

Wrestling : Training for the Rest of Your Life

Wrestling is one of the most difficult and challenging activities anyone could do during the course of their lives. I am sure most wrestlers would agree that wrestling is extremely physically and mentally demanding. The sport of wrestling truly prepares you for the rest of your life, because our sport teaches you the "lessons of life".

So what are these lessons of life that our great sport teaches you? I suppose they are infinite, but allow me to pinpoint a few: **intensity, focus, discipline, goal-setting, determination and perseverance**. To be successful on the mats, in school, or in the work place, you must possess these characteristics. I feel wrestling can teach you these better than any other sport.

I conduct camps for kids throughout the year. At every camp I make t-shirts with different slogans. The slogans reinforce valuable lessons that wrestling teaches you. Over the years I have used an array of slogans, incorporating some of the attributes mentioned above. The slogan for one of my Winter Break Training Camps was *Wrestling - Training for the Rest of Your Life*.

I chose this slogan a few months ago when I was talking to a friend of mine, Jeff Levitz. Jeff is founder and coach of Boca Raton Wrestling Club Inc. He told me he painted this slogan on his wrestling room wall. I thought it would be a perfect slogan for camp. Jeff is a great example of someone who used wrestling as "training for the rest of his life". He wrestled in high school and college, and then started his own business, Purity Wholesale Grocers. Jeff has developed Purity into an ultra successful business, and is trying to pass his message on to his young wrestlers.

This slogan *Wrestling - Training for the Rest of Your Life* is one of my favorite camp slogans to date. It covered all the lessons of life and it is what I am trying to accomplish as a coach. I am striving not only to develop champions on the mats, but to also help my students understand what it will take to excel in life when their wrestling career is behind them.

At my Olympian Camps I ask my clinicians to talk about much more than doubles and high crotches. I asked them to share their insight into what it takes to be successful in all aspects of life. Two great examples of this is Bruce Baumgartner and John Fritz. They were both guests at one of my Winter Break Training Camps. As most of you may know, Bruce and John are retired from coaching and are now athletic directors. They applied the skills wrestling has taught them to their current jobs on a daily basis. These great men and my other Olympian Camp instructors offered some valuable information to my campers.

Bruce talked about his constantly changing goals as he went through different stages of life. One of his critical messages was that it is important to change and adjust both your wrestling and career goals over time. The key thing is that you always have concrete, have meaningful goals, and stay focused on them over time. Bruce also showed great combinations from the under hook series. Crippling turns and a sweet cross wrist roll were some that my team is already using very effectively.

John Fritz spoke on an array of topics. He entertained the kids with some anecdotal stories about my obsessive work habits as a college athlete. John was my college mentor. He spent many early morning and late night hours with me in the gym. This helped me perfect my skills. John shared with the kids how much improvement I made during my college years. Intense work ethic and determination contributed to my success. John has been an instructor at my camps many times over the years. His duck unders and set-up drills are always very well received.

There were numerous other guests at Winter Camp who had unique and valuable messages. Penn State Head Coach, Troy Sunderland, spoke to the campers about the importance of doing being a good person and conducting yourself in a positive fashion. Harvard graduate and Olympic alternate, Paul Widerman, spoke to the kids about the importance of doing well in school and having a creative, open mind. Paul owns his own fitness company and recently invented and patented "smart bells". They are a new and unique piece of strength training equipment that I believe has great value. Two

clinicians you may not know by name, Donn Ernst and Dale Bonsall, are two of the annual favorites at my Olympian Camp. Donn and Dale are both teachers and coaches. They shared their messages with such unique presentations that they mesmerized the young wrestlers. Their enthusiasm and passion for our sport and helping kids rubbed off on everyone. There is no substitute for these important characteristics if you wish to excel on or off the mats.

In closing, my father had a huge impact on my life and he never taught me a single wrestling hold. My dad is a dedicated research scientist and physician who is devoted to his life's work. Through my father I came to understand the intense work ethic necessary to be successful in life. Other than my dad, the men who have had the most influence on my life are the wrestling coaches who helped me over the years. I encourage my fellow coaches and fathers to teach more than just winning technique. Take time to share with the kids what is required to excel in all aspects of life. Also show them how the characteristics they are developing will help them forever. I place a great value on developing champion wrestlers; however, in the process I am also striving to help my athletes develop the character and work ethic necessary to excel in life.