

Recap from: IJF Lima Grand Prix 2026; IJF Guayaquil World Championships Cadets Individuals 2026; IJF Ecole Mont-Olivet Lausanne Grand Slam 2026 – Switzerland; IJF Hungary Grand Slam 2026

Informal Working Reference

Source	Recap of interviews with Brian Toth, an IJF World Tour referee, following his participation in the IJF Lima Grand Prix 2026; IJF Guayaquil World Championships Cadets Individuals 2026; IJF Ecole Mont-Olivet Lausanne Grand Slam 2026 – Switzerland; and IJF Hungary Grand Slam 2026.
Date	October 4, 2026
Interviewer	Saribek Balagezyan – USA Judo Referee Committee

Goal of this document: Share knowledge, observations, and experiences shared by IJF World Tour referee Brian Toth following his participation in the IJF Lima Grand Prix 2026, IJF Guayaquil World Championships Cadets Individuals 2026, IJF Ecole Mont-Olivet Lausanne Grand Slam 2026 – Switzerland, and IJF Hungary Grand Slam 2026.

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1. Dynamic Edge / When to Call Mate

Discussion Topic

Consistent application is needed when managing nage-waza action near and outside the contest area, particularly when determining whether an active scoring sequence should continue or the action should be stopped once both athletes are outside and the sequence has concluded.

Directionelayed / Application Guidance

An action that begins inside the contest area should be allowed to continue naturally when there is clear continuity, even if both athletes temporarily move completely outside it. This continuity may include dynamic exchanges involving multiple kaeshi-waza or renraku-waza, as well as transitions between tachi-waza and newaza, provided the action began inside the contest area.

Do not call Mate solely because all four feet temporarily move outside the contest area while the action is still developing.

Once both athletes are completely outside the contest area and the action has clearly ended, Mate should be called promptly. This prevents a new action from beginning outside the contest area and avoids situations in which a score is awarded only to be cancelled.

Key Principle

Treat edge situations dynamically. Allow legitimate, continuous judo to develop while recognizing when the action has clearly ended outside the contest area. During dynamic edge situations, the action may move completely outside the contest area and then return inside. Mate should not be called when there is clear evidence of continuous, dynamic action moving outside the contest area and then back inside.

Additional Note:

Brian clarified that an athlete temporarily lifting the only foot remaining inside the contest area: as in newaza, if that foot is lifted while inside, the athlete would not be considered outside unless the foot lands completely outside.

2. Newaza Developing From an Edge Situation

Discussion Topic

In a match, an athlete who was leading in score backed toward the edge and eventually moved outside the contest area in a manner that appeared defensive, although the defensive intent was not sufficiently clear.

As the sequence developed, Mate was called in connection with a potential penalty for leaving the contest area. Meanwhile, the action continued into newaza and Osaekomi was established.

The IJF Commission emphasized that the basis for a penalty should be clearly established before stopping a positive newaza progression. When the basis for the penalty is not yet sufficiently

clear, consideration should be given to allowing the positive action to continue, even when the sequence has moved outside the contest area.

Direction Relayed / Application Guidance

Because the action began while the athletes were legitimately inside the contest area and developed naturally into newaza, the resulting newaza should have been allowed to continue. The preferable course would have been to call Osaekomi rather than Mate. The athlete may have shown signs of defensiveness before going outside, but if those signs were not clear enough to justify a penalty at that point, moving outside the contest area should not, by itself, provide a clearer basis for that penalty.

Key Principle

If the apparently defensive action had remained inside the contest area, there would have been no reason to stop the Osaekomi. Accordingly, the Osaekomi should not have been stopped simply because the action progressed outside the contest area.

3. Irregular / Unconventional Gripping

Discussion Topic

The current rules permit a wide variety of unconventional grips, including pocket-type grips, pistol grips, inside-sleeve grips, two hands on one side, belt grips, and others, provided they are used positively.

The feedback relayed was that athletes have increasingly exploited this flexibility by using unconventional grips defensively. Such use of unconventional grips should be penalized.

Direction Relayed / Application Guidance

Referees should evaluate how the grip is being used, not simply whether the grip itself is permitted. When an unconventional grip is established, it should be used positively. Referees should be diligent in penalizing athletes who maintain these grips without positive intent or a meaningful attack.

The intent of the rule was not to allow athletes to establish a permitted grip and then maintain it without using it positively.

Key Principle

Referees should physically practice different gripping situations together to develop a more consistent understanding of when a grip is being used positively, when sufficient time has been allowed for positive action, when the situation has become defensive, and when Shido is appropriate. This type of practical, scenario-based training may be useful for USA Judo referee development.

Additional Note:

Referees should not allow excessive time before determining that an unconventional grip is

being used negatively. This may contribute to delayed penalties, prolonged negative gripping situations, and unnecessarily prolonged Golden Scores.

4. Walking Outside the Contest Area

Discussion Topic

The updated interpretation of the contest area boundary allows for more dynamic judo near the edge when legitimate judo action causes the athletes to move outside the contest area. However, athletes have also begun exploiting this flexibility by deliberately walking outside.

Direction Relayed / Application Guidance

If an athlete leaves the contest area as a result of legitimate judo action, there should be no penalty solely for crossing the boundary. If no legitimate action causes the athlete to leave the contest area and the athlete deliberately walks outside, the athlete should be penalized.

Guidance was relayed that referees may allow some leniency on the first occurrence when there is doubt, while remaining prepared to penalize subsequent occurrences.

One or both athletes may be penalized, depending on who is responsible for deliberately walking outside the contest area.

Key Principle

Do not stop the contest solely because one athlete has stepped outside the contest area. Consider the actions that led to the transition into the safety area. Referees should allow the action to continue until both athletes are outside, while also considering whether the athlete initiating the positive action retains an advantage and has a realistic opportunity to complete the technique that began inside the contest area.

Determine whether legitimate judo action caused the athletes to leave the contest area or whether one or both athletes deliberately walked outside. If one or both athletes deliberately walked outside, the responsible athlete or athletes should receive Shido.

Additional Note:

The liberalized edge rule is intended to protect legitimate judo action. It does not permit athletes to escape or deliberately walk outside the contest area without consequence.

5. Overall Concern Discussed: Consistency of Application of the Rules

Summary

A recurring issue was noted in the application of the contest-area boundary interpretation. Brian indicated that this was especially noticeable during the events in South America and remained a point of emphasis during events in Switzerland and Hungary.

Expectation Discussed

The expectation is not merely that referees know the rule, but that the interpretation be applied consistently across the referee corps.

6. Overall Theme Discussed: Positive Judo

Summary

Several of the topics discussed reflect a broader theme in the feedback relayed from IJF supervisors and directors: allow legitimate judo to develop, avoid unnecessary interruption of positive action, and do not allow athletes to exploit rules intended to encourage positive judo. This applies particularly to dynamic edge situations, unconventional gripping, deliberate movement outside the contest area, transitions into newaza, and defensive behavior. Referees should distinguish between athletes legitimately using the rules to create positive judo and athletes using those same rules to avoid engagement.