



https://journaltimes.com/sports/high-school/wrestling-video-waterford-s-halter-disqualified-from-individual-competitions/article_5de3b783-9851-5811-b7b1-0b6a0865fd02.html

Wrestling

Wrestling: VIDEO: Waterford's Halter disqualified from individual competitions

DEAN BIBENS dean.bibens@journaltimes.com Feb 5, 2019



Halter

+2 



Fitzpatrick

TRY 1 MONTH FOR 99¢



Waterford's Hayden Halter, who wrestled for Burlington last season, defeated Stevens Point's Justin Groshek 5-1 to win the 2018 WIAA Division 1 106-pound championship at the Kohl Center in Madison. The WIAA has disqualified Halter from individual wrestling for the rest of the 2019 season.

AMBER ARNOLD, Lee Newspapers

For Hayden Halter, the dream of winning four straight high school wrestling championships appears over.

As a freshman at Burlington High School last season, Halter won the WIAA Division 1 106-pound state title, beating Stevens Point sophomore Justin Groshek 5-1 in the championship match.

Halter transferred to Waterford High School this season and, with a No. 1 ranking at 120 pounds most of the season, seemed primed to be back atop the podium for the second straight year.



But on Monday the WIAA disqualified Halter from continuing his individual season with the Wolverines after he received two unsportsmanlike conduct penalties while winning the 120-pound championship at the Southern Lakes Conference meet on Saturday at Elkhorn.

The WIAA's decision left Halter confused, his coach angry and claiming a biased referee officiated the match, many state wrestling fans up in arms, and his parents planning to hire a lawyer to fight the ruling.

Halter was docked three points in the championship match against Union Grove sophomore Cade Willis, ranked No. 7 by Wisconsin Wrestling Online. The referee of the match was Michael Arendt, athletic director at St. Catherine's and former teacher at Union Grove High School.

Halter was up 7-1 in the third period with 20 seconds left. The two wrestlers stayed interlocked until the buzzer sounded. Arendt gave Willis a point for an escape, which made the final score 7-2, and Halter questioned the referee's decision.

“It didn't make any sense to me,” Halter said. “To have an escape, you have to be totally separated from your opponent, and we were together in those final 20 seconds. I said to the ref, ‘What was that’ and he gave me an unsportsmanlike conduct call.”

After that call was issued, Halter shook hands with Willis and then flexed his muscles.

“(The officials) said I was flexing toward the crowd and taunting them, but I was flexing at my dad because I just won the match and I was excited,” Halter said. “To have the ref take this opportunity to go to state away from me; it's personal.”

Arendt officiating Halter's match did not sit well with Waterford coach Tom Fitzpatrick.

“I think there's a conflict of interest with a referee that knows Cooper and Cade Willis,” Fitzpatrick said. “I think there's a desire to bring a talented wrestler down for no reason because he's showing emotion. And now the WIAA keeps adding to the list of things that Hayden allegedly did. Why did (Arendt) not recuse himself from the match?”

“At first it was the taunting and the questioning of an officials decision, now they're saying that there was vulgar language used, that Hayden's straps were down before he left the mat,” Fitzpatrick said. “It feels like collusion to me.

“I don’t think he was deserving of this at all,” Fitzpatrick added. “We had three or four guys do the exact same thing where they flex and say something like ‘Yes!’ in excitement, and none of them were penalized. It makes no sense why Hayden got this treatment.”

Halter’s father, Shawn, also could not understand the calls against his son.

“I can’t let this die,” Shawn Halter said Monday. “We are going to lawyer up and fight for Hayden to get back into action.”

Wade Labecki, WIAA deputy director who oversees wrestling, said the official’s decision is final and Halter will have no chance to appeal.

“In the official’s judgement, (Halter’s) actions were enough to be considered flagrant,” Labecki said. “It’s unfortunate, but we provide a reminder every year to the athletic directors of every school. Our hope is that the athletic director passes that information on to their coaches and the coaches pass it on to their players.”

An attempt to contact Arendt for comment was unsuccessful on Monday.



The symptoms of depression can be challenging

This isn't the first time Halter was penalized with an unsportsmanlike call. In 2018, Burlington lost to Holmen 27-26 in the Division 1 state semifinals and Halter was penalized for flexing at the crowd. Burlington coach Jade Gribble said at the time that it should have been a non-call.

Asked if Halter's history had any impact on the decision in the SLC tournament, Labecki said, "Every situation is new and the rules are applied the same."

Despite the ruling, Fitzpatrick said he's going to do everything in his power to make sure that he gets his wrestler back.

"I thought we could diplomatically resolve this through video evidence, but clearly that's not the case," Fitzpatrick said. "I told Hayden that we are going to keep fighting for him and hopefully we can work something out.

"We all have Hayden's back and we're all fighting for him to get back so he can wrestle with us again," Fitzpatrick added. "He's a 15-year-old kid and the treatment he's getting is unfair."

The three lost points cost the Wolverines the team championship. Waterford's revised score was 260.5 points. Burlington finished with 262 points and won its second straight SLC title.

"We had other matches we could have won and by no means does any of the blame go to Hayden," Fitzpatrick said. "He wrestled remarkably well and I'm proud of him."

Halter's mother Brynn posted a video of the match on her Facebook page and invited fans to comment. On Wisconsin Wrestling Online, a forum post about Halter's situation took up eight pages of comments.

Halter plans to use his disqualification as motivation for his next two years of high school and beyond.

"Moving forward, this won't affect my career," Halter said. "Mentally, it's going to sting for a little while, but next year, I'm going to be better than ever; I'm going to come back and win a state championship."

Dean Bibens

Reporter

