

## Training & Technique

I am writing this article on Election Day night and the morning after as ballots are being re-counted. Too bad we could not allow the candidates to have a sudden death wrestle-off to determine the true champion! On a more serious note, there was an active movement in the wrestling community this year to "get out the vote" and educate our politicians about our great sport. It probably made a difference in some of the election results at the various levels, perhaps even the presidency. I urge you to follow-up on this movement and educate your recently elected politicians about the value of our special sport in the development of young people. Make sure they are aware of how quotas are limiting learning opportunities for many dedicated young men. Interest in wrestling is steadily growing in our nation. Our young wrestlers deserve opportunities to compete at the collegiate level if they want them. Let your politicians know what is going on and how you feel about it.

The season is upon us! What an exciting time of year! I have been on the road the past 8 weekends conducting my series of 3 day pre-season Camp of Camps. These intensive camps have averaged over 100 wrestlers every weekend. The level of skill, dedication, and motivation of these youngsters is exciting. One of the keys to being a successful coach is to keep your athletes motivated. One important way of doing this is to keep practice interesting. I encourage you to have a wide variety of drills and exercises that will help your wrestlers develop and improve their skills while having fun. If a wrestler gets into too much of a routine and starts "going through the motions", his training will not result in steady improvement.

Coaches often ask me at my camps, what type of drills I use in my practices, and what games and exercises I do with young wrestlers to keep practice interesting. A couple years ago in AWN I wrote a series of three articles on drilling. You can find this material on [www.kenchertow.com](http://www.kenchertow.com). In this article today, my main objective is to give you some unique "training games" that you can incorporate into your training program.

Over the past decade I have experimented with and developed a wide array of drills, games and exercises at my camps and with my team members. I use some on a regular basis, while others I only utilize occasionally. When the kids are interested in their drills, they are more likely to work harder. The drills I incorporate into our training program are meant to improve my wrestlers conditioning, balance, speed, agility and/or skills. Having fun is a secondary, but important component. A brief description of some games and drills are below. More details can be found on [www.kenchertow.com](http://www.kenchertow.com).

Shadow Drilling — We often do a few minutes of shadow jump roping to get in the proper mind-set for some intense shadow wrestling drills. I tell kids to get their "imaginary" jump rope out and we do an array of jump roping exercises for 1-2 minutes. One of the kids' favorites is simultaneously crossing rope, running in place and spinning. Two other excellent unique shadow rope drills are one foot jumps and monkey jumps, where you jump rope while in a deep knee bend position. Both of these exercises lead into games I play with the kids (see below).

To keep it interesting during warm-ups, we will occasionally shadow box with emphasis on staying light on our feet while protecting our face. We will then shadow wrestle with emphasis on staying low and protecting our legs while executing level changes and shots with good motion. Kids tend to come out of their stance when they move and they must learn to move while still staying low and protecting their legs. We will also shadow ski (hip twists) and then climb back up the imaginary mountain doing a traditional mountain climber exercise, where you get in push-up position and run up the mountain.

Your mind controls your body. Some type of shadow drilling should be part of every workout. It can be used as a great warm-up or for conditioning. My favorite shadow drills are sprawls, spins, shots, and back arches. 1 & 2 drill and sprawl & re-shot drill are also very valuable training tools. For bottom work we typically drill many stand-ups, granbys, and hip heists without partners. These shadow moves are "drills" not games. Kids typically enjoy shadow drilling and consequently, it is very beneficial for the body and mind. It does not matter if you are teaching elementary school kids or elite college wrestlers; shadow drilling should be an integral part of your training program.

Monkey Fighting - This is an exercise where the wrestlers bounce around in a squatted deep knee bend position, pushing, shoving and snapping each other. The goal is to knock your opponent on his butt or snap him down to his knees. You can have kids "keep score" by keeping track of how many times they knock someone down. You can also circle kids up and have "featured" money fight with two guys going head to head. Monkey fighting is great for leg conditioning, balance and agility.

Typically, I train various age groups separately and monkey fighting is quite competitive. At Sunday workouts I have mixed age groups training together and I have a popular monkey fighting variation that I use. The teenagers all have to assume the deep knee bend monkey position, while the elementary school boys get to be gorillas and stand upright and "attack" the monkeys (the bigger kids). Use your imagination. It gets quite interesting. In the interest of safety, I usually limit these monkey vs. gorilla battles to 30 seconds and the older kids are only allowed to keep balance, not fight back.

One Foot Fight — is another popular and beneficial game. The wrestlers stand on one foot holding their other foot at the shoelaces, and they hop around pushing and shoving each other. The goal is to knock as many people off balance as possible while not letting go of your own foot. This exercise is great for improving balance and is a good time. We usually do about 30 seconds on each leg.

Tag — an old fashioned game of tag can be made into a great warm-up and conditioning exercise, not to mention a great workout for coaches as well. Choose about 10-20% of the group to be "it" depending on how big your room is. Typically I am "it" along with my coaches and a handful of others I select to assist me. We chase kids around the wrestling room or gym and tag them. If they get tagged they have to do 15 perfect push-ups. Typically we play for 1-2 minutes and then I let new guys be "it" and play a couple more minutes, making kids to do 15 sit-ups when they get tagged. Require that kids run throughout the game and do not stand in corners. Also note with wrestlers tag tends to become smack, so make sure things remain safe and civil. If managed properly, tag can be a beneficial conditioning exercise with some push-ups and sit-ups incorporated in as well.

Snag the shirt — Have kids remove their shirts and put in the back of their shorts with half hanging out. The goal is to grab your teammate's shirts without letting anyone get your shirt. If your shirt gets pulled out, you have to do 10 explosive knee-to-chest plyometric jumps. Then tuck your shirt back in your pants and get back after it. Snag the shirt teaches kids to get an angle on their opponent and is excellent conditioning exercise as kids chase and avoid one another.

Please keep in mind that my goal is to use 99.9% of our workout time constructively. When we play games, they are games designed not just to have fun, but also to benefit my athletes. How many games you incorporate into your practice schedule will depend on what age group you are coaching, as well as their level of experience and motivation. I continue to develop many of these specific drills and games to keep things fun for the kids. I encourage you to do the same. Do not be scared to be creative. For now I encourage you to utilize some of my ideas above and let me know what you think. Have a successful and enjoyable season!