

A Heart for Competition

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Attending the NCAA Division I National Championship in St. Louis and both the Wisconsin High School and Grade School State Tournaments allows me to see the premier wrestling events of the nation and my state each year. The competition at each of these events is intense and extremely exciting, and the contact with past, current, and up-and-coming champions is very rewarding. I look forward to these events each season.

Here are some notes and observations from my recent trips as a wrestling fan:

Technical trends. There was plenty of good technique, but there were some examples of poor technique that I saw more than once (and at every level!). We'll be working with our campers to correct these trends this summer at Camp of Champs:

- *Pushing a single.* Some wrestlers are getting in on single legs, and then failing to pull the single in and finish. Instead, they end up pushing with it, and most often going out of bounds - a wasted opportunity!
- *Not continuing to sprawl.* Some wrestlers are defending shots well with a good sprawl to start, but then allowing their opponents to finish. Just because you've sprawled doesn't mean your work is finished! *Keep* sprawling, and don't plant your leg. You may not win the takedown, but at least you'll get out of bounds and prevent your opponent from getting it.
- *Shooting straight in.* Too many wrestlers are relying on their athleticism and straight-on shooting. We need to focus on our set-ups, getting angles, and "swinging the door open" with arm drags and two-on-ones.

Thank you Mike Chapman, Bryan Van Kley and WIN Magazine for the Memorabilia Show in St. Louis. It's a grand arena to meet people who love wrestling, and a wonderful opportunity to mingle and make connections with wrestling businesses and past legends of the sport.

The NCAA's is *the* key wrestling promotion event and premier showcase of our sport in the U.S. Fans came from all over the country, and the total attendance for the weekend was nearly 100,000.

I noticed that many high school and club coaches attend the NCAA's. It's like the national convention of their profession. They are all eyes and ears, soaking up all they can to better their work with youth. In many cases, they had their sons at their sides.

Many couples go to these seasonal finals. In St. Louis, there were several in their fifties, sixties, and seventies who have attended the NCAA's together for years. It almost appears to be like an anniversary trip for them each year. They love wrestling, whether the husband was once a coach, still is, or they are just interested in a particular team. They just enjoy the people, the setting and the competition.

Yes, *the competition!* That's what brings us to these events. Often we hear the accolades of wrestling, "the world's oldest and greatest sport." But I think it is the competition that makes it so exciting.

Some people study wrestling for its technical refinement. And yes, all of us who have competed and/or coached have needed to know the techniques. But the thing that excites me the most is the display of heart, motivation, drive and determination. This aspect of the game can leave you with tears in your eyes and pride in your heart like almost nothing else.

I will never forget watching Lloyd Keaser win the World Championships in Tehran, Iran in 1973. I cried watching him compete when I saw the strain on his face as he pushed himself to honor himself, his family and our nation. His determination was driven by a love for his family and country.

The term I use to describe this kind of attitude is “a heart for competition.” This is more than just “wanting to win.”

Many in St. Louis were conservative. They would hang on to a move, sometimes too long. They seemed afraid of losing. They wanted to slow things down and stop the action. They often won, but didn't thrill many. They seemed strained and hesitant even in their facial expressions.

Others seemed to carry an excitement about them. I describe them as having a love for competition. They don't just “like wrestling” - they *love the competition* it provides. When two men met with this approach, everyone enjoyed it. The fans responded and honored both the winner and the loser of those matches. I say it is competitors like these who draw so many of us back to these events year after year.

How does one get that perspective? I believe the way I have gotten it in the past (and still do today) is described in a couple of verses in the Bible. Colossians 3:23-24 says: *“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”*

This quote from Scripture instructs me in two ways: (1) Do my work with heart, and (2) Look to the Lord for rewards.

Whenever I look too much for man's approval it begins to burden me down. I experience thoughts of rejection and disapproval. I become afraid of failure and clamp up. But when thoughts of God's love for me are strong in my mind, I want to love Him in return, and do so through my actions. My focus is on my effort and in doing my very best for someone who loves me. I get similar motivation from my love for my family. *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear”* (1 John 4:18).

Therefore, I urge all of us, whether we are the young competitor, the guiding coach, or the interested parent/fan, let us look at love for God and those around us as the motivation to live and compete with “a heart for competition.” I believe that attitude can enable us to reach our fullest potential... and it won't hurt in drawing more fans to our sport, either.