

Why Wrestle?
THE VALUE OF WRESTLING PROGRAMS FOR OUR YOUTH
By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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Regularly I am asked to explain the benefits of wrestling. Therefore in the following paragraphs I would like to list some of the key benefits young athletes will receive from an organized wrestling program. Please feel free to use this list and my name if it can help recruit and/or motivate young athletes to participate in wrestling.

1. Wrestling Encourages Physical Care and Development. A strong healthy body is essential for wrestling. Many have suggested that wrestling is the most thoroughly balanced sport. All muscle groups and all aspects of physical development (balance, strength, endurance, coordination, speed and alertness are needed and developed in proper training for our sport). Because of this, many seemingly average athletes excel because they develop all of the above instead of just one or two. That is why many think they are in shape while training for other sports, but can't last five minutes in wrestling. It is why we find wrestlers excel in other sports also. Wrestlers are a total athlete, ready and confident to do whatever the other sports require.

2. Wrestling Encourages Mental Development and Confidence. Many techniques must be learned. It is a challenge to learn and coordinate them for proper use. Developing a plan for training and competition is essential for success. Control of eating habits and weight are usually addressed in wrestling. Mental control is needed to complete that job.

Often with the lack of physical labor in our society, wrestling becomes a valuable place to learn how to work to exhaustion. The wrestler learns that his body may hurt from fatigue, but it will still perform. This is a valuable lesson for all youth and adults. You may feel like you are at your end, with no more energy to give, but with determination there is always more that can be done. You learn that mental control over your physical body is possible and extremely valuable. That lesson was essential in my climb from a young freshman fighting to win even one match all the way to the Olympics.

3. Wrestling Encourages Social Development. Individually the wrestler learns to stand alone under pressure. He has no one to blame and so learns to accept himself and then work to improve his weaknesses. He competes alone and so learns to stand alone. Wrestlers are well noted for this across America. But even though we compete alone, building close friendships with teammates is invaluable as we learn from each other and correct each other.

Also, school teams and clubs bring the team aspect and school pride factors in. An athlete can go as far personally as his work habits and determination permit, yet he also represents a team and brings along the others as he excels. Wrestling friendships very often last a lifetime. Individuals working very hard on a common task can really be drawn together.

4. Wrestling Encourages All To Participate. All young men can find a place in wrestling. Many sports favor a certain build, size, or mentality. Through the years I have seen very small and very heavy, very short and very tall, very timid and very eccentric wrestlers. All these participated and some from all categories have excelled. All high school young men from 100# to 275# will find a weight class made just for them.

An athlete is not exempt or severely restricted by some physical characteristic or even a handicap. Through the years I have watched young wrestlers excel with withered legs, one leg, no legs, no fingers, blind, just to name a few. Their determination amazed me and made me thankful for every healthy part of the body God gave me. (As a college coach I witnessed a young man from Wisconsin who lost his legs in a farm accident. He made up for it in arm strength and became a very competitive wrestler on a college level).

5. Wrestling Encourages Character Teaching and Development. Many a teacher/coach has told me they never get as close to students in the classroom as they do being their coach. There is a tremendous opportunity for coaches to personally help and strengthen athletes in developing work habits, faithfulness, loyalty, honesty, determination and confidence. Then they can test these qualities under pressure.

Remember, wrestling alone does not build character. My brother John often reminds me that sport is more likely to build “characters” than character. But coaches and athletes with character can greatly help and strengthen each other by addressing character qualities during training and competition.

Few sports provide the same chance as wrestling does to observe each individual and how they respond to pressure. Coaches can clearly address the strengths and weaknesses of the athlete personally. The diligent wrestler can be assured that they will be maturing in many ways as they push to be the best wrestler and person possible.

In conclusion - these are some of the values of a wrestling program for youth. It should be noted that strong, mature, qualified coaches are needed to fully carry out the potential of wrestling. So I encourage parents, coaches, teachers, fans and wrestlers to work together to make the upcoming season a true success as we help the youth of America mature through the sport of wrestling.

You can find other articles by Ben & John at their web site. Today Ben & his brother John 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