

The Four Seasons of Wrestling

By Don Vest, Ph.D.

Many people see amateur wrestling as a winter sport. Each year, however, it becomes more of a three or four season sport. The old t-shirt slogan, "Summer wrestlers make winter champions," is well documented and accepted by most coaches. In explaining the sport to the general public, this author has often mentioned that wrestling can be a nine or ten month sport for the serious competitor.

The nine months description is often used with young wrestlers and their parents to explain what is needed to improve and stay up with the competition. In some areas, where most of the wrestlers are relatively inexperienced, getting more mat time is extremely crucial. This brings us to what might be called "The Four Seasons of Wrestling."

The **first season** is the traditional November to March which culminates in the state championship. The general public, at best, sees this as the wrestling season for the year. That's what the school calendar says along with basketball and swimming. To tell someone you are going to a wrestling practice or tournament on Saturday draws expressions of confusion in the spring and summer. Even some coaches, competitors and parents frown on such "out-of-season efforts" saying burnout is sure to follow. It is true that spring and summer wrestling is not for everyone. For some it might even be counter-productive.

The **second season** for young wrestlers 16 and under exists in the growing number of kids' federation clubs under the umbrella of USA Wrestling. In many states another month (or 20-30 matches) of wrestling is available. These programs usually end the last of March. Most of this competition is of a folk-style or high school rules nature.

A **third season** follows close on the heels of the kids' wrestling championships (sometimes even overlapping). This season provides the introduction of Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling. For many young wrestlers this will be their first exposure to the international styles. Some high schools open their doors to this type of wrestling practice. Ages can range from 5 or 6 to open level competitors. Volunteer coaches emerge from the community to help the local wrestlers get some experience with

the different styles and, most importantly, more mat time.

Being experienced in several styles of wrestling leaves less room for "surprises" in high school competition. Although the styles are quite different from one another, there is a definite carryover of skills to improve the developing young wrestlers. For example, Greco-Roman wrestling can be especially good for the wrestler who doesn't feel comfortable in the tie-up position. Freestyle makes the wrestler more aware of the opportunities for back-points and throws. An increasing number of competitions exist for the spring-time wrestler, especially for the younger athlete. An example would be the School Boy Greco-Roman and Freestyle Championships in Enid, Oklahoma, June 24-28, which includes competitors ages 8-14. This type of event is usually the first national expo-

sure a young wrestler will get.

But for the most serious wrestler the **fourth season** will carry over until the end of July. The very large red brick building at North Dakota State in Fargo, ND, awaits the largest wrestling tournament in the world. The Cadet and Junior National Championships take place for young men and women ages 15-19. State rivalries clash with enormous brackets for the two styles. The theme is survival with the ever-changing pairings. Wrestlers, who thought they were in shape, soon find out otherwise as the grueling competition wears on. Multiple state champions find out the reality of a higher level of competition. In the end, most wrestlers are better for this experience and return to their homes to train and wait for another season (or seasons) of wrestling. 🏆

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