

Wrestling Parent Education Meeting

By Dave Crowell

There is one thing we all have in common here: We all care very deeply about a boy who is participating in wrestling. I know that you want him to have a good experience in wrestling this season... and beyond. I know that you want him to be successful. What I would like to do at this point is to help you make your son's experience in wrestling a good one AND to help YOU help him to succeed.

Parents, NEVER underestimate how important you are in the life of your son. Most of you have gone to great lengths in time, energy and in money to help your son to be successful in wrestling. You've undoubtedly spent a great deal of time driving, watching, waiting for and in some cases even coaching your son. Without you and without your support, your son would not be who he is and would not be the wrestler he is today. As a coach (and as a father) I appreciate what you do.

Once again, the reason I am speaking to you this evening is that I would like to help **YOU**... to help **YOUR SON**. I believe that by passing some of what I have learned during my years as a parent as well as my years as a coach who has observed thousands of wrestlers and their families, I can help you avoid some of the problems that have occurred in the lives of many. I have seen good things... and I've seen some very bad things... that parents have done to their sons. The interesting thing is that in probably EVERY case, the parent has meant well. When it comes to "helping" our sons succeed as a wrestler, **meaning** well does not **always** get the results that we are hoping for. In fact, the opposite frequently happens. We all want our boys to succeed... and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. The problem lies in the way we often times go about trying to make this happen.

Perhaps the most important thing for us to know is this: every athlete needs to **enjoy** this sport. If he is not enjoying it, he will not improve as quickly. In fact, if he's not enjoying it, and may even quit... and this can happen **regardless** of his talent or the amount of success he has had. **We** (both parents and coaches) must be very careful not to be **overly** concerned with success in terms of wins and losses. If we are, the wrestlers' enjoyment of wrestling will drop significantly. This is *especially* true for the early period in the wrestler's development. We would do well to remember this: The greater the **enjoyment**... the more improvement they will experience. We (adults) should NEVER be responsible for taking the fun **out** of wrestling for our sons.

We also need to understand that just because a wrestler wins does not necessarily mean he is a good wrestler. He is a good wrestler IF he is in the **process** of mastering the art of wrestling... in each and every situation. With this approach, you should see consistent improvement. Your son's training is designed for him to master the art of wrestling – NOT just win tomorrow. **This is a process**... and it takes time. If he can simply keep getting better, winning will take care of itself. Also know that no two wrestlers make progress at the same rate. But, if he sticks with it, he will undoubtedly succeed.

The first thing **you** can do to help **your son** is for you to understand what your role should be. You are your son's SUPPORT SYSTEM. This means that your role (job) is to "help" your son make good choices and assist him in wrestling, school and in life. This role is critical and no one else can fill it other than you.

What you should **never** try to be, however, is your son's coach! This is the biggest mistake that we as parents make – trying to *coach* our sons... rather than simply supporting and **encouraging** them. Your support role is vital. But, your son does not **want** to be... nor **should** he be...

coached 24 hours a day. Wrestling practice and competition is extremely tough. When your son leaves the battlefield of the practice room or the competition mat, he needs to be energized and **encouraged** – not mentally and emotionally “drained!” Your son should never be criticized, coached, given a “clinic” or “trained some more” because you “think he should be better” or “could be doing more.” That is the responsibility and role of the coach.

So what **should** and **can** we as parents (now aka our son’s support system) do to help him?

1. Be positive. Encourage your son. Do NOT criticize his performance. Praise good efforts in both victory AND defeat. Enforce the positive points of the match. Praise improvement. If you see something negative in his performance, **keep it to yourself**. Never yell at... or certainly never physically abuse your child after a game or practice. This only hurts... especially later on as the **negative** effects are often delayed. You and your home should be an “oasis”... a place for your son to go for refreshment, recovery and rejuvenation both physically and mentally. Wrestling is tough enough in both practice and competition. He needs someplace to go where everything is OK... where he doesn’t have to “hear it” or defend himself. And, while he may “put up with it” when he is younger, it will come back to haunt you later. Do you know what statement wrestlers want to hear most from their parents? Answer:- “I love to **watch** you wrestle!”
2. Don’t force a conversation about wrestling unless your son initiates it... *especially* after a tough loss or poor performance. If he doesn’t want to talk about it – don’t! And don’t fret over his silence. He most likely will talk at some point – **especially** if you are consistently complimentary, encouraging and positive. Also, if he wants to talk about a match, let **him** do the vast majority of the talking. Don’t use it as an opportunity “teach him something” or tell him what he ought to have done or how he can get better. Show him that you are listening and that you care. Do you know what period of time wrestlers dread the most? Answer:- It is the car ride home after a loss or a poor performance .
3. It will also help to remind yourself that wrestling is HIS thing, not yours. Remember that you want to support him, to let him know that you are on his side. If he talks to you about it, your goal should not be to give advice on how to become a better wrestler. Adopt the attitude that you want your child to tell-you-more (i.e., “I really want to hear what you have to say.”). Then, actually **listen** to what he has to say — even if you don’t agree with it or like it – rather than waiting for an opportunity to talk. He does NOT want to hear how he could have done better. It should be: He talks and you listen... NOT the other way around – no matter **how** much you have to say.
4. The exception to this rule may be in the area of poor sportsmanship or other inappropriate actions involving school, opponents or teammates. Some of these may include disrespectful actions or attitudes toward opponents, his teammates or his coach, humiliating an opponent, throwing a fit during or after a loss, not supporting his teammates, arrogant behavior, etc. In this case, firmly remind him that this is not something that will be acceptable or tolerated in the future. My approach to an athlete who fails to respond appropriately after a loss has been along this line: “I really like that you hate to lose. Hating to lose is a great quality. However, showing it with poor sportsmanship is a sign of weakness. No one should ever see this again.”
5. Be supportive of the coaching staff. Whether you agree with them/us or not, you should never communicate to him (or to others) a difference of opinion, make negative comments about us

personally or our ability to coach. It will accomplish nothing positive and will undoubtedly adversely his attitude as well as his effort in the future. If there is a disagreement or a problem, discuss this with the coach/coaching staff privately. These things are just as “contagious” among adults. Help the team by **supporting**... not tearing down.

6. Do not criticize or “talk down” other members of the team to your son. He will learn sportsmanship and leadership (be it good or bad) from you. My experience has shown that the best leaders I have had on past teams...have consistently come from positive parents.
7. Do NOT make the mistake of trying to approach wrestling in the same manner as **another** parent has... simply because his/her son has had competitive success. Being “overly involved” with your son’s wrestling career carries with it problems that often do not show up until sometime in the future.
8. “Honor the game” and avoid embarrassing your son. You can do this by being respectful toward officials and opposing coaches and players. Focus on cheering for **your** team... **not** cheering AGAINST the **other** team.
9. Make good nutrition a **family** thing, not something reserved for the wrestler only.
10. Be sure to provide a good environment for academic work at home. DEMAND GOOD ACADEMICS.
11. Avoid being a fan of other wrestlers. What is meant by this statement? The last thing your son wants (or needs) to hear is how good someone else is... or what some other wrestler does...or how well he does it! You should be a fan of the team and your son.
12. Get involved with fundraising for the team, etc.
13. Be sure your son has clean workout gear and a clean towel every day. This includes uniforms. Skin infections can be prevented by cleanliness proper rest and good nutrition.
14. Make sure that your son gets to practice and meets EARLY as well as providing transportation home in a timely manner. Make certain that your son learns to take care of the details of his life that must be completed.
15. Remind and enforce any rules and/or procedures the coach establishes.
16. Provide a great environment for sleep. Get your son to bed. A strong suggestion is that cell phones, ipads, etc. are turned off and are out of your son’s room at bedtime.
17. Take in high school and college matches... **IF** your son wants to do so.
18. Remember that wrestling is for the student athletes – NOT for the adults. It is your SON’S thing... not YOUR thing.