

# Reaching a Higher Plane

By Ben Peterson w/Ethan Bosch

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Top wrestlers are always seeking to improve themselves and those around them. True competitors never think they have reached the top, yet they never stop striving to get there. I always encourage young wrestlers to attend extra tournaments in the spring for that very reason. Exposure to more competition on their own is a great confidence builder and gives athletes a chance to see and try new things. It is a great arena to get new experience.

Freestyle and Greco events are especially helpful. The emphasis on back awareness helps wrestlers learn to protect their own shoulders and expose their opponent's. The emphasis on hips in Greco and Freestyle will be invaluable to reaching a wrestler's winter high school and college wrestling goals.

Summer wrestling camps are also a key element in a wrestler's total development. At Camp of Champs, we often see campers exposed to wrestlers from six or more states in one week. I urge our campers to stay alert and think of what others are doing and the techniques that are being taught to help them develop a plan of their own. This will be very valuable to win state awards and to round them out as total wrestlers and as men.

In an article for *WIN-Magazine* last year, Mike Chapman urged the leaders of the wrestling family to look outside the box to raise wrestling to a higher plane. I appreciated that reminder. My brother John and I have often reminded each other to look at a higher/better plane in all areas of our lives: wrestling, coaching, family, community, etc. We often have asked what we can do better and what should we do differently. The scriptures urge something similar. The apostle Paul sought a higher plane of life when he said:

*"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things." - Philippians 4:8*

I have done a lot of public speaking since my three Olympic team runs as a competitor. School assemblies, sports banquets, business lunches, church and youth meetings, camps and wrestling clinics have been a great arena for me to urge wrestlers, coaches, parents and young people to seek the best in life. As I rub shoulders with people at these events, I am most often challenged to a higher plane myself.

Recently, I attended a clinic with a couple hundred high school coaches. The speaker/clinician was a very energetic and capable speaker. Yet, he grieved several of us with his crudeness, slang and even vulgarity. He thought he needed to "entertain" these men in that way. This saddened me, as there is so much more to wrestling that is good and wholesome to entertain with. This speaker does a lot of clinics and camps with young wrestlers. I left wondering if he uses the same tactics with them. Bringing the "old locker room talk" into wrestling does not raise our sport to a higher level.

I have appreciated Real Pro Wrestling this spring. Unlike their "professional wrestling" counterparts in the squared circle, RPW avoids the crudeness and shows athletes trying their best to win the intense battle of wrestling. They've adjusted the rules to emphasize scoring and excitement. They're trying to show off the good things in wrestling, what we have that makes our sport great. These are real athletes in a real competitive arena, demonstrating athletic prowess sharpened through hard work and dedication, not actors on a roped-off canvas stage, playing to the lowest common denominator in an increasingly disturbing spectacle. Some may laugh at this spectacle, but when we see our children imitating the crass language and behavior they learned watching these "wrestlers" on TV, it ceases to be funny.

Perhaps the saddest thing about “professional wrestling” is that many Americans think of these costumed clowns first when they hear the word “wrestling,” instead of the dedicated athletes we all know and (rightfully) admire. Yet, from what I understand, professional wrestling started out as honorable, true competition. If we aren’t constantly seeking a higher level, we will sink to a lower level. Let’s hope and pray that RPW will continue to seek the higher ground and honor the true sport of wrestling, and that they enjoy a long and successful run with that as their goal.

In my younger days, I was exposed to and influenced by a professional class of public speakers. World-class runner Glen Cunningham and pro football player Jerry Kramer both appeared and spoke at my high school. Later I heard pro quarterback Bart Starr. Their discipline and manner spoke as loud as their words.

Later a professional football speaker also disappointed me. His crude story at a sports banquet startled and saddened me. I was devastated by the fact that one of my heroes would talk that way anywhere, let alone in a major public event.

Ever since, whenever I speak publicly I remember that night and seek to bring my speaking to a higher level that shows respect for my audience and those who invited me. I know I reflect on the sport of wrestling wherever I go and I know I reflect the Lord as well. I would encourage all who speak and lead in our sport to emphasize what is “true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue and praiseworthy.” There is so much in wrestling that fits into these terms. We will not run out of material and examples as we seek to bring wrestling and our youth to a “higher plane”.

(Ben Peterson won Olympic Gold in 1972 and Silver in 1976. He also won 2 NCAA Titles. He and his brother John, also Olympic Champion, now run a summer camp system called “Camp of Champs.” Ethan Assists has been a National Greco champion and National team member for several years. He now assists the Petersons at Camp of Champs. They can be contacted for speaking or camp info at: 800-505-5099, ben@campofchamps.org or Camp of Champs POBox 222 Watertown, WI 53094)