

## Accept the Challenge...Promote our Special Sport! Part Three

by Peggy Durant in collaboration with Ken Chertow

Now that the 2005 PIAA State Wrestling Tournament is history, it is time for reflection and analysis. It is rare that coaches, wrestlers, and fans are completely satisfied with the year-end results for their team. More often than not, the question is "How can our team do better next year?"

Detailed in Parts 1 & 2 of this series were ideas for promoting the sport by educating everyone who will listen about the virtues of wrestling; attending States and college events; post-season banquets and awards; creating life-long fans; developing good local news coverage; instituting elementary recognition night; building a successful feeder program; strategy for elementary events; building a full JV squad; and the importance of creating an active booster club to support and supplement the wrestling program. In this 3rd in the series we continue the theme:

1. Develop a community wrestling facility for use during the off-season and supplemental practice time during the season. This will take a coordinated effort on the part of the booster club, coaches, and parents, but it can be done if there is a desire. If space and materials can be found, affiliating with PAWF/USA Wrestling as a charter club takes care of insurance issues. Staffing can be done on a volunteer basis until participation has grown sufficiently to hire regular coaching staff. In addition to folkstyle, spice things up by providing freestyle and Greco-Roman instruction. Encourage kids to participate in the PAWF freestyle-Greco season for a change of pace.

The Power Plant Mat Club in Clearfield, has been in existence for 4 years but it was just this past year that we were able to hire coaches and consistently provide twice-weekly off-season training sessions. The Power Plant attracted quite a number of area kids who had not participated in year-round training prior to this year in addition to a significant number of district, regional, state champs and placewinners for whom extra training is routine.

2. Conduct 1 or 2 day clinics in which an outside "name" wrestler or coach comes in to work with your wrestlers. Publicize the event with local coaches and invite other area wrestlers. This can be done at an independent wrestling club or in conjunction with a tournament held at a middle or high school in the off-season. The "name" draws interest from wrestlers and parents alike and provides a high level expertise to which your wrestlers might not otherwise have access. A special guest clinician usually has an inspirational story and can motivate kids to see the big picture, set higher goals for themselves and to begin to think of wrestling in college and beyond. Invite parents to sit in on these sessions. Motivated wrestlers are one thing; motivated wrestlers with their parents on board are an awesome force to get and keep momentum going in your wrestling program.

3. Provide opportunities for cross-training - running, weight lifting, and freestyle and Greco wrestling. Encourage kids to get strong rather than cut weight severely. Wrestlers who don't wrestle year round can be directed to other activities that will enhance their wrestling season. Those athletes who have an aptitude for it can run cross-country in the fall and participate in track and field in the spring.

Weight lifting clubs and YMCA's are great resources for strength training. Year-round wrestlers also benefit from cross-training. For example, Clearfield wrestlers Brad Pataky, Matt Kyler and Chris Bloom, all of whom train and wrestle competitively year-round, set national weight lifting records for their age and weight groups this past summer training with a drug-free weight lifting organization.

Encourage serious wrestlers to participate in extra world-class training opportunities that Central PA is blessed to have in abundance. Ken Chertow's Home Training Center (HTC) and Gold Medal Camp System are two of the great options available for kids wanting to improve their skills and compete at the highest levels of PA high school wrestling. Brad Pataky and Matt Kyler are both PIAA State Champions from our community who have attended Gold Medal Camps and HTC many times annually for seven years.

4. Involved and enthusiastic coaches are a must. Coaches must be able to connect with the athletes, keep their interest and commitment going even when the program is not experiencing great success. Love of the sport and ability to impart that to the wrestlers cannot be over emphasized. Too often we hear excuses – “the school is too small, there’s not much interest, kids are different nowadays, etc....” and yet have only to look at successful programs dealing with the exact same issues to know instinctively that the right coach(es) can make all the difference.

5. Brainstorm within your wrestling community – here are a few more proven ideas to get you started:

A. College wrestlers can come into in to talk & work with the junior high and high school. Take older wrestlers to college matches to promote their interest in wrestling beyond high school. Arrange for motivated high school wrestlers to visit the elementary schools in the area to talk to students about coming out for wrestling.

B. Hold a pre-season "fan's clinic" in which the general public is invited to learn about the sport of wrestling. Demonstrate the basics and explain how scoring works. Hold some exhibition matches. Have an official speak and explain his role and why things are done the way they are. This is a good time to address sportsmanship on the part of fans and wrestlers. Coaches can field questions from the audience.

C. Schedule a Parent's night at the beginning of the season where parents meet with coaches, booster club officers, and wrestlers. Provide refreshments and mingle but also spend time explaining the program to the parents and soliciting their support and help.

D. Conduct an inter-squad dual meet before the first official competition of the season. This can be varsity wrestle-offs or exhibition matches, depending on the needs of the team and preference of the coaching staff. This event can draw crowds of wrestling folks eager for the season to begin and many potential fans from the general public when publicized adequately ahead of time.

E. Host an Alumni night during one home dual meet in which wrestling alumni are very special guests. Last season, Clearfield Wrestling honored their state champions, state placewinners and former coaches from 1935 - 2003. There was a tremendous response from the community and honorees came from all over the country to participate in the event which featured a banquet, social time, and a rare Saturday dual meet with a school that is an intense rival dating from the early days of the program.

F. Organize an official wrestling Alumni Club. Document & celebrate the history of your wrestling program. Interview former coaches and wrestlers on video and create a verbal and written history of the program. Alumni events and activities help retain the support, interest and insight of your former wrestlers. Keeping alumni involved can provide continuing contact with youngsters eager to join the wrestling program, just like dad did!

G. Develop a wrestling scholarship to be awarded to students who go on to wrestle in college. This can help keep kids in the room throughout their high school years - just one more “carrot” to motivate your wrestlers when the going gets tough.

No one can do all of these things, but everyone can do something. We encourage you to pick some of these ideas and implement the ones that make the most sense for your program. Do not wait around and do not try to do it all yourself. Get your coaching staff, wrestlers, parents, and entire community involved. Raise the awareness of wrestling in your community. You can do it. Youth and Jr/Sr High Wrestling should play a vital role in the development of young people in every community in Pennsylvania. Together we can make it happen!

Editors Notes: Peggy Durant is a co-founder of the Power Plant Mat Club in Clearfield, active with the Clearfield Wrestling Booster Club, and an avid wrestling fan.

See [kenchertow.com](http://kenchertow.com) for training tips and to learn about year-round training opportunities at Ken Chertow's Home Training Center (HTC) in Boalsburg as well as 2005 Super Gold Medal Summer Camp. For information on Ken's instructional videos, wrestling gear, and Resilite Mats, visit [www.wearandgear.com](http://www.wearandgear.com)

JOB OPPORTUNITIES exist for coaches & counselors interested in summer camp work, as well as two full-time career opportunities in State College, PA. One position focuses on managing [wearandgear.com](http://wearandgear.com) while the other focuses on helping coordinate our year-round Gold Medal Training Camp System. Send resume and references ASAP to [ken@kenchertow.com](mailto:ken@kenchertow.com).