

THE WRESTLING COACHES

HANDBOOK

ON

WRESTLING PRACTICE FORMAT

AND

WRESTLING PRACTICE EVALUATION

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The success of your scholastic wrestling program will depend largely on how well you prepare practice sessions from day to day. It is important to realize that your daily practices must evolve with the needs of the athletes participating in the program. For example, if you are working with young and inexperienced wrestlers, you will need to spend more time on the perfection of fundamental techniques. After that, you can begin to move on to more advanced wrestling skills.

Preseason and In-Season Practice Format

The following format demonstrates the similarities and differences between preseason and in-season practices. In both cases, daily practices should never last more than two hours. After that point, scholastic wrestlers tend to lose their ability to concentrate.

Conditioning Warm-Up Exercises (10 to 15 minutes). These exercises should stress total-body flexibility, strength, and endurance. Such training will help prevent injuries. The same warm-up should be used for both preseason and in-season practices.

Wrestling Drill Work (10 to 15 minutes). Passive to active drills involving skills and moves from all facets of wrestling are the priority during this phase of practice. Use this approach in both preseason and in-season practice.

Step-by-Step Analysis of Wrestling Moves (10 to 15 minutes). In this phase, thoroughly demonstrate moves, then let the wrestlers practice the maneuvers' essential parts step-by-step. Use this technique often in preseason practices but only when necessary during in-season practices.

Wrestling Workout Sessions (30 to 60 minutes). The wrestling workout sessions should be much more intense during in-season practices, when wrestler conditioning is at its peak. Preseason workouts should last about 30 minutes; in-season wrestling workout sessions should last for nearly an hour. During this time, divide the wrestlers into groups. While one group is wrestling, the other group is running and weight training. Thus, no one is standing around while others are wrestling. (If your wrestlers do lift weights, it should be every other day.)

During the wrestling workout sessions, you should frequently stop wrestlers in the middle of action with two purposes in mind. First, show the wrestlers how they are inadequately executing moves. Second, if necessary, demonstrate another move that would be more suitable for the same situation. Keep in mind, the wrestling workout sessions are the most important phase of in-season practices.

Conditioning Finish Exercises (10 to 15 minutes). These end-of-practice exercises should be “snappy,” with emphasis on strength and endurance skills. This phase would be identical for both preseason and in-season practices.

Never forget that as a coach, you are also a teacher. You should always entertain any responsible questions from your wrestlers regarding practice drills and moves. If a wrestler does not understand the significance of what he is doing, successful accomplishment of a maneuver will rarely be the result. The following are several teaching tips to ensure your practices are meaningful and produce winning results.

Teaching New Moves

When teaching a new move to your wrestlers, you should be able to do the maneuver flawlessly yourself. A step-by-step analysis of the move is your best approach. Emphasize those aspects of the maneuver that make it effective in competition.

Also, it is imperative that you stress *why* a move should be drilled in a certain manner, and what could happen if it is not. The more profound understanding your wrestlers have regarding the purpose behind each move, the easier it will be for them to master it.

The adept wrestling coach never attempts to demonstrate a move he does not fully understand. There is no shame in admitting to your wrestlers that you will need to do some research involving a certain wrestling skill. Your athletes will respect this course of action much more than if you feign knowledge of a move. In fact, you could easily harm your wrestlers’ performance by showing a move you don’t know authoritatively.

Specialized Wrestling Workouts

The typical wrestling workout session involves spending about 50 percent of the time in the neutral position, perfecting takedown skills. This is an astute workout approach because takedown superiority is so important to winning matches. Next, both bottom and top mat wrestling would be equally divided for the purpose of polishing escape/reversal and ride/pinning combination skills.

Likewise, you will sometimes want to incorporate workouts that add variation to the traditional wrestling session, simply for a change of pace. Situation wrestling and round-robin wrestling are excellent alternatives that are described in the following pages.

Situation Wrestling

Situation wrestling is usually incorporated during the season. It is much like a regular workout session with one exception: the wrestlers are placed in various wrestling positions and begin wrestling from that point. As with typical wrestling workouts, the coach should periodically stop the wrestlers to demonstrate what they are doing wrong.

There is a twofold purpose for including situation wrestling in daily practice sessions. First, you can use the strategy to work on new moves and to demonstrate how they should be performed during real wrestling situations.

The second rationale for adding situation wrestling to practice plans involves the scouting phase of coaching. While scouting rival teams, the coach often observes certain moves that members of these squads use the most to score points. Wisely, the coach will place his wrestlers in these various move situations, having them counter the maneuvers in preparation for an upcoming dual meet or tournament. This wrestling strategy has been very successful over the years.

Let's now consider two examples of situation wrestling—one for perfecting new moves and the other to prepare for competition.

Round-Robin Wrestling

Round-robin wrestling is another action-packed workout. One advantage to round-robin wrestling is that the entire squad participates simultaneously. This routine involves the following procedure:

1. Divide the team into groups of five wrestlers who weigh as close to each other as possible.
2. Assign a number from 1 to 5 to each wrestler in the group.
3. Wrestler 1 steps in the center of his group. He is given 30 seconds to score a takedown on each member of his group as follows:
Wrestler 1 vs. wrestler 2
Wrestler 1 vs. wrestler 3
Wrestler 1 vs. wrestler 4
Wrestler 1 vs. wrestler 5
4. If a takedown is scored in less than 30 seconds, the participants stand up and go at it again (and again) until time has expired.
5. Then wrestler 2 does the same with wrestlers 3, 4, 5, and 1. The process continues until everyone in the group has spent his time in the middle.

6. This round-robin session would include wrestling in the referee's position, emphasizing escapes, reversals, rides, or pinning combinations.
7. The inactive wrestlers for each group may act as spotters, protecting the active wrestlers from going out of bounds or colliding with other pairs.

As you can visualize, round-robin wrestling consists of a very invigorating workout. The prime objectives are quite obvious: conditioning and further skill development.

Evaluating Practices

In order to have a successful program, you must develop practice sessions that benefit each and every wrestler. You need to match practice strategies with the wrestlers' ability levels. General questions you want to ask yourself after each practice:

- Did the wrestlers react well performing today's drills?*
- Were the wrestlers able to adapt to new moves taught?*
- Were the wrestlers giving all they have during practice workout sessions?*
- Were partners in the groups co-operating with each other during the drill and new move phase of practice?*
- Was each group working to their fullest during the "off-mat" activities phase of practice?*
- Do we need to spend more time with drill work, workout sessions, conditioning, etc.?*
- Did the wrestlers seem stale during practice?*
- Do the wrestlers need a day off or "change of pace" activities day?*
- Was the overall practice successful in achieving the daily objectives and goals?*

On a more detailed basis, you must continually watch for wrestler strengths, but more importantly, wrestler weaknesses. You must always be aware of wrestler mistakes and correct them immediately. Below is a basic checklist example of wrestler weaknesses to eliminate in the three wrestling positions.

Neutral Position

- _____ The wrestler is crossing his feet (foot work).
- _____ The wrestler's feet are too close together or too far apart in an extreme manner.
- _____ The wrestler is standing up too straight (lower center of gravity: hips).
- _____ The wrestler has his elbows out too far.
- _____ The wrestler is reaching for his opponent rather than penetrating.
- _____ The wrestler is looking at his opponent's face or feet instead of focusing attention on his opponent's center of gravity (hips).

- _____ The wrestler is backing away from his opponent.
- _____ The wrestler is not crossfacing properly.
- _____ The wrestler is not sprawling on his toes.
- _____ The wrestler is putting too much weight on his heels.

Offensive (Top) Position

- _____ The wrestler is reaching over his opponent's shoulder.
- _____ The wrestler is riding too high (readjust center of gravity: hips).
- _____ The wrestler is not on his toes while riding opponent.
- _____ The wrestler is locking hands on the mat.
- _____ The wrestler is pulling his opponent on top of him instead of riding with weight pressured on his opponent.
- _____ The wrestler is too parallel while riding or pinning his opponent.
- _____ The wrestler has his head too far over his opponent's back to the far side.
- _____ The wrestler has all his weight on his knees while riding his opponent.
- _____ The wrestler is repeatedly assuming an incorrect starting position on top.
- _____ The wrestler reacts too slowly on top when the whistle blows.

Defensive (Bottom) Position

- _____ The wrestler is reaching over his opponent's back while executing a switch.
- _____ The wrestler is stopping after one move.
- _____ The wrestler is sitting-out too far.
- _____ The wrestler is not changing direction.
- _____ The wrestler is balling up which makes him easy prey for a cradle.
- _____ The wrestler is not controlling his opponent's hands when standing up.
- _____ The wrestler is leaning too far forward when assuming the referee's position (lower center of gravity: hips).
- _____ The wrestler is laying on his stomach with elbows close to his body.
- _____ The wrestler is looking toward his opponent's half nelson.
- _____ The wrestler is hesitating on the bottom when the whistle blows (needs to curl toes).

Practice Paradigm

The most important phase of practices are the workout sessions. The drill work session should place emphasis on neutral, offensive and defensive areas based on

“scouting” reports. During the season, the new or review move instruction phase is virtually nonexistent unless there is an important maneuver that needs to be reviewed. Below is a model in-season lesson plan scheme that will effectively keep your wrestlers constantly ready for competitive action.

I. Starting Practice: Flexibility/Conditioning Exercises (10 to 15 minutes)

- _____ A. Neck Circles and Four-Way Neck Exercises
- _____ B. Arm Circles
- _____ C. Wrist and Ankle Circles.
- _____ D. Stomach Circles
- _____ E. Leg Stretches
- _____ F. Ankle Circles
- _____ G. Bridging (side to side/backward & forward)
- _____ H. Push-ups
- _____ I. Run and Front Roll Intervals

II. Wrestling Drill Work (10 minutes)

- _____ A. Sprawl Drill
- _____ B. Ankle-waist Drill on whistle
- _____ C. Spin Drill to Snap-Down Drill
- _____ D. Stand-up (hand control) Drill

III. Wrestling Workout Session (60 minutes)

- _____ A. Neutral Position (50% of time)
- _____ B. Starting in Referee's Position: Offensive and Defensive Position (50% of time)
- _____ C. If group work is needed due to mat space, each group would workout for 30 minutes. While one group is working out the other group could be running, lifting weights, climbing ropes, etc.

IV. Finishing Practice: Conditioning Exercises (10 to 15 minutes)

- _____ A. Run for 10 minutes (sprint and jog intervals) or Jump Rope
- _____ B. Strength Exercises (Sit ups, Push ups, Pull ups on bar, etc.)
- _____ C. Chalk talk as wrestlers cool down

Conclusion

The key to a championship wrestling program is how well you organize your daily practice drill and workout sessions to fit the needs of your wrestlers. It is also up to you to develop and enact a well-rounded, yearlong (off-season activities) strategy your wrestlers can follow.

(excerpts from *The Wrestling Drill Book: 2nd Edition* by Dr. Bill Welker which will be available to purchase in December 2012.)