

The Scramble

By Mitch Clark & Scott Conroe

Ever since I was a kid, I've had a competitive soul. I used to play games with my other siblings, usually ones we made up, simple in form and strategy. Whether it was who could throw the rock against the barn or who could catch the others, I had to win. I couldn't stand to lose, and if I did, my temper flared, resulting in a fit of rage that sent my brothers and sisters running for cover.

I brought that same competitive edge to the wrestling mat. That is probably one of the best assets I possess. In the wrestling room, it's all about pride. Even in my training sessions, when my workout partners would score on me, I felt it a necessity to quickly score the next point and punish them for scoring on me. Every wrestler needs to obtain this attitude, one that conveys, "Don't you dare score on me again." Certainly guys have turned around and scored on me again, but they had to work real hard to do it. If two wrestlers have that attitude in practice, they will get the best out of each other, because neither one wants to give up anything. They'll simulate a pace close to what a real match's pace would be, which will inevitably bring them to top-notch conditioning. Those who get scored on, and then lie on the mat feeling sorry for themselves before they attempt their next move, don't have enough pride and will never get into competitive shape.

In the practice room at Ohio State, guys will be screaming with anger at getting beaten up. But they will always turn around and get more physical, or pick it up to another level to even the score. Often it ends in a two-man brawl where technique is no longer used, the adrenaline takes over and you rely on sheer horsepower. At the end of the flurry, two tired warriors will lie on the mat, both unable to get up, but one of those guys scored the last critical takedown because he didn't break first. Either way, they both benefit from their hustle and their refusal to get taken down.

One of the best ways I found to sur-

vive, when I was a freshman in a Division I wrestling room, was to constantly "scramble" in every position. Scrambling is a generic term for constantly moving and never giving up on any position. It requires grit, strategy and conditioning.

I first learned to scramble at the Montreal Wrestling Club, where day in and day out I was getting mauled by higher-class wrestlers. It came to a point where I would have to find justice in spreading out the time it took for them to score each takedown on me. Not by stalling or backing away, but by fending them off with everything I could muster. Maybe it meant that at the last second I had to dive between their legs as they were taking me to the mat, or do the splits when they attempted to finish a single-leg, or adjust my body just as they were going to cover me for a takedown.

Unless it meant I was going to give up back points, I wouldn't give up on any position. Believe me, that can often frustrate an opponent, because most wrestlers tend to relax for a second once they think they have the takedown. I believe you

should gain back your position in that moment of hesitation, then quickly take advantage of your opponent's frustration. Opponents would tire because I was always moving and because I was used to the pace of long scrambles or flurries.

I can honestly say that I rarely scored off my first maneuver. It was the third, fourth or maybe fifth adjustment I made during a series or flurry that would gain me points. And usually it was because the guy was mentally broken or fatigued.

So, if you are constantly getting mauled by your opponent, have someone take a stopwatch and record how long you have spread out their takedowns on you. Chances are, if it means something to you, you will find a way to increase his time between takedowns and eventually you might get the best of him.

The keys to being a good scrambler:

1. flexibility
2. hip awareness
3. good conditioning
4. savvy

Flexibility is somewhat controlled by



2002 Midlands Consolation 7th place results. 184 pound Ben Heizer, N. Illinois, decisioned Austen Palmer, Iowa State, 4-2. Photo by John Johnson.

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your genetics. One can, however, work on this area. Stretching after each training session, especially after weight lifting, can increase flexibility and decrease injuries. Being flexible allows you to slither out of your opponent's control or test his ability to execute a move to perfection.

Hip awareness involves knowing how

and when to shift your hips to counter a takedown. For instance, if a man is bringing me to the mat and I'm falling, I tuck my head and roll underneath his legs. The adjustments he makes will be the deciding factor in how I move my hips. If he settles his hips and falls on me, I must switch to one leg, hip over to my stomach and ele-

vate, bringing my hips under once again. Four adjustments are made with my hips in as many seconds.

Conditioning can't be emphasized enough. During the heart of the season my coaches have always stressed interval training. That is exactly what wrestling consists of: a hard 30-second flurry, followed by a 10-to-15-second break (perhaps walking back to center mat). That is exactly why I trained by pushing a car 50 yards, resting and driving while my partner pushed it back. My heart rate would go sky high after that push. It would be a full-body workout: triceps, shoulders, hips, quads and calves. But I would be able to bring my heart rate back down while my partner was pushing. I believe that is why I outlasted my opponents on a scramble, because I was relentless with my adjustments and motion due to my training. Yes, I would feel like I hit a semi truck after pushing cars or; completing a tough scramble. But I conditioned my body to recover at a faster rate. Instead of needing 20 seconds to bring my heart rate down, I needed to do only 10 seconds.

Savvy is acquired by being in certain positions so many times that your motion becomes automatic regardless of the opponent's reactions. You know that you possess this if you can wrestle and score in positions while blindfolded. Also, being savvy can mean that you have a few tricks in your bag, ones that work on almost anyone and will bail you out of trouble. I won a national championship because I was savvy, unique in my own style. You need to have moves that throw opponents off, however funky or unorthodox they may be. I'm not saying the fundamentals aren't important, but do not fall prey to becoming a one-dimensional or textbook wrestler.

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