

Importance of a System

You can look all around you and see the power of using systems to achieve greatness. Walk into any Subway, Chipotle or any chain restaurant and watch the workers flow through the system that was developed to mass produce food, customer service and massive profits. Look to Russian and how they develop wrestlers with a system that is used in clubs across the entire country and developed by their governing body.

To achieve excellence in the quickest most efficient way you must learn from an expert in a systematic fashion. People can do it by themselves but the trial and error involved slows down the rate of progress tremendously. When mastering any skill it is important to get in the game as quick as possible but it is also important to find expert guidance to accelerate the learning curve.

Develop a System of Wrestling

I started seriously coaching youth and high school wrestling in 2000 when I moved to Christiansburg, VA. I figured out quickly that if you wanted to have a good program you had to develop a system to teach throughout your entire program. This system need to build off basics, be capable of being learned by masses and built a foundation capable of being built upon to take wrestlers to the highest levels.

Great high school and youth teams can be very predictable. This is because well-coached teams have had specific techniques and strategies drilled into them consistently over a long period of time, which leads to members of these teams having success with common techniques. Good wrestlers can be just as predictable. They repeatedly use the same wrestling techniques to score their takedowns, turns and wrestle from the bottom position. Even though these teams and individuals are predictable it is hard to stop them.

If a coach doesn't have a clear system of techniques and strategies their athletes will not develop quickly. Also, if athletes don't buy into the principles described in this article their chance of developing a highly effective style they can force on their opponents will be difficult to accomplish.

Steps to Mastering the Sport of Wrestling

Learn Techniques: Wrestlers are taught a hold or series of holds and learn to execute the hold(s) perfectly.

Repetitions: Once a wrestler can execute the hold properly then they need to get repetitions. Drilling techniques over and over will program your body to perform the technique automatically in a live situation. To become proficient in holds from the neutral position requires more repetitions then holds from the top or bottom position.

Sparring: When a wrestler can execute holds in at a high pace with perfection they need to begin to spar. Sparring is when your practice partner begins to give resistance back. This will learn to work for

setups, recognize openings, perform hold explosively and chain wrestle. This is where the functional learning begins.

Situational Wrestling: This is a great way for wrestlers to master techniques in a live situation. When wrestlers are learning new techniques and situations they won't attempt them during practice in fear of losing. By starting them in those situations they are forced to get better in those areas.

Forced Attempts During Practice: If a wrestler wishes to add a technique to their arsenal they need to force themselves to execute that technique in live practice wrestling. Most likely, when learning new techniques, they won't be successful in their first attempts. The only way they will ever master them is if they force themselves to try the techniques and learn the position in practice. The best practice may be to execute newer techniques on lesser opponents in practice then as the wrestler builds their confidence and mastery they can execute on higher level opponents.

Live Wrestling: This should be happening throughout the entire learning processes and great strides can be made through live wrestling.

Stay Focused on the Few

As you can see, it can be quite time consuming to truly become good at a few wrestling techniques or situations. This is why it is important to focus on basic and highly effective techniques and build off them. The two biggest mistakes that wrestlers and coaches make are to focus on gimmick holds/systems or try and master a million moves.

Falling for the Gimmick

Don't fall into the trap of focusing your efforts on techniques that only work on lower level opponents or on high risk and high reward techniques. A wrestler only has so much time to spend in a practice room and it is important to make sure that time is spent efficiently. After you have a solid foundation and your body is trained to stay in good position and execute solid wrestling holds then it may be a good time to focus on the high risk/high reward techniques, but don't make those your foundation. I have always thought that being an effective coach at the youth and high school level is just as much teaching your wrestlers to stay out of trouble as it is to teach them how to score points.

Master of a Million Moves

By trying to learn as many techniques as possible you will never master any. To execute on the highest level of competition a wrestler needs to become an expert in several areas and learn to force that style on their opponent. Over time they can build off of these core techniques and continue to build a more elaborate system. This will lead to effective chain wrestling skills if the core techniques are the correct ones.

Take Time to Plan Your Wrestling System

Don't Drop the Ball: Coaches or wrestlers that don't put significant thought and planning into developing an effective system of wrestling will develop on a slower pace and will limit their potential. If you are building off sound fundamentals in all areas you can continually grow your system and your wrestlers will progress relatively quickly.

Coaches: Take time to write down your core curriculum and constantly tweak it and chunk it.

Wrestlers: Understand the importance of repetition, sparring, live wrestling and the value in becoming excellent in a few areas.

Big Time Payoffs

Most freshman or sophomores that are winning National Titles or gaining high All-American status at the Division I level are either coming out of good high school programs or were getting one-on-one coaching from good club coaches before college. They enter college with a solid foundation, effective style and are ready to develop the toughness it takes to have success at that level from day one. If they need to learn or re-learn to wrestle and develop that toughness at the same time their progress will be slowed down tremendously.

I can use myself as an example. I was a three-time All-American and NCAA Champion. I came from a good high school program, but it wasn't a program that went year round. In the off-season I went to club and wrestled with other motivated wrestlers in the area. I never received year round systematic coaching until I went to the University of Iowa and that is when my technique truly started developing. After I won my NCAA championship, Randy Lewis told me, "I knew you were going to win it because your technique had gotten so much better." It wasn't until I developed an effective technical system that I was ready to beat everyone.

Final Thoughts

- Don't try to master too much.
- Whatever you decide, YOU need to believe in it. There is no way you will sell your wrestlers and assistant coaches on it if you don't believe in it.
- Coaches – Your system should have something for everyone. Within your system there should be components that light weights, heavy weights, athletic, non-athletic wrestlers can latch onto. I think all wrestlers on your team should be able to at least execute everything but realize each wrestler will excel at different parts of your system.
- Technically you should be covering these areas
 - Neutral
 - Attacks to each leg
 - Series of finishes for your shots.
 - Multiple setups
 - FHL offense
 - Upper body and short offense options
 - Defense to all major attacks

- Strategies to get and keep your tie ups (hand fighting)
- Drills to encourage chain wrestling
- Top
- Breakdowns that lead to multiple turn series
- Granby Defense
- Mat Returns
- OT and Short Ride Strategies
- Drills to encourage chain wrestling
- Bottom
- Escape, reversal and leg defense strategies that flow together.
- Strong emphasis on getting to your feet
- Bottom strategies where that aren't based on getting to your feet will only work up to a certain level.
- Hand fighting/Hand control skills
- Defense to all major breakdowns, turns and rides
- Drills to encourage chain wrestling

Wrestlers need to know what they are going to do when the whistle is blown and force it on their opponent. That is the sign of a great wrestler and they can't do this without direction and focus. I hope you enjoyed the article and please understand that this is a very broad stroke on this topic. To cover all my thoughts would result in a book. This is meant to be a guide to get wrestlers, coaches and parents to begin thinking about a system for yourself, your team or your child. It will also greatly help your efforts to seek the advice of someone experienced and knowledgeable when deciding what you are going focus on.