

Beneficial Exercises

In addition to often being asked what games and drills can be incorporated into youth wrestling practices, I am also often asked "what exercises are good for wrestlers?" The obvious choices are pull-ups, push-ups and sit-ups. I grew up doing many sets of these traditional calisthenics daily, and they are still a regular part of all my athletes' training programs.

I want to share some training tips on the basic calisthenics and some games that you can use to incorporate these exercises into your training program

When doing push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, or any other exercise, remember to focus on good technique and full range of motion, rather than just how many repetitions you can do. It is also important to remind your athletes to "be tough when you are tired". Having your athletes perform perfect push-ups and/or pull-ups when they are exhausted is an excellent training tool. It is a good time to remind them and help make them tough when they are tired. Push-ups must certainly help your bottom positioning and endurance. I believe pull-ups with good technique simulate "double overtime" from the top position as well as any exercise.

In addition to simply having my students do standard sets of push-ups, I will often incorporate push-ups into games.

When we do the "countdown game", I personally get in the center (you can select a leader if you are not up for it) and will do 10 push-ups and then my athletes will do 10, then I will do 9, then my athletes will do 9, etc... During this game no one is allowed to touch his or her knees. Everyone must stay in push-up position the entire time. If anyone touches a knee, you can start the game over. (I tell my wrestlers this is a "game", but they do not buy it.) Counting down from 10 down to 1 and then back up to 10 is very challenging, especially if done at end of practice. Depending on skill and age of your athletes, you may have to start at a lower number, especially if you expect good technique. "Mountain Climbers" are a great burnout exercise for "sudden death" at end of the countdown game. Note, if you have a multi-person pull-up bar like we do at Penn State, you can have your wrestlers play the countdown game with pull-ups. Working down and up from 5 pull-ups with good technique is a respectable starting point for a serious wrestler.

Another beneficial push-up game requires a partner. Have one partner do push-ups with his ankles together and have his partner jump side-to-side over his ankles as fast as he can. Typically 20-second spurts are ideal. I call this "push n' jump".

The final push-up exercise I am going to share with you is one I did throughout high school. I would frequently run before school and do some type of exercises immediately after the conclusion of my run. Once a week, I would come back inside my house, grab a deck of cards and play "push-up poker". I would deal myself 5 cards, add them together and do that many push-ups. I would do 15 perfect sit-ups between every hand to rest my arms and then deal 5 more cards and get after it. I had to do some quick arithmetic to get through the deck on time for school. I told my parents the reason I did so well on the math portion of my SAT test was because I played so much push-up poker, not because of my trigonometry and calculus classes.

On a serious note, I credit my friend Tony Dickens for sharing this card game idea with me. Tony and I were from different school districts, but we trained together throughout the spring and summer. Where we grew up, few people wrestled during the off-season. Tony and I would pair up for marathon workouts. Tony had incredible muscular endurance, so I figured I would give his game a try. I took a liking to it. I figured if I could do over 300 push-ups in a short period of time, no one was going to push me around or hold me down. The game worked for both of us. Tony went on to have a successful career at the U.S. Naval Academy. After graduating, he became an All-American in Greco-Roman. Tony is now an ultra-successful businessman and he epitomizes one of my favorite camp slogans,

"Wrestling: Training for the rest of your life". Our sport and the unique training regimen it requires to excel, truly does prepare wrestlers to excel in all their future endeavors.