellow belts.

It sounds more complicated than it is.

By the book...

The **valid points** are divided as follows:

- 1) **One (1) point** for attack on **trunk protector**
- 2) **Two (2) points** for a valid **turning kick to the trunk protector**
- 3) **Three (3) points** for a **valid attack to the head**

IX. Prohibited Acts

As a corner judge, you should be very familiar with the prohibited acts—what’s legal and what’s not. You should also know why certain things are penalized:

By the book...

Objectives in establishing the prohibited acts and penalties:

- To **protect** the contestants
- To ensure **fair contest management**
- To encourage **appropriate or ideal techniques**

By the book...

It is a rule that **points gained through illegal actions or illegal techniques cannot be valid**. In this situation, the referee must indicate invalidation of the point by hand signal and declare the appropriate penalty.

As a corner judge you need to understand that **points should not be awarded for prohibited techniques, or when they are the result of prohibited acts**. Your job is not to second-guess the center referee by trying to figure out what should be penalized and what should not; however, when it’s an obvious infraction—for example, an attack after Kal-yeo—don’t score it.

There are **two kinds of Prohibited Acts**:

- **Kyong-go (Warning)**—two Kyung-go penalties result in a point being added to the opponent’s score; a single odd Kyung-go has no effect on the score. These are considered less serious infractions.
- **Gam-jeom (Deduction)**—this results in a single point being added to the opponent’s score. These are the more serious infractions.

X. Kyung-go Penalties

By the book...

- a. **Crossing the Boundary Line**
- b. **Evading by turning the back to the opponent**
- c. **Falling down**
- d. **Avoiding the match**
- e. **Grabbing, holding or pushing the opponent**
- f. **Attacking below the waist**
- g. **Pretending injury**
- h. **Butting or attacking with knee**
- i. **Hitting the opponent's face with the hand**
- j. **Uttering undesirable remarks or any misconduct on the part of a contestant or a coach**
- k. **Lifting the knee to avoid a valid attack or impede the progress of an attack**

There are really only two of these that you need to be concerned with as a corner judge:

- **Crossing the Boundary Line**
When both feet of a contestant cross the Boundary Line, the action—at least from the judge's perspective—stops. The referee is going to call a penalty on the player who stepped out, or, if he/she was pushed out, on the opposing player.
- **Grabbing, holding or pushing the opponent**
If a player is obviously holding the opponent, and then kicks, let common sense and fair play prevail and do not press the button. If a player forcibly pushes the opponent, and then kicks as the opponent is falling, don't score it.

But... don't overthink this. If in doubt, go ahead and score it, and let the center referee decide.

XI. Gam-jeom Penalties

By the book...

- a. **Attacking the opponent after “Kal-yeo”**
- b. **Attacking the fallen opponent**
- c. **Throwing down the opponent by grabbing or hooking the attacking foot in the air or by pushing the opponent with the hand**
- d. **Intentionally attacking the opponent’s face with the hand**
- e. **A coach or contestant interrupting the progress of the match**
- f. **Violent or extreme remarks or behavior on the part of a contestant or a coach**

Again, only two of these will affect your duties as a corner judge:

- **Attacking the opponent after “Kal-yeo”**
This applies to obvious, intentional attacks after the referee has declared “Kal-yeo.” Safety, fairness, common sense.
- **Attacking the fallen opponent**
A player is considered “fallen” when any part of his/her body other than the soles of the feet touches the floor. Until then—even while they are falling—they are fair game, and can be scored on. (It is the center referee’s responsibility to protect a player who is falling, but if they don’t, it is the corner judge’s responsibility to continue to score the match.)

XII. Determining the Winner

In most cases the winner of a match will be decided by the total number of points.

But, for your reference, there are actually a number of ways in which a match may be decided:

- K.O. (knock-out)
- Referee stops contest
- Score/Superiority
- Withdrawal
- Disqualification
- Referee's punitive declaration

If the score is tied at the end of the final round, the match goes to a “sudden death” round, in which the first score (or total of one deduction point) decides the winner.

In ECTC competition, if there is no score in the first sudden death round, a second sudden death round is conducted—and so on—until one player finally scores or receives one full deduction point.

XIII. Superiority

In most non-ECTC competitions, if neither player scores in the sudden death round—then the winner is decided by **Superiority**.

The judges and center referee will each be sure to have a **Superiority Card** and pen with them before the match begins. These will be provided by the Tournament Committee or Referee Chairperson.

SUPERIORITY CARD														
Please circle the particulars														
1. Aggressive match management.														
2. Greater number of techniques.														
3. More advanced techniques (difficulty and complexity).														
4. Better competition manner.														
Referee Name _____					State/Country _____									
J4	J3	Referee		J2	J1									
CHUNG					HONG									
Signature: _____														
Referee Only														
J4	J3	Referee		J2	J1									
C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H					
Referee's Final Decision:					CHUNG					HONG				

- At the end of the sudden death round, the referee commands the judges (*“Woo-se kirok”*) to decide which player they think was superior—in the sudden death round only, not the whole match—based on the “rules of superiority” (page 14).
- In the case of four judges, the winner is decided by simple majority, with each judge and the referee having one vote.
- Where only three judges are used, if there is a 2-2 tie, the referee makes the final determination. In this case, the referee also votes as “Judge #4,” and, in effect, has two votes.

Procedure for Deciding Superiority

By the book...

The **decision of superiority** shall be based on the initiative shown during the 4th round. Initiative is judged by:

- **Technical dominance** of an opponent through **aggressive match management**
- A **greater number of techniques** executed
- The use of **more advanced techniques**, both in difficulty and complexity
- Display of a **better competition manner**

What you do as a corner judge to decide Superiority

First, make sure you have a Superiority Card and a pen with you when you sit down. Then, when the referee steps back and says, “*Woo-se kirok,*” you:

Look down and mark your card as follows:

1. Circle your position—Judge #1, 2, 3, or 4.
2. Circle your choice of winner (Chung for blue; Hong for red), based on the criteria of Superiority.
3. Sign the card.
4. Walk to the center and hand it face down to the center referee.

— Notes —

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Questions? Ask your instructor.

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