

Tenacious Defense

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

#28

This article will address the issue of not giving up easy points. This is a key element of developing a consistent winning attitude and strategy.

Watching the final tournaments of the high school and college wrestling season is always a special treat. To see the heights youth reach is always special. Developing young men that you may remember being snotty nosed kids are now showing real courage, desire and maturity.

One special aspect of a wrestler's development is his willingness to fight through and out of a tough spot. Most well trained wrestlers that stay at the game for a period of time learn several ways to score points. In many matches they may score relentlessly.

It is when they are attacked or put in a difficult, potential point losing position that their toughness & determination really is tested and may be proven. Against the best it is too risky to give up the easy takedown and just figure you will score like many other times. A relentless attacking offense is very valuable in most sports. But against a quality competitor the ability to fight to the end to counter his attacks can make the difference.

At the 2007 NCAA Division I Nationals in Auburn Hills, Michigan, many aggressive wrestlers had proven throughout the year(s) that they could score again and again in most matches. However at least 4 of them lost in the final seconds or in a quick over time takedown. It almost seemed like they were thinking only of their own offense and were not ready to fight to the end when attacked.

A common statement for years has been, "the first takedown wins the match." If that statement has some truth in it then every wrestler should be ready to fight to the death to counter his opponents' attacks and complete his own takedowns. Fortunately that statement is not totally true. Therefore we wrestle the entire match. But time after time the first takedown sets the pace for a match. And it always makes it easier to be in control of the pace of a match.

Many times a mid match stand off or scoring situation is the turning point. Afterwards we wonder what would have happened had the score been stopped by a tough, no way, defensive determination. The momentum would have been stopped, reversed, and the final score possibly different.

This is not to say we never give up a point. At times it is most wise to give up the point just to stay alive. If back points could result it is better to give up the takedown, escape or reversal. But first every wrestler should be prepared to be tough, determined and fight to the end. "95% of the time good strategy does not include giving up points." World Champion Stan Dzedzic called his defense "the impossible leg". You just would not score against it. While in college I practiced various times with Iowa State University National Champion Tom Peckham. But I never once scored a take down! He exhibited a tenacious defense every time I tried.

There has been one match I often recall from my own experience that makes me appreciate this point. It was my first Olympic match and only my second international match. (I had lost the first in a dual meet earlier that spring with the Soviet Union.) To start the Munich, Germany Olympic Games I was paired up with Pavel Kurczewski from Poland. He was a strong stocky competitor. I stepped on the mat, nervous, naive, scared and yet excited about the potential of

the competition. American wrestling teams had not been doing well for years. A key reason I could be confident was Coaches Bill Farrell, Jim Peckham and Bill Weick and teammates Dan Gable and John Peterson were relentless on building my hopes.

Midway through the 1st period I got caught in a front headlock. My own double leg takedown attempts and tie-ups had not succeeded except to get me under his attack. To defend against his front headlock I recall spreading my arms and legs to increase my balance and stop any Freestyle/Greco rolls. Being taught to stay solid and off my knees as much as possible I used a lot of energy to just hold my own. The seconds began to add up. Pavel had it tight and had no intention of letting go until he had earned some points. He was tight and we were moving a lot so the referee let it continue. It became a stand off of who would/could hold out the longest.

Pavel's front headlock was limiting my breathing and I knew if I let him turn me, he would score and maybe in a big way. It was at this point I DETERMINED HE WAS NOT GOING TO TURN ME! He tightened the headlock even more and decided to force it, but I dug in and DID NOT GIVE UP THE POSITION! As a result He over-stretched himself and turned under me. Immediately I scored 5 quick points on him. The rest of the match was a blur to me. I had spent myself being too nervous and then fighting that front headlock. But I won 7-4!

That stand off and win was a turning point for my future international experience. Many times I have wanted to thank every coach, every workout partner and every family member that helped sharpen my determination in a tough spot. (Had I lost that match to start that Olympics the next 8 years of international success could very likely have been much less and may not have happened at all.) In various ways that stubbornness set the pace for momentum and confidence in years to come.

This is true in all aspects of life. Lets hold our ground and say no to what is wrong. Satan and others will attack us. With God's help lets determine to say NO. Set a pace for doing what is right and good. That will be key for each of us to reach our full God given potential. As we anticipate the next opposition and the next match we must prepare to hold off all attacks. Build a confidence and pride that we can and will stop our opponent no matter what. Keep building a relentless offense but also learn to say "NO!" with a capital N, a capital O, an underline and an exclamation mark. That kind of defensive strategy will be invaluable in wrestling and in daily life.

***Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: info@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org**