

2005 SECOND EDITION

# PARENT'S GUIDE



TO  
\* YOUTH \*  
WRESTLING

An Official Publication of USA Wrestling  
by Bill Campbell

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# FORWARD

*Of the many sports in which your child your child can participate, Wrestling is perhaps the most misrepresented, misunderstood, and underrated. The ratio of participation to public awareness is remarkably lopsided.*

*Each year hundreds of thousands of kids participate in this sport, yet the average person knows as much about wrestling as they might know about rugby or polo -- which combined, involve far fewer athletes.*

*The purpose of this guide is to generate new interest and awareness among parents whose children want to participate in this exciting and rewarding sport.*

*Hopefully, this guide will help expose the myths and uncover the benefits wrestling has to offer, and most importantly, help parents understand how this unique sport best compliments other sports choices their child makes.*

*If your child is about to become a “wrestler” and this is your first real experience with this sport, you will want to know what is happening as you watch from the bleachers, what to expect as the match progresses, and how to react when your child comes off the mat. This guide provides this information and more and is the first step toward maximizing the benefit your child may experience as they explore this new and exciting sport.*

**“AFTER YOU HAVE  
WRESTLED,  
EVERYTHING ELSE  
IN LIFE IS EASY”,  
DAN GABLE,  
OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL  
WINNER AND  
WRESTLING LEGEND**

# INTRODUCTION

What is it about wrestling that makes it so different from other sports? It is a sport that is virtually non-existent in the sports media, practically never the topic of conversation among sports enthusiasts, and typically dismissed as something akin to the theatrical, so-called "professional" version of the sport.



It's not that the sport is that rare or unusual. Of the more than 80 sports tracked by the NFHS (National Federation of High Schools), wrestling is the sixth most popular and consistently draws well over 200 thousand high school participants each school year. Wrestling is also alive and well at the collegiate, national, international and Olympic levels. Those not directly involved with wrestling do not see or experience this first-hand. If you did not come from a "wrestling family" and have not wrestled or been close to someone who has, then your perception of the sport was most likely formed from things you have heard, a few matches you may have seen in school, and some of the associations you might draw with so-called "professional" wrestling.

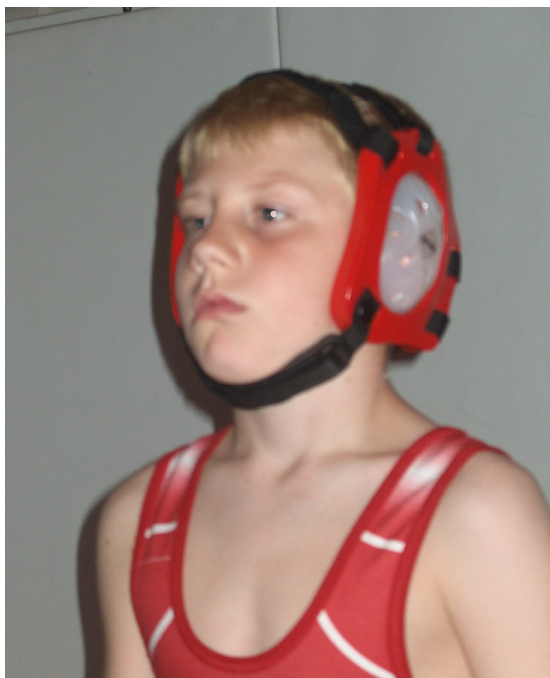
Now, with a child interested in the sport, you might have some concerns about your child fitting in or worse yet, if they really like it, becoming a "wrestler".

Will he be losing weight? Will he become more aggressive or cocky? What if he gets hurt? Do I have to worry about cauliflower ear or ringworm...yuck! Will he have to wear those wimpy looking tights? How will I know what to say or when to cheer...I know nothing about this sport. Why can't we just stick to basketball or hockey?

If you have thoughts like this you are not alone. This guide is for you and for any parent that wants to know more about the sport. You will learn what wrestling is really about and how your child can benefit from the experience. This guide also addresses specific concerns and gives you enough basic information so that you know what to expect as the season progresses. Wrestling can be a very rewarding and positive experience for both the parent and child. This guide will get you started in the right direction.

## THE WRESTLER MENTALITY

To the uninitiated wrestling may seem pretty intense and brutal. Most everybody has heard a story or two about a wrestler so obsessed with winning that they went to extreme measures to prepare for competition. Wrestling is pretty intense...how will my child survive, and if he does, is that really the part of his personality that needs to be developed?



Wrestling can spark the competitive drive and over time, wrestlers can become very focused and intense, but this is a commonly misunderstood aspect of the sport. Many very successful wrestlers do not fit this mold, and those that do, are not the loud, bragging, in-your-face “professional” wrestling type. If you were to meet some of the most intense wrestlers off the mat, surprisingly, you would most likely find them to be quiet, respectful, and although confident, in many ways humble.

So how will your child survive on the mat?

What's going to happen when they have to face someone bigger, older or more experienced? Eventually this will happen. Sooner or later every wrestler gets beat and for most it is a steep uphill battle right from the start. If you are OK with this and your child is OK with this then you are off to a great start. Nobody likes losing but the wrestling mentality is to turn a loss into a new challenge. That does not mean that if a wrestler cries that they are not cut out for the sport. The point is that as a parent you do not need to be concerned about how well your child will do. If they enjoy it and want to continue despite losing they will not only survive, but they will eventually succeed. Differences in natural ability diminish over time. It is the ability to see a loss as a challenge and forge on that really makes the wrestler.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Assumptions about the unknown and stereotyping have served to create a public perception that is far from the truth. The “public picture” has enough negatives to deter most any parent but you can rest assured that reality unveils a different, much more positive picture.

Public Perception	Reality
Wrestling attracts the more simple-minded, physical athlete. Wrestlers are the epitome of the “dumb jock”.	Accomplishment in wrestling is often accompanied by high academic achievement. Wrestling technique is extremely complex and mentally challenging. Match strategy is an important aspect of live competition.
Wrestling is one of the crudest forms of a sport involving nothing more than a battle of strength and will.	A wrestling match has the strategy of a game of chess with an unlimited number of constantly changing possibilities. Technique, balance, speed and confidence are all just as important as strength. Technique is as important and refined at top levels as it is in gymnastics or any other complex sport.
Wrestling has little or no entertainment, societal or cultural value.	When spectators know the competitors and understand the sport, wrestling can be very exciting. Wrestling does not favor any particular race, culture, size or stature and is popular in most other countries. Wrestling is also the oldest form of organized sports and it builds character that contributes to one’s ability to become a responsible member of society.
Wrestling is dangerous. There’s a high incidence of injury, excessive weight loss, cauliflower ear and ringworm.	Wrestling is not risk-free, but this level of concern is typically fear of the unknown. You can learn more about these concerns later in this guide.
Real wrestling is in many way similar to the WWE “Professional” wrestling.	In virtually every respect real wrestling is the exact opposite of the WWE. Read on to learn more.

## PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

The origin of professional wrestling dates back to the early 1900's at a time when promoters decided to enhance the entertainment value of the real thing. They found that by adding a plot, a ring, some interesting characters and a bit of drama, they were able to improve the entertainment value and ultimately the draw at the box office. Real wrestling and pro wrestling continued on different paths, and today, they represent different extremes in virtually all respects. Here's a side-by-side comparison.

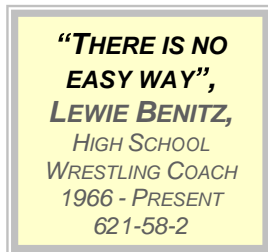
<b>The Actual Sport of Wrestling</b>	<b>WWE "Professional Wrestling"</b>
Based on self-discipline, hard work, skill and determination.	Based on theatrics, entertainment value and shock factor.
Conducted on a mat with regulation shoes, kneepads and headgear.	Conducted in a ring with boots and outrageous costumes.
Physically demanding, but relatively safe and non-violent. Does not involve or even tolerate actions intended to cause injury.	Violent in nature with contestants depicting punching, kicking, body slams, etc.
World-class wrestlers utilize skills, strength and endurance developed over a lifetime of practice and hard work.	Showcase events typically involve participants with no amateur (real) wrestling experience.

Professional wrestling attracts a different audience and has created an image problem for the real version of the sport, but two recent Northwestern graduates have set out to change all that. Toby Willis and Matt Case launched Real Pro Wrestling which debuted on national television in March 2005. RPW is a league of eight teams competing head-to-head at seven different weight classes. If Toby and Matt have their way, RPW will continue to gain in popularity and ultimately undo some of the misconceptions created by WWE.

## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Ask anybody that has wrestled for a good number of years, while also participating in other sports, which sport offered the most in the area of character development. Wrestling is an extremely difficult sport. Its survivors have learned that effort and attitude really do drive accomplishment more than natural talent, ability, luck or circumstance. They have developed a strong work ethic, resilience and sense of responsibility for their own destiny, and a lasting inner-strength and quiet confidence. Wrestling is not about who can beat who. It is about commitment and drive. It is about becoming the best you can possibly be. It is the humility that comes from discovering your limits and the sense of accomplishment that comes from ultimately surpassing them. It is about setting goals, self-discipline and delayed gratification. Wrestling is the blueprint for overcoming life's challenges, and the learning ground where these principles are tried and proven.

This may sound a bit idealistic, and in a way, maybe it is. Not every wrestler benefits from the sport in this way. Changes like this do not happen overnight – or even in a year in most cases. Other sports offer many of the same benefits, but wrestling, because of its one-on-one nature and non-violent high-stakes outcome, is the ideal learning ground for these life lessons and this is why it has the greatest potential for having a profound impact.



The factors that set wrestling apart in this respect are:

**Individual Sport** – There is a direct link between the commitment and effort one makes and the degree to which that effort leads to success in live competition. There are team dynamics in wrestling but they do not mask or distort the connection between effort and outcome.

**High-Stakes** – The satisfaction of success and sense of accomplishment can be high with most any sport, but very few sports expose their competitor to the degree that wrestling does. Wrestlers have a lot on the line. All eyes are on them when they compete. A mistake is not hidden among the team, and a win or loss can be a very personal thing. Getting beat in a wrestling match with your girlfriend, father or coach looking on is generally a bigger letdown than coming in second in a race.

**Non-Violent** – Wrestling is a sport of control – not violence. The objective does not involve physical harm or disabling an opponent as with boxing or some forms of martial arts.



**Tangible Outcome** – There is a point system in wrestling such that outcome need not be determined by “judging”. Some sports, due to their nature, require “judging”. When associating effort with outcome, a clearer connection is made when a point system can be used.

This unique combination of characteristics makes wrestling the ultimate learning ground for many life lessons. Learning through experience can take time but it is reasonable to think that a season of wrestling can have a positive impact in at least one of the following areas with even the first year wrestler.

- Self Reliance
- Self Discipline
- Self Confidence
- Self Respect
- Respect for Others
- Responsibility
- Work Ethic
- Competitive Spirit
- Goal Orientation
- Mental Toughness
- Drive and Determination
- Camaraderie and Sportsmanship

## HOW DOES WRESTLING COMPARE WITH TEAM SPORTS SUCH AS SOCCER, BASEBALL AND BASKETBALL?

Wrestling differs from most team sports in that during competition, each athlete must rely entirely on their own individual abilities for success. There are no “assists” or stronger players there to receive your pass or make a block. With wrestling you have no choice but to meet adversity head-on and you must summons your own strengths in order to prevail.

In addition to the individual characteristics of the sport, there is also a strong and somewhat unique team element to wrestling. Other sports have their superstars that can carry the team and are responsible for scoring the majority of points. Each wrestler on a high school wrestling team, however, has the exact same point scoring potential and responsibility and the camaraderie that develops among teammates is every bit as strong as that of any other sport.

Other team sports develop interactive player-to-player skills such as position play, passing and blocking, but wrestling offers a unique mix of individual and team benefits not found in any other sport. The sense of accomplishment in wrestling, in the words of one ex-football player exceeds even that of playing on a Super Bowl-winning NFL team as he reminisces about his victory in the high school state championships. Overcoming great difficulty while relying only on your own strengths builds pride, inner-confidence and that realization that success is only limited by effort and attitude.

## 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. Not only does wrestling improve balance, speed, agility and intensity, but it strengthens virtually all muscle groups from hips, legs, torso and upper body, but also neck and grip strength.

Wrestling is the sport that can dramatically improve one's ability to perform in other sports. A ten-year old, for example, who was considered by coaches to be a slow base runner, later won a large and very competitive multi-county base running contest after only one season of wrestling. Many soccer and football coaches are known to recruit wrestlers because of their superior athletic capabilities, and parents often notice improvements in athletic ability after a season of wrestling.

## DOES WRESTLING TEACH OR PROMOTE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR?

One of the most common misconceptions of this sport is that it is a violent or extremely aggressive dog-eat-dog sport. Those that share this view have a complete misunderstanding of the sport. The objective is to outscore one's opponent – not to inflict pain, injure or harm an opponent in any way. Wrestlers in general have a great deal of respect for their opponents, knowing full well what they have been through and how much they both desire to succeed. Compassion is apparent even at the highest levels of competition in facial expressions, embrace and occasional tears shed knowing how an opponent feels when it is your hand that is raised.

One of the factors that makes 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 non-violent. Wrestling does not permit opponents to strike one another, and imposes strict penalties or disqualification for violent or even unsportsmanlike 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.



Sportsmanship is promoted in wrestling in ways that go beyond what other sports practice. Youth wrestlers are not only required to shake hands before *and* after competition, but they are expected to shake the hand of their opponent's coach, win or lose, as they leave the mat. High school wrestling is perhaps the only sport to actually deduct team points for even minor sportsmanship infractions such as a derogative comment to an official, throwing one's headgear in frustration or exposing one's chest by removing any portion of one's singlet (uniform) before leaving the mat.

The intensity with which wrestlers compete increases with age and experience. Youth 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, leads to greater success both on and off the mat, and contrary to what some might think, it does not turn kids into bullies or thugs.

## IS WRESTLING TOO INTENSE FOR CHILDREN?

Some parents feel that wrestling is too intense for young kids, and that it is better suited for high school. Denying a child the opportunity to participate in wrestling until high school greatly reduces their chance of success. Wrestling is a sport involving very complex technique that can take many years to master. A great high school athlete with little or no wrestling experience has little or no chance against an 8 or 10 year veteran. Some kids can close this gap by their last year of high school, but like most sports these days, starting younger seems to be the norm.

There are two entry points prior to high school — kid's clubs and middle school wrestling. Both are very accommodating for new wrestlers. Age and maturity level is not a factor by the time kids are in middle school, but at the club level, kids can enter wrestling as young as 4 or 5 years of age.



There is no standard age at which a child becomes mature enough to handle the rigors of practice and competition. Some might be ready at three, while others might not develop an interest or capacity for wrestling until their early teens. The best approach is to introduce kids to the sport at a time and pace that is consistent with their interest level, backing off when necessary, and allowing more participation as their interest grows. In any case, it is important NOT to involve very young kids in a highly competitive program.

Parents with young wrestlers should check that their club can properly accommodate young wrestlers with a separate, less competitive regimen involving more fun, "tumbling" types of activities, with virtually no emphasis on any of the serious, more competitive aspects of the sport.

## 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 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."*

The following factors serve to differentiate wrestling from other sports in this regard and contribute to wrestling's safety record:

- 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
- Rules, regulations, and state certified officials

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 with great momentum or at 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.

Wrestling injuries can and do occur, but are more of a factor at the collegiate and international levels where match intensity is much higher. Most injuries occur during periods of horseplay or unsupervised activities such as before or after practice or competition. Parents and coaches can reduce this risk through proper planning and preparation.

Some parents may have heard of wrestlers contracting ringworm or suffering from “cauliflower ear”. Ringworm (tinea corporis) is a fungus (not a worm or parasite as the name implies) that appears as a dime-sized circular ring or rash that can last for days or weeks if not treated. Athlete’s foot and jock itch are other more commonly known forms of the exact same fungus, just in different places on the body. Ringworm is contagious and can originate from the soil outdoors and from household pets. The fungus can be transferred to the wrestling mat when people wearing street shoes walk across the mat.



Ringworm is not a serious condition, but it can spread from wrestler to wrestler fairly easily. This is why wrestling coaches like to prevent parents and other onlookers from crossing a wrestling mat wearing street shoes. Other precautions include after-practice showers, daily cleaning of headgear and workout clothes, and regular

mat washing.

Referee’s will also check for ringworm prior to competition and can disqualify a wrestler without a doctor’s permission if ringworm is found. There are also other skin conditions that can be transmitted through wrestling but ringworm accounts for well over 90% of cases and the chances of getting ringworm are actually quite low. It is estimated that less than one percent of wrestlers will contract ringworm in the course of a season.

Cauliflower ear is a permanent disfigurement of the outer ear that occurs from the build-up of scar tissue from repetitive impact to the ear. It is non-existent at the youth level and extremely rare at the high school level. Collegiate wrestlers that wrestle day in and day out without wearing headgear will gradually develop cauliflower ear, but even at the collegiate level it is not the norm. Cauliflower ear is simply not something parents need to be concerned about – especially at the youth level.

## WOULD MY CHILD BE REQUIRED OR EXPECTED TO LOSE WEIGHT?

There is a stereotype that exists of wrestling coaches so hell-bent on winning that they force their varsity wrestlers to cut excessive weight. The stereotypical coach is so competitive and ego-centric that their only focus is team victory and they are willing to sacrifice the health and well-being of a few wrestlers to achieve victory. Public perception created this stereotype -- it is not based on reality.

The vast majority of wrestling coaches are coaching not for their own egotistical glory, but because they know the great positive impact wrestling can have on *each* of their wrestlers' lives. The most competitive coaches are generally well informed and know the negative effects of excessive weight cutting and how it can seriously impact performance. There is an ideal weight for every athlete and it is not the lowest possible weight. The competitive coach helps educate their wrestlers about the healthy ways to achieve optimal body weight. Ultimately, the choice to lose or gain weight is the wrestler's – not the coach's.

Weight control is a part of wrestling, but it is virtually non-existent at the youth level and only occurs within state standards at the high school and collegiate levels. Wrestlers that choose to cut weight learn how to effectively manage their weight and learn the life lesson that their weight is a matter of self-discipline rather than a condition bestowed upon them over which they have no control. Managing one's weight while enduring the rigors of practice and competition is arguably the most difficult of all sports endeavors requiring an incredible amount of self-discipline and resilience.

Such challenges build character and mental toughness that last a lifetime. Wrestling is not without the exception of the few that find ways around the system and take weight loss to unhealthy levels. The occurrence of steroid use among Major League Baseball players is a more widespread problem, but it does not deter parents from signing their children up for little league.

Parents concerned about weight loss should know that state associations require that wrestlers are checked for proper hydration and minimum body fat standards prior to the start of the season. Wrestlers not meeting safe standards are disqualified for the entire season and those that pass the initial screening are restricted from competing at weights that would violate hydration and body fat safety restrictions. Testing is conducted by state-approved athletic trainers using scientifically-proven specific gravity and skin fold tests and there is an extensive amount of research supporting the decisions state associations make regarding weight loss guidelines.

## CAN WRESTLING BE AN AID IN SELF-DEFENSE?

Who would win in a fight between a world class boxer and a black belt kung-fu expert? How about an NFL linebacker versus a world-renowned jiu-jitsu champion? Opinions vary widely, but the truth of the matter is that each sport, or self-defense discipline, offers its own unique advantages that become more or less important depending on the situation. For example, boxing skills are quite valuable in a fistfight, but are practically useless if attacked from behind.

Most fight situations begin as a fist fight, but end up on the ground in a grappling contest with the better *wrestler* being the victor. Grappling, or wrestling skills, are actually more important in most self-defense situations, than the ability to punch or kick. The highly controversial sport of Ultimate Fighting proves this point.

Ultimate fighting, much like organized street fighting, began in 1993 with contestants of virtually every discipline. More than thirty forms of martial arts have been represented including everything from aikido to wing chun kung fu. Win/loss statistics compiled since inception list wrestling as the most effective discipline. Always able to take their opponent to the ground and remain in control, wrestlers with no other martial arts training fared extremely well against world renowned experts in Karate, Jiu-jitsu and other similar martial arts disciplines. Although wrestlers are relatively rare in the sport, past champions have included several excellent wrestlers such as Dan Severn and Mark Shultz, whom easily won matches against much bigger and stronger, internationally acclaimed martial arts champions.



Involvement in wrestling is a great way to build confidence and the ability to defend one's self, without resorting to the violent tactics inherent in most other forms of self-defense. Wrestling skills are a great asset in a schoolyard brawl or even a street fight, however, wrestling's non-violent nature does not prepare one for other aspects of self-defense such as disabling or disarming an assailant or the use of deadly force.



## IS WRESTLING ONLY FOR BOYS?

In the 1970's and early 1980's, with the exception of a few isolated incidents, wrestling was a male-only sport. Over the last ten years female participation has increased to the point that it is fairly common to find girls participating in youth and high school programs. Women's divisions have been created in U.S. and international Freestyle competition, and some tournaments are exclusively for women. Unlike Japan, where female participation equals and sometimes exceeds male participation, in the United States, there are still far fewer girls than boys, however, female involvement is growing rapidly in all respects.

Girls can benefit from wrestling just as boys can, but the social, mental and physical challenges can be much greater. In addition to the typical challenges of the sport, a female wrestler may feel singled out if she is the only girl on the team and she may be avoided in live competition because boys do not want to risk losing to a girl or may not feel right about being aggressive in a match against a girl. Girls also face greater physical challenges. Differences in strength can be negligible at young ages, but as children reach puberty, boys typically gain a significant strength advantage.

Overcoming these challenges requires great determination and mental toughness. Some girls have been able to develop the speed, technique, balance and agility needed to compete favorably even at the state level against stronger boys. Wrestling is a sport in which champions create their own recipe for success and girls are no exception.



Parents with daughters willing to accept these challenges should take the time to interview coaches and be sure they are satisfied with the coaching staff's acceptance and effectiveness in integrating girls into the program. If possible, it's best to select a team with other girls, or to join with a girlfriend.

## WHAT FORMS OF WRESTLING EXIST, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE?

Wrestling, like soccer, is an international sport, prevalent in virtually every major country in the world. The most common forms of wrestling are Folkstyle, Freestyle and Greco-Roman. All US-based high school and college scholastic wrestling is Folkstyle, which originated in the United States in the early 1900's. Folkstyle is unique to the United States, but Freestyle and Greco are the main staples of international competition and are now practiced at all ages in the United States as an adjunct to Folkstyle school or club based wrestling programs.

Folkstyle rules are established by the National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA] and the National Federation of State High School Associations. World and Olympic championships in Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling are conducted by FILA, the international governing body responsible for the administration and rule development of the sport. USA Wrestling conducts annual regional and national tournaments in all three styles for male and female wrestlers of all ages.

***“THERE ARE  
ABSOLUTELY NO  
SHORTCUTS. IT IS  
THAT SIMPLE.”***  
**JOHN SMITH,**  
*TWO-TIME OLYMPIC  
GOLD MEDAL WINNER,  
FOUR-TIME WORLD  
CHAMPION*

The differences between Freestyle, Folkstyle and Greco-Roman are subtle to the novice observer, but rather significant to the wrestler. There are differences in rules, objectives, scoring and strategy. Freestyle and Greco-Roman focus more on wrestling from the feet. They are identical except that Greco-Roman is limited to upper-body holds. Folkstyle, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on establishing and maintaining control and involves more mat wrestling.

Wrestlers advancing beyond the college level can compete in Freestyle and Greco-Roman World and Olympic competition, however there has been no true professional venue until the recent advent of the RPW (Real Pro Wrestling). Unless RPW is able to establish the sport of wrestling as a mainstream professional sport, it remains unrealistic for wrestlers to fantasize about aspiring to the level of notoriety and fame that so many other sports legend have achieved.

## WRESTLING NOTABLES

If Michael Jordan's success was on the wrestling mat instead of the basketball court, chances are that you would not even know his name, but here's some names you will know. These are examples of public figures that were also accomplished wrestlers:

- **U.S. Presidents** - *George Washington, Zachary Taylor, William Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, and Chester A. Arthur.*
- *Several well-known **Congressmen**, Senators, and other Statesmen and Military leaders including General Norman Schwarzkopf and Denny Hasserf, Speaker of the House.*
- *Several **Scientists** including Benjamin Franklin and Nobel prize winner Dr. Norman Borlaug.*
- *Several well known **actors** and **entertainers** including Jay Leno, Tom Cruise, Tony Danza, Kirk Douglas and Robin Williams.*
- *And quite a few other prominent people including a long list of **NFL Football players, CEO's and presidents** of major corporations.*

And then there are the legends within the sport such as Dan Gable, John Smith, Cael Sanderson, Rulon Gartner, Ken Chertow, Andy Rein, Brandon Slay, Dave Schultz, Bruce Baumgartner, Dennis Hall, Joe Williams, and the list goes on. Each is a story in itself of incredible drive, commitment and determination that equals or surpasses the sacrifices made by the greatest legends of any sport.

## WRESTLING HISTORY

Here's a good trivia question to spring at a party: "What is the oldest organized sport ever practiced?". You guessed it, Wrestling! No other sport even comes close. If your child chooses to wrestle you can tell them they are part of a tradition dating back fifteen thousand years as evidenced in cave drawings, ancient pottery and other artifacts.

Wrestling was later popular in Greek and Egyptian culture, and is prevalent in the architecture of many temples and tombs. Match results are recorded in Japan dating back to the year 22 BC. Wrestling was also a common element of Native American culture prior to the arrival of European settlers.

Wrestling was alive and well throughout American history and even included participants such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. In the 1920's wrestling drew record crowds in places like Madison Square Gardens with matches sometimes lasting hours or until one of the contestants would withdraw due to exhaustion. Wrestling, at that time, drew more spectators than any other sport.

## THE WRESTLING SEASON

The youth wrestling season for Folkstyle wrestling begins in November, December or January and generally runs until March. The Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling season begins in March and runs through July. Some of the most competitive programs also offer summer wrestling, however, the vast majority of youth wrestling is limited to the Folkstyle season.



The wrestling season can be organized differently, depending on whether your child is participating in a school program or an independent club. School sponsored wrestling typically involves after-school practice sessions with weekly meets and tournaments. Meets involve matches between the starting wrestlers from each of the two or more

schools. Standard weight classes apply to all teams and competitions. Competition exists within teams for starting positions.

Some school systems only offer wrestling at the high school level, however, private wrestling clubs can provide opportunities to participate at younger ages. Wrestling clubs typically hold practices two or three times per week and have anywhere from a few, to more than 100 wrestlers ranging in age from 4 to 14. Club participants do not compete for starting positions on the team because the vast majority of youth tournaments are open to all.

Club and tournament operation typically conform to guidelines of an affiliated state wrestling program. For example, most kids wrestling clubs in Wisconsin belong to the WWF (Wisconsin Wrestling Federation) which provides everything from insurance to state tournament competition, resulting in a high standard of organization, consistency and safety throughout the state.

## PRACTICES

Wrestling practices develop basic skills, technique, conditioning and perspective. Most practices start with stretching and warm-up activities. The mainstay consists of technique drills, live wrestling, conditioning and instruction. Fun and combative games are also used to break up the sessions or as a starting or ending activity.

Many kids and even parents fear the first practice not knowing how they will fare against friends and strangers or kids twice their size, but the first several practices often involve little or no live wrestling. Coaches know to match kids by size, age and ability and generally take care to see that new kids and parents are paired with other novices and know to take the transition to live wrestling gradually. Most kids will adapt to live competition quite naturally within two or three weeks.

## TOURNAMENTS

Once wrestlers have adapted to practices and learned the basic skills they will have opportunities to compete in tournaments or meets. Unless your child is participating on a school team, chances are that most if not all competition will be in the form of tournaments. Tournaments are held every weekend of the wrestling season. Depending on where you live, you should be able to find local tournaments. The club or team your child belongs to will typically organize a schedule, but unlike most team sports, participation at tournaments is discretionary.

The first course of events at youth wrestling tournaments is registration and weigh-in. Each wrestler must be weighed so brackets can be formed with kids of similar weight, age and experience level. Wrestling typically starts sixty to ninety minutes after weigh in, and is most often conducted in three rounds. Wrestlers are either called to a staging area and then directed to the mat, or assigned directly to a mat through a numbering system. Each wrestler will get two or more matches (usually three) depending on the type of bracket and the number of wrestlers. Between rounds there will be plenty of time to watch other matches or to hang out with friends.

Nearly all tournaments offer medals and/or trophies to the top (or sometimes all) places in the bracket. Awards are distributed at the scoring table or in a separate awards area, and wrestlers are generally free to leave after awards for their bracket are given out. Smaller tournaments drawing 250 to 350 participants typically finish up early in the afternoon. Larger tournaments can draw 500 or more wrestlers and tend to finish later in the afternoon. There are also national tournaments that draw as many as 2,000 participants and run for multiple days.

The bracketing process is always a mystery for parents of first year wrestlers. Most youth tournaments use a “blocked” approach, which simply means weigh-in cards are grouped by age and then sequenced by weight, and then separated into “blocks” of 4 or 8 wrestlers. The other factor in arranging brackets is to avoid situations where wrestlers with great differences in experience or ability end up in the same bracket. The same holds true for wrestlers from the same team. The bracketing challenge is to make the best of every situation so kids have the best experience on the mat, but it is inevitable that in any tournament there will be some brackets that are less than ideal, and therefore on some occasions, children from the same team will compete against each other, and wrestlers of different ability levels will meet. Nonetheless, with the right focus, tournaments can be a fun and exciting experience that both wrestler and parent will remember for some time.

### COMPETITION TIME

Most tournaments allow coaching from the edge of the mat, however, if a coach from your child's team is present it is their job to coach – not yours. In fact, some



tournaments restrict coaching to only state or USAW certified coaches. As anxious as you might be, especially if it's your child's first tournament, it's best to stay out of the picture and let the tournament organizers, your coach and ultimately your child make their way through this on their own.

Your job as a parent is to find anything that went right and to focus on that, win or lose. Coaches will critique a wrestler's performance if necessary and your child will only feel added pressure if they feel that a loss in your eyes is a bad thing. Remember that your child is learning how to become a champion and part of that lesson is about how to turn a loss into a learning experience.

## WRESTLING LINGO

Do you feel like an outsider talking to other wrestling parents? If your child decides to become a “wrestler” you will want to be able to talk the talk. Here’s enough basic terminology to get you started...

**Match:** This is when two wrestlers compete. *Do not call this a “fight”.*

**Meet:** This is when the wrestlers of each of two teams face off one match at a time with the team points being awarded for each match. Meets are also referred to as “duals” or “dual meets”. *Do not refer to a meet as a “game”.*

**Stick:** This is slang for a pin.

**Tech:** This is short for technical fall, which is to win the match by gaining a lead of at least fifteen points.

**Top, Bottom or Neutral:** These are the starting positions for Folkstyle wrestling. Neutral is the standing position in which the match starts.

**Defer:** This is to forfeit the opportunity to choose a starting position at the start of the second period so that you have the opportunity to choose at the start of the last (third) period.

**Double or Single:** These are the basic moves used to take down an opponent.

**Sprawl:** This is the basic defense to a single or double. The defending wrestler jumps back while lowering their weight on their opponent’s shoulders.

**Bridge:** As a last resort to avoid being pinned, using his legs and neck strength, the wrestler forms an arch, and pivoting on his head, flips over to his stomach.

**Half or Half Nelson:** The basic move used for turning an opponent from his belly side to his back side in an attempt to score a pin.

## FOLKSTYLE WRESTLING BASICS

**Objective:** The primary objective in Folkstyle wrestling is to gain control of your opponent and to ultimately pin your opponent by holding your opponent's back (both shoulder blades simultaneously) to the mat for a period of at least two seconds. Most matches end before either wrestler is able to score a pin. The secondary objective is to score more points than your opponent so that you can win by decision in the absence of a pin.

**Match Basics:** Wrestling matches consist of three periods. Periods can vary in length from one minute in duration for younger age groups, to as long as three minutes for college wrestling. Either wrestler can win the match at any time if they are able to pin their opponent or develop a lead of more than 14 points. Otherwise, the wrestler that can accumulate the most points by the end of the third period (or after overtime in the case of a tie) wins the match.

There are only two positions from which referees start, or continue a match. The first is **neutral position**, with both wrestlers standing and facing each other. The other is the **referee's position**, where one wrestler starts on his hands and knees down on the mat, and the other starts on top, behind and in control. The first period always begins in the neutral position. Each wrestler has their choice in one of the remaining periods, to choose to start from top or bottom referee's position, or in the neutral position. If the action must be stopped before the end of a period, the referee restarts the wrestlers in the starting position that best reflects the position the wrestlers were in when the action was stopped.

**Scoring:** The scoring system is rather simple. **Takedowns** (when from a neutral or standing position one wrestler is able to bring the other to the mat and gain control) are worth two points. **Escapes** (when the bottom wrestler is able to break free from the top wrestler and revert back to a neutral position) are worth one point. **Reversals**, (when a wrestler on the bottom is able to reverse the control so that the opponent is on the bottom) are worth two points.

**Back points** (also called near fall) are awarded when one wrestler comes close to pinning the other (i.e. exposing the other wrestler's back) and are worth two or three points depending on the length of time that the opponent's back is exposed. In addition, **penalty points** can be awarded when the opposing wrestler performs illegal moves or is penalized for excessive stalling.



**Sportsmanship:** Competition is conducted in a manner as to promote and require good sportsmanship. Competitors are expected to show respect to opponents, officials and coaches regardless of the outcome of their match. Both wrestlers are required to shake hands before and after the match. It is also common practice for each wrestler to shake the hand of their opponent's coach after the match. Sportsmanship violations can result in disqualification and a deduction of team points.

**Officials:** The referee's role is to award points as they are scored, insure safety, and start and stop competition. Officiating is primarily objective in nature, although judgment does come into play in situations where it is difficult to determine if point criteria has been met. High school and college referees and in many cases even youth referees are trained and certified.

**Equipment:** Basic wrestling equipment includes a headgear, wrestling shoes, and a singlet. Wrestling shoes offer more ankle support than the traditional shoe and are designed lightweight and tight to the foot to promote freedom of movement. Headgear can prevent outer ear injuries and bruises during practice and competition. The standard wrestling uniform, known as a singlet, is designed to fit snug to the body so that it does not restrict the movement of either wrestler. Kneepads are sometimes worn by choice.

## FREESTYLE AND GRECO-ROMAN WRESTLING BASICS

Freestyle and Greco-Roman styles of wrestling share the same primary objectives as Folkstyle – score as many points as possible, and pin your opponent if you can. The primary difference is with how points are awarded. Because of these differences, Freestyle and Greco-Roman forms of wrestling have different moves and strategies.

**Match Basics:** Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling matches can be only one or two periods depending on the age group and FILA guidelines. Periods always begin with both wrestlers in the neutral (standing) position. As with Folkstyle wrestling, the match can be stopped short of the time limit if either wrestler scores a pin or achieves technical superiority, which in Folkstyle and Greco-Roman wrestling is a lead of ten or more points.

After a takedown situation in which both wrestlers continue to wrestle down on the mat, known as the "par tarre" position, the bottom wrestler is not obligated to work for an escape or reverse as with Folkstyle wrestling. Instead, it is the responsibility of the top wrestler to work diligently to execute a hold that will expose their opponent's back. If the top wrestler is not immediately (officials allow about fifteen seconds) successful in doing this, the official will stop the match and re-start the wrestlers on their feet in the neutral position.

**Scoring:** Control of one's opponent is less of a concern in Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling. Back points are awarded more freely in that it is only necessary to turn your opponent's back within 90 degrees of the mat. Takedowns, escapes and reversals are awarded one point, unless there is exposure of the back, in which additional points are awarded. Unlike Folkstyle wrestling, it is not necessary to have control in order to score back points.

Other variations from Folkstyle scoring include the additional points that can be awarded for takedowns that result in back exposure. "Grand Amplitude" holds, in which an opponent is lifted from the mat and brought from a standing position directly to his or her back are good for five points.

**Sportsmanship:** As with Folkstyle wrestling, both Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling mandates sportsman-like conduct. In international competition, wrestlers are required to shake hands with their opponent *and* with the referee before and after the bout.

**Officials:** Officiating in Freestyle and Greco-Roman is performed in teams of one, two or three officials. When possible three officials are used. The referee who stands on the mat and controls the action with his/her whistle is assisted by a judge and a mat chairperson seated on opposite sides of the mat. All scoring must be agreed upon by at least two of the three officials.



**Equipment:** FILA permits, *but does not require*, the use of headgear in international Freestyle and Greco-Roman competition. In addition, wrestlers are required to wear either red or blue singlets, depending on their match pairing. Other than that, the equipment is identical to that used with Folkstyle wrestling.

## THE COACH'S ROLE

An effective coaching staff is essential in helping kids derive the greatest benefit from their involvement in the sport. Coaches need to be effective in planning, organizing and running practice sessions, and coaching mat-side during competition. They are also called upon in a host of other related activities, but most importantly, coaches should strive to create and maintain an environment in which the champion in every child can blossom.

It is the coach's responsibility to provide opportunities for growth, achievement and excellence that can lead to success on and off the mat. A good wrestling coach is effective in preparing his wrestlers for the challenges of competition and is able to instill positive values such as goal setting and self-discipline, while maintaining a high degree of enjoyment and fulfillment for the wrestlers.

In addition, coaches must be perceptive, flexible and creative enough to address individual needs. The ideal coach would also be a person wrestlers trust, look up to, learn from, and rely on for support. This is a lot to expect from a single person. It is perhaps more realistic to seek to build a coaching team of individuals that collectively offer these strengths and together have the time and ability to achieve positive results with each and every child.

## YOUR ROLE AS A PARENT

Hopefully you now see a different side to this sport. Wrestling is more than a crude, meaningless battle of strength and will. It is an opportunity to develop positive character traits, a chance for to gain confidence in their athletic abilities and a sport that will enable your child to meet and overcome new challenges. The possibilities are great but they come at a cost and part of that cost is the parent's responsibility.

The first step as a parent is to allow or even encourage your child to try the sport of wrestling. Set aside any reservations you might still have and support your child's decision to give wrestling a try and make the commitment to stick by their side even when things are not going as well as either you or your child would like. Take responsibility for seeing that your child takes advantage of all the practice time available to them. Success is rare without the opportunity to learn and develop the proper skills. Make the commitment to take your child to wrestling tournaments if they are ready to compete. You will need to be up early and should plan on spending the better part of the day with your wrestler on tournament days. Live competition will develop not only their skills, but also their ability to perform under pressure.

Most importantly, kids need support and encouragement. They need to be able to stake claim to something positive about themselves that they can build from in developing self-confidence. Parents can facilitate this process by identifying and reinforcing strengths while helping their child to see past their weaknesses. Your positive reinforcement as a perceptive and caring parent can be the single most significant influence in your child's athletic development and personal growth.

A famous Lao-tsu quote sums it up like this.

***"To see things in the seed, that is Genius."***

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

**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.

**Get involved.** Your club needs your help and support. Attend parent and club meetings to find out how you can help. And most importantly, show your child that you care by attending as many meets and tournaments as possible.

**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 score keeper. 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.

## USA WRESTLING AND YOUR CLUB

USA Wrestling supports and promotes amateur wrestling at all levels from youth programs to international and Olympic competition. USAW provides services to wrestling clubs and their individual participants, either directly, or through state organizations, fulfilling a variety of important needs.

### **USA Wrestling Mission Statement**

USA Wrestling, as the National Governing Body for wrestling in the United States, shall responsibly advocate, promote, coordinate and provide opportunities for amateur wrestlers to achieve their full human and athletic potential.

### **Coaches Education and Certification**

USA Wrestling plays an important role in the education and training of wrestling coaches throughout the United States. USA Wrestling's coaching education program offers training and certification for coaches of all levels from club coaches to Olympic coaches.

There are four levels of certification offered through USAW's National Coaches Education Program (NCEP); Copper, Bronze, Silver and Gold. The Copper Level program is designed for parents and club coaches, and the Bronze Level is a prerequisite for the Silver and Gold Levels required for coaching at the highest levels of competition.

**Copper Level certification** is mandatory for coaching mat-side at any USA Wrestling Regional and National Events. It is also the starting level for the beginning or part-time volunteer coach. This program is four hours long and covers wrestling and coaching basics. The Copper course uses materials from ACEP and the *Rookie Coaches Wrestling Guide* book, and can be offered locally at the club level. The cost is about \$25. Contact USA Wrestling or your State Chairperson for more information.

**Bronze Level certification** is the next echelon for coaches with a serious commitment to the sport. It is ten hours in duration and covers material for the advanced volunteer or the professional coach. This course is the minimum requirement to enter the National Coaching Pool. It includes four hours of wrestling technique and the book *Coach's Guide to Excellence*.

### **Liability and Sports Accident Insurance**

USA Wrestling chartered clubs, directors, volunteers, and membership programs include this valuable asset for your club and members.

### **USA Wrestler**

The official publication of USA Wrestling is sent to all members of USA Wrestling six times a year. This feature-packed publication appeals to wrestlers of all age groups, providing tournament listings, wrestling tips and technique, kid's perspectives and tournament results throughout the year. USA Wrestling is *the* wrestling publication for any wrestler, parent or fan.

### **National Competition**

Membership in USA Wrestling provides opportunities for wrestlers to participate in National Folkstyle, Freestyle and Greco-Roman age-group championships. Your state and club representatives can provide information about participation in these events.

### **Olympic Involvement**

Youth involvement serves as the grassroots foundation for wrestling at all levels throughout the United States. USA Wrestling not only serves the needs of youth clubs, but also organizes and conducts World and Olympic competitions and has been instrumental in positioning the USA as a world wrestling powerhouse.

*For more information about USA Wrestling programs and events see your club representative or contact USA Wrestling at 719-598-8181.*

## **THE WRESTLER – THE CHAMPION**

No one is born a champion. Every champion must pay the price, and the price is never small. It is the investment in one's future that builds the inner strength of the champion. This investment of time, sweat, effort, sore muscles, bruised egos, frustration, more sweat, exhaustion and at some times even tears. While others sit idle and enjoy short term pleasures, the champion is hard at work, focused on the future.

The sport demands everything you've got and often returns little. No dreams of fame and fortune. No glamour. No glory. No celebrity status. No chance of going pro. Yet the investment continues, with faith, trust and respect for the coach's vision amid the exhilaration and heartbreak of competition.

Wrestling has many champions. They are not just the first place winners, for it is not the victory that makes the champion – it is the investment. The greater the investment, the greater the champion.

*Wrestling is the sport of champions.*

**The Author:** *Bill Campbell is a former wrestler, avid wrestling fan and coach, and resides in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, where his three boys have the opportunity to be part of one of the successful wrestling programs in the country. He can be reached via email at [Bill.Campbell@YouthWrestlingGuide.com](mailto:Bill.Campbell@YouthWrestlingGuide.com).*