



...On the “Drill Work” at Practice

By Bill Welker

Jack London wrote:
Every part, brain and body, nerve tissue and fibre, was keyed to the most exquisite pitch; and between all the parts there was a perfect equilibrium or adjustment. To sights and sounds and events which required action, he (a dog named Buck) responded with lightninglike rapidity.

Quickly as a husky dog could leap to defend from attack or to attack, he could leap twice as quickly. He saw the movement, or heard the sound, and responded in less time than another dog required to compass the mere seeing or hearing. He (Buck) perceived and determined and responded in the same instant. In point of fact the three actions of perceiving, determining, and responding were sequential; but so infinitesimal were the intervals of time between them that they appeared simultaneous. His muscles were surcharged with vitality, and snapped into play sharply, like steel springs.

-Excerpts from *The Call of the Wild*

Although this novel is about a dog, the astute sports enthusiast sees an analog-

ogy between Buck’s ability and the skills of a great wrestler, and all outstanding athletes. So how do these superior sports persons possess the same spontaneous skills as a dog named Buck? Allow me to explain. The answer to such athletic abilities is so simple, but hated by all athletes, myself included “drill work.” Practice in all sports entails the perfection of moves, which can only be accomplished by drill, drill, drill, and then more drill. Ask legendary coaches of every era if you doubt my words.

The best wrestling example I can share with my readers involves a matman of yesteryear named Mike Johnson. I had the privilege to observe his skills in person as a high school and freshman wrestler at the University of Pittsburgh.

Mike was a four-time Pennsylvania state champ from Lock Haven (1958-1961), who perfected the “duckunder” takedown as a scholastic grappler. As a freshman at Pitt, Mike Johnson competed at the prestigious Wilkes Tournament during the Christmas holidays. Mike wrestled his

way to the finals of the competition. His opponent in the final match was an fantastic senior EIWA champion from, would you believe it, Pitt.

What you must totally understand at this point in the column, Mike and his senior matmate have practiced together on a daily basis for at least two months. Thus, his senior practice partner, the Pitt varsity wrestler, knew his every move.

In the championship finals of the Wilkes tourney, Mike lost to his senior Pitt matman, 4-3. But what is so ironic, Mike Johnson did score a takedown. Guess what, it was a duckunder!

My point, drill work is the key to success. It is the simple formula to perfecting a move in wrestling or skill in any sport you can imagine. Ask any great athlete.

In closing, the best way to explain why my “drill work” assertion is so very important in athletics or life can only be demonstrated as follows. If a coach, in any sports contest, has to yell to his athlete what to do it’s too late! 🐾

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