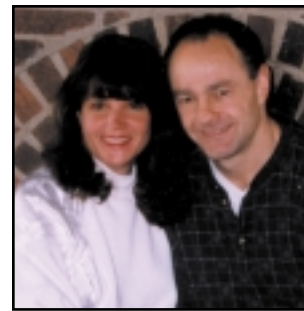


## “Coaching” in the Off-Season

By Carol and Patrick Milkovich

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**H**ere it is the middle of March, and the season is over. Many coaches are already thinking about how the season could have been a little different, maybe a little better. Even the most successful coaches aren't satisfied to rest the glory of the past season. They, too, are planning how they can perpetuate or build upon their team's accomplishments. Other coaches are contemplating ways they can help their athletes reach a higher level of success. There are coaches in every sport who may talk about helping their team improve, but the ones who actually do something about it in the off-season are the ones whose teams usually climb to the next level of success.

The first thing that coaches can do is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses from the past season. This can be done in a couple of ways. First, have a meeting with the athletes and ask them what their opinions of their strong and weak points are and compare those answers to the coaches' perception. The answers might range from building a better work ethic to becoming more physical to functioning better as a team to wrestling more in the off-season. Another helpful strategy is to study the videotapes of each wrestler and determine their proficiencies and deficiencies.

(If your team doesn't have a method for videotaping each wrestler, then you are missing out on an excellent learning tool. Other sports use this, so should we.)

In this same vein, you and your coaching staff might also consider studying the tendencies and techniques of teams that presented problems for your wrestlers. One example would be running into a team that throws legs. If your kids were having trouble with that, make it a focus for improvement for next year. You need to be prepared to teach them how to avoid getting caught in legs, how to counter legs, or how to use that technique themselves.

It is also important that you, as the head coach, take a leadership role in establishing a strong and consistent feeder program. Usually, the best teams have excellent middle school or junior programs that teach the same basic techniques and strategies that the high school coach can refine and build upon when the wrestlers reach that level. Then the high school coach won't have to un-teach anything or start from scratch. The kids should have a knowledge of the basic fundamentals. You can accomplish this by communicating with and teaching these coaches what you need the kids to have learned before they reach your program. For example, you

might want those coaches to teach younger athletes to practice all their moves to both the left and to the right side.

As the coach, if you truly want to help your athletes become more successful, encourage your wrestlers to try to attend two clinics. At least one should be a team concept, which you should attend with them. I think team camps are very beneficial for several reasons. They develop more team unity as well as helping to develop your team style. These camps offer a lot of competition between teams, allowing the kids to experience a variety of styles and techniques from around the county. They often see a style or technique they have not seen before. The wrestlers also learn to drill as a team. Do not underestimate the value of learning how to drill effectively, intensely, and without distraction. I think a team camp helps to accomplish that. Your team gets to see that you are serious about being better because you get to spend a lot of time with your athletes talking about next year and planting the seeds of what needs to be done. This gives the coach an opportunity to reinforce many character traits of being successful: discipline, dedication, commitment, integrity, goals, sacrifice, and education. You also get to observe and share ideas with other coaches, particularly the college coaches, about wrestling philosophy.

You and your coaches should attend every session. (It doesn't send a very positive message if the coaches skip any of the meetings or sessions.) Coaches not only need to attend the clinics but to actively participate as well. Whenever I am asked to work a "coaches" clinic, I expect all the coaches to get on the mat and actually practice the technique. It's one thing to take notes; actively participating accelerates



Michigan's 130 pound Jerry Salenbien, Dundee, defeats Chad Ditty, Bedford, 14-7 at the Bedford Tournament. Photo by David Schankin.

ates comprehension of the technique or philosophy. Personally, I feel as a coach, it's much easier for my athletes to understand what is being taught if I can demonstrate it, as well as explain it. Videotape the technique or strategy from different angles so you can always refer to the exact process.

Encourage your wrestlers to enter at least two or three off-season tournaments, just for fun. It doesn't matter whether they are freestyle or Greco. It's good for them to get out there and experience the techniques of those styles. Although this experience won't help them much with escapes and riding, they are excellent vehicles to understand throws and upper body moves. And of course, it helps them to stay in shape and to stay sharp.

Make it a point to attend your state's coaches' clinic. These are put on for your benefit and there's always something positive you can learn and bring back to your team. Additionally, you should make the effort to attend the NCAA wrestling championships, and if possible, take some of your wrestlers with you. Not only will all of you see some great wrestling, it is also very inspiring. I will never forget that my first NCAA experience, as a junior in high school, included witnessing Dan Gable's only college defeat to Larry Owing. The entire experience was exhilarating, and it made me dream about being in that same atmosphere someday.

So the season is never really over for coaches who want to be better. If you talk to any coaches who have done many of these things for themselves and for their teams, you will probably find a consensus that it greatly accelerated their level of success. If it works for them, it can work for you.

Note: This summer, Pat will be a clinician at Brian Smith's University of Missouri Team Camp on June 22-27 and at Lenny Bernstein's University of Virginia Team Camp on July 8-12.

The authors, Carol and Patrick Milkovich, have developed the L.E.A.D.E.R.S. program, which is composed of a series of "Commit to Success" workshops that they can present to students in grades 6-12. If you are interested in this program, please contact them by phone (248) 375-2553, fax (248) 375-0631, or e-mail [leadersprogram@comcast.net](mailto:leadersprogram@comcast.net). For more information, you can also visit their website at [www.leadersprogram.org](http://www.leadersprogram.org).)



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