

## Basic Wrestling Information

*by Bill Campbell*

Endorsed by: USA WRESTLING

Wrestling is perhaps the purest form of athletic competition to exist in the realm of organized sports. There are no bats or balls, or pucks or sticks. No pads or helmets or jerseys. There's no time to rethink strategy, regroup, or even to catch your breath. There's only you, and your opponent of equal weight and size. Experience, preparation and the will to succeed will determine the victor. There's no doubt about it, wrestling tops the list of intense, highly-competitive sports.

Wrestling involves a unique balance of practically every aspect of physical and psychological conditioning. Strength is as important as stamina. Speed as technique, strategy as intensity, and power as is coordination. However, it's not always the natural athlete that ultimately succeeds in the sport - it's the natural competitor.

Kids that are strong for their weight, well coordinated and naturally aggressive are usually more successful early on in the sport. However, it's the highly competitive kids that really enjoy the sport, that eventually achieve the highest levels of success. True competitors come in all shapes and sizes, and in varying degrees of natural talent. Many of the best wrestlers the world has ever seen, such as John Smith, Dan Gable and Dave Schultz were not star athletes. They are and were ordinary people with an extraordinary competitive drive.

Although it is wise for parents and coaches to de-emphasize winning, victories can be extremely gratifying because of the strong sense of personal accomplishment. The effort put forth in practice and preparation is apparent in competition, and not lost in a team effort. This aspect of wrestling can be a great motivator and can develop a person's work ethic, self-confidence, and ability to achieve in all areas of life. Wrestling is great for exposing the "champion" within most any kid, but especially with those that love to compete.

### **How does wrestling compare with team sports such as soccer, baseball and basketball?**

Wrestling is considered an individual sport, but includes many of the benefits of team sports. Wrestling differs from most team sports in that during competition, athletes must rely entirely on their own individual abilities for success. Those that dedicate the time and effort will eventually achieve at a level directly proportionate to the investment they have made - even if their teammates prepare and perform at a different level. Wrestlers also develop an appreciation and respect for teammates that have been through the same challenges, and a strong sense of belonging and camaraderie with teammates and other wrestlers.

### **What physical effects can the sport of wrestling have on children?**

Sports offer opportunities for children to improve their strength, flexibility and coordination, while having fun. Most sports activities rely more on some muscle groups and less on others. For example, most sports focus primarily on pushing motions (leg/arm extension) such as throwing, hitting, kicking, jumping and running.

Experts believe that unilateral (equal emphasis on all muscle groups) physical development is especially important in young athletes. Isolated development at an early age, over a long period, increases the risk of injury and limits long-term foundational growth. Swimming, gymnastics and wrestling are among the few sports that engage both pulling and pushing muscle groups.

Of all the sports choices a parent and child can make, wrestling is perhaps the best sport for overall physical development because it involves all muscle groups, and requires the greatest balance of athletic skill. In other words, wrestling does more to improve basic things such as strength, balance, speed, agility and intensity, and is not as specialized as most other common sports.

### **Does wrestling teach or promote aggressive or violent behavior?**

Aggressiveness? Yes. Violence? No. Wrestling is often referred to as the toughest sport, and in many ways it is, but it is certainly not violent, nor does it lead to unruly or destructive behavior.

One of the factors that make wrestling so different from most other sports is that wrestling involves head-to-head competition. Each wrestler's efforts work in direct opposite from each other as in a tug-of-war contest. Success in wrestling requires the ability to attack, as well as the ability to stop your opponent's attack. The same factors apply with boxing and martial arts, but an attack in wrestling is nonviolent. Wrestling does not permit opponents to strike one another, and imposes strict penalties or disqualification for violent behavior. In essence, wrestling is unique in the fact that it can be very aggressive without being violent. The objective is not to destroy or harm one's opponent, but to out-manuever them and to gain control.

The intensity with which wrestlers compete increases with age and experience. Kids wrestling, especially the younger age groups, is not nearly as intense as high school or college wrestling. It's common for new wrestlers to feel somewhat intimidated at first, not knowing how they compare with other wrestlers, but that is soon overcome. Wrestling, perhaps more than any other sport, is a great for building confidence while retaining a healthy dose of humility. The long-term result is that it develops the champion from within, and leads to greater success both on and off the mat, and does not turn kids into bullies or thugs.

### **Is wrestling a "dangerous" sport?**

There is a common misperception among the non-wrestling public that wrestling is a very dangerous sport. Perhaps it's the aggressive nature of the sport, association with "Pro Wrestling", or perhaps fear of the unknown. Several studies have been conducted in recent years that show wrestling to be safer than many more common sports including football, ice hockey and gymnastics. Most notable in these reports, is wrestling's low percentage of serious, permanent and life-threatening injury in relation to other sports. A quote from USA Wrestling Club Organizing Guide has the following to say about Risk of Injury:

"Wrestling is a contact sport and injuries will occur. As would be expected, wrestling has more injuries than tennis and swimming, but most wrestling injuries are minor, consisting of sprains and strains. Wrestling has fewer serious injuries than football, basketball or ice hockey. There is a lesser chance of getting

seriously hurt when wrestling than when riding in a car, skateboarding or riding a dirt bike."

Safety factors in some ways unique to wrestling include:

- Rules, regulations, and state certified officials.
- The high ratio of officials to athletes (one for every two).
- Greater strength and flexibility as a result of more emphasis on practice and preparation.
- Competitors are matched by age and weight.

Perhaps the most notable difference with respect to the risk of injury, is the lack of high-impact collision that occurs in most other common sports. Wrestlers do collide, but never at great momentum or speeds as can happen with sports that involve running such as football, baseball, soccer, hockey and basketball. Also, overuse injuries from highly repetitive motions such as pitching are virtually non-existent in youth wrestling because of the variety of movement, and there is no risk of injury from hard objects such as bats, sticks, balls or pucks. On the other hand, wrestlers are more susceptible to some communicable skin infections such as ringworm, but these incidents are quite rare, and can be prevented with the proper precautions, such as washing the mat and showering after practice.

### **Can wrestling have an effect on character development?**

Success factors in sports, or anything for that matter, are part God-given (i.e. height and size) and part acquired (i.e. endurance). Success in wrestling depends most on acquired factors, and unlike most other sports, wrestling does not favor athletes of any particular height, size, weight, muscle type, race or social class, and does not rely on superior vision or hearing.

Wrestlers learn, by the nature of the sport, that long-term success has much more to do with the investment made than the "natural" gifts one is given. Wrestlers learn the value of preparation and hard work, and the role it plays in achieving one's goals. Wrestling provides real-life experiences that build and strengthen the following character traits:

- Self Reliance
- Mental Toughness
- Work Ethic
- Competitive Spirit
- Responsibility
- Self Discipline
- Goal Orientation
- Confidence

### **The parent's role**

Wrestling can be relatively demanding, not only for the wrestler, but also for the parent. Wrestling clubs typically hold practice sessions two, and sometimes three times per week, in the evening, after the high school practice is over.

Some tournaments are a good distance from home, and usually require an early start. There are other responsibilities as well, ranging from fund raising activities to helping with tournaments or participating in other team activities. The parent's role, however, extends beyond such tasks. Matches and practice sessions offer

new and unique learning opportunities for young athletes. Involved parents spot these opportunities and make the most of them.

Here's some additional do's and don'ts:

- Don't impose your ambitions or expectations on your child. Remember that wrestling is your child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for each individual. Don't judge your child's progress based on the performance of other athletes and don't push them based on what you think they should be doing.
- Be supportive no matter what. There is only one question to ask your child, "Did you have fun?" If meets and practices are not fun you should not force them to participate.
- Do not coach your child. Your job is to support, love and hug your child no matter what. Conflicting advice and criticism work against the coach's efforts and only serve to confuse and de-motivate your child. If you feel you have the experience and ability to contribute to the team as a coach, volunteer your services through the proper channels.
- Acknowledge your child's fears. Their opponents appear to be much more intimidating through their eyes than through the eyes of a grown-up. Consider their perspective and don't expect them to compete with the confidence and mental toughness of a seasoned expert.
- Do not criticize the officials. Unless you have been there, you have no idea how challenging officiating can be. Expect that in some matches your child could lose as a result of an error on the part of an official or scorekeeper. That's life. Help your child to understand that the official does their best to score the match fairly, and that it is important that we respect the ruling of the officials regardless of how we feel about the situation.