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## Some Do's and Don'ts to Inspire Young Wrestlers

By Steve Fraser

This article is meant to be a humble, thought-provoking message to all of the fine coaches and parents that support our young grapplers throughout our country. Your leadership and wonderful efforts - in inspiring and coaching our youth - is vital to our sports future. I commend you for your dedication!

How do we avoid burning our young wrestlers out? How do we inspire kids to love the sport so they continue to wrestle in their teens and beyond? Do we want them to learn good sportsmanship, good discipline, good work ethic, and gain good physical strength and coordination? Do we want to teach them how to overcome adversity and how to be persistent? Do we want to build great character?

I have compiled a few Do's and Don'ts that we all need to consider when working with these young kids. Let's start with athletes 12 years old and younger.

### The Do's:

Create a fun environment in the practice room and in the competitions. Having fun should be the most important priority. Focus on enjoying the act of wrestling is very important.

Having a small (or no) focus on winning/losing is good. Kids will do this enough without any of our help.

Focus and excitement should be placed on successful execution of techniques and wrestling movements.

In practice, focus should be on following the coach's plan and activities. Focus on good listening and discipline skills are important.

Wrestling "type" games that help teach movement, balance, and the very basic technical skills will keep it fun. Inspire kids to learn and enjoy themselves.

Teaching a good work ethic and tough - but fun - physical activity will help a youngster to develop their conditioning, health and coordination.

Win or lose, let's hug our child/wrestlers lots and always.

### The Don'ts:

Don't get emotional as parent or coach regarding winning and losing. Kids will sense our emotion for sure.

Don't think that if kids don't win 'now' (at 12 years old and younger) that they are learning to accept losing. This is false! Matt Lindland, Olympic and World silver medalist, states; "Without properly teaching kids how to win AND lose at this young age we are doing them an injustice. In the real world we have to deal with both."

Don't push young wrestlers to think winning is the main focus. Yes, winning is good and fun but it's not all about the wins and losses. "I was the worst wrestler on my club team when I was young. However, wrestling with all the better kids helped me to get better myself"; says Lindland.

Don't get mad at a child/wrestler for losing or not executing moves properly. Most of the time a young child's physiology and motor skill development determines what that child can and cannot

master at that particular age in their life. As they grow older, their coordination and motor skills will naturally develop.

Don't cut weight! Please understand that losing weight to wrestle at a lower weight class does not help a wrestler win. Learning the skills and strengthening the body and mind is what helps them to win. The fact is cutting weight will kill (in many cases) a young wrestler's attitude about this great sport of ours. Wrestling requires enough hard work at learning the skills and conditioning the body without the added torture of not eating after the tough workouts. It is no fun to cut weight! Remember the main goal of the young wrestler should be to have fun and enjoy the act of wrestling.

Don't get mad at officials, or yell at them and other coaches/wrestlers. Accept the results and all the bad calls (or perceived bad calls) that the referees make. Teach good sportsmanship by setting a good example.

Don't be a "coach" when we need to be "father/mother". Kids need their mom and dad more than anything!

Don't think short term. Think about how we will teach our child/wrestler to love the sport so they will wrestle as teens and beyond. This is where the true value of the sport of wrestling will build their character.

Don't take our child/wrestlers match (especially losses) personal. Don't think our wrestler's performance is an indication of how tough 'WE' are. Remember it's about growth and development. Young kids need to learn from defeat as much as victory.

In summary: If we are too focused on winning/losing at this young age we are risking a lot. Basic skills, games and fun should be the emphasis. It takes a strong parent/coach to fight the common urge to get emotional about our children/wrestler's performance and result. Remember kids all develop their coordination skills, physiology and anatomy as their maturity allows. Most wrestling techniques and movements will not even be possible to master at this young age. Not to mention the mental development at this age varies tremendously. Many of the young national champions at this age never even wrestle past the age of 12. Why is this? And let's keep in mind that a national champion at age 7 means absolutely nothing in the big picture.