

Accept the Challenge...Promote our Special Sport! Part Two

by Peggy Durant in collaboration with Ken Chertow

Our favorite part of the season is upon us with the District and State Duals and season ending tournaments coming soon. In keeping with the theme of this promotion of wrestling series, plan to attend and invite many friends and media to these exciting events. Urge your local newspaper and also TV News Media to consistently cover wrestling.

Make a point of it to watch wrestling whenever it is televised and let your team know when a match is going to be on TV. PCN will be broadcasting the State Duals as well as their match of the week and Individual State Championships. You can let PCN know you appreciate their coverage and are looking forward to more. E-mail them at billbova@pcntv.com.

Ken will be broadcasting two more Penn State Matches this season. The Penn State vs. Iowa Dual Meet will be broadcast on CSTV Saturday, February 5 at 1:30PM, while Penn State vs. Ohio State will be broadcast on FSN Pittsburgh live Friday, February 18 at 7pm. Ken will do the analysis for both matches and will be working hard to educate and entertain everyone who watches, whether they know anything about wrestling or not. Encourage your friends to check it out.

In our fist article about promotion of wrestling we presented ideas to promote our sport that could be implemented for immediate in-season impact on the development of interest and participation in wrestling. In this article we are presenting ideas that require longer-range vision or planning and implementation during the off-season and/or pre-season.

1. Every successful high school program must have a feeder program - "Wrestle for Fun" Programs are geared for 5 to 8 year olds, moving to more formal programs as the wrestlers progress in skill and interest. High School Coaches need to sell their vision to their youth and junior high coaches and make sure everyone is on the same page to some degree. Head Coaches who are actively involved with these programs on at least an occasional basis and begin to form relationships with the kids participating are ahead of the game as these young wrestlers approach junior high and high school level wrestling.

2. Wrestling events for elementary kids that are 2-3 hours long instead of 10-12 hour tournaments. Match young wrestlers up by experience and skill. One of our area leagues structures their scrimmages so that each wrestler gets a minimum of 3 to 4 matches in which a pin does not end the match (though a 2nd pin by the same wrestler does). This provides inexperienced kids vital mat time, while getting them and their parents in and out of the gym as quickly as possible. Short & sweet is definitely best for elementary school wrestling families. Our culture of long events, with most inexperienced wrestlers going 0-2, hurts our sport. We need to change this. Coaches and Team Leaders must work to keep wrestling fun and kids and parents interested and involved.

3. Plan to build and field a full JV squad. Long-time wrestling fans remember when it was the norm for every varsity dual meet to be preceded by a full JV meet from which the excitement leading into the varsity match built to a crescendo. Until every team has a full JV team again and there are JV meets prior to varsity meets, it is necessary to provide as much mat time as possible for the JV members of the team. Having a designated JV coach is vital. Enter JV tournaments and/or hold a JV tournament in order to get the JV kids used to competing outside the wrestling room. If the coaches are able to help the kids understand how valuable they are to success of the entire program, it is quite possible to develop a JV team with kids that care, work together, and stick with the program. Counting on a core of accomplished varsity letter winners without strong JV back up can prove disastrous when injury or discipline issues disrupt or deplete the varsity line-up. In addition, the future strength of a team depends upon the quality of the JV contingent. Get working to schedule JV matches and JV Tournaments ASAP.

4. An active Booster Club is a must. Boosters provide moral support and encouragement as well as raise funds to provide extras as incentives for all levels of wrestlers from the "Wrestle for Fun" crowd on up. For elementary wrestlers, our local booster club provides team t-shirts, jackets for second year wrestlers, and pays entry fees for 4 tournaments a year. The booster club pays for extra coaches for all levels in addition to those the school hires; provides charter buses and helps pay for motel rooms for long distance and post-season tournaments for HS kids. The booster club also encourages every junior high and high school wrestler to attend summer wrestling camp by providing \$150 towards the cost of tuition. Using a little imagination, the possibilities for enhancing already existing wrestling programs are endless.

5. Develop a community wrestling facility for use during the off-season and supplemental practice time during the season for those that want it. 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. Our local wrestling club, the Power Plant Mat Club, has been in existence for 4 years but it was just this year that we were able to hire coaches and consistently provide twice-weekly training sessions starting after states last spring through mid-November. 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.

6. Conduct 1 or 2 day clinics this spring 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 often 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.

7. Provide opportunities for cross-training - running, weight lifting, etc. 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, current Clearfield varsity wrestlers Brad Pataky, Matt Kyler and Chris Bloom 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 and Gold Medal Camp System are just a couple of the many options available for kids wanting to improve their skills and compete at the highest levels of PA high school wrestling.

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 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

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 while the other focuses on helping coordinate our year-round Gold Medal Training Camp System. Send resume and references ASAP to ken@kenchertow.com.