

Practice Planning

By Scot Davis

There are numerous ways to structure a wrestling practice and different coaches bring new ideas to those plans. I'd like to share with you a sample plan of such a structure to your practice based on almost 40 years of coaching experience.

Over the course of time my ideas regarding practice structure have developed based on several factors. The key components are to maximize use of your time; structuring a practice that keeps your wrestlers engaged and active; promotes learning and some enthusiasm for wrestlers to return each day.

I think in planning a practice you first have to consider the number of wrestlers in your program and the coaches you have on staff. The greater your numbers requires more structured planning. This planning is not only important for your wrestlers but in keeping your coaches active and engaged as well. Don't waste a coach in your room! Each assistant can be utilized in some capacity, and it is just as important to plan for their participation as it is for your wrestlers.

It has been my experience that large groups are tougher in trying to gain everyone's focused attention. Smaller groups work best! I remember back in 1997-98 our high school was being renovated and we were getting a new wrestling room. However, it was not to be completed until after our season. Our current one was already being used for something else. There was no place to practice in our school building. We had to go across the street to a small college campus. There was a small building we moved our wrestling mats to for practice. This structure did not allow the space we needed for our 60 plus wrestlers. What we decided to do was split our practice into two shifts. Lighter weights practicing together at one time slot, and heavier weights at another time slot. This way we had space and we (coaching staff) could focus and provide the attention our wrestlers deserve. If we had we gone to just one practice with everyone we would have had a number of wrestlers sitting around. We want our athletes constantly active and involved in practice. This system worked as we won a state title that season with a final ranking of #8 in the USA.

Obviously practice structure will depend on your unique situation presented. I've coached at schools where we rolled our mats out in a cafeteria; To one school where we had a 30' X 30' wrestling room; To coaching in a makeshift room on a stage in a gym. All these situations helped me develop strategies in my coaching to better planning a

structured practice.

With the aforementioned experiences considered, let me show you a design for a wrestling practice that I have found works well for the teams I have coached:

The first thing to consider is getting your wrestlers to practice on time. To do this I have found it imperative to limit the amount of time between our wrestler's last class and the start of practice. The more time they have it seems they find themselves opportunities to be late, such as visiting with friends right after school. If this time span is limited and wrestlers realize they must hustle to get to practice on time there is just less opportunities for them to be delayed.

PRACTICE DESIGN FOR TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS AND FRIDAYS:

Example: 2:30 to 2:50 P.M. (20

minutes):

Reporting to Practice:

At Owatonna High School we limit this time span to just 20 minutes. Within this time span wrestlers must not only make their way to the locker room, but shower and change into their practice clothing. Yes, we make all our wrestlers shower before practice to limit opportunities to contract some kind of skin infection. We also enforce our wrestlers showering before going home from practice. Skin infection issues are always a concern and priority in prevention.

Example: 2:50 to 3:00 P.M. (10

minutes):

Once they report to the practice room we take attendance (our student managers do this as they enter the room). Wrestlers then congregate to one part of the room where they will be addressed by me or another coach regarding any topics of importance and what they can expect in practice that day.

Example: 3:00 to 3:25 p.m. (25

minutes):

We start actual practice with some jogging and gymnastic maneuvers like cartwheels, round offs, etc.

Following this we do several stretching exercises. You can use exercises and stretching of your choice. The key is to get the circulation up before you stretch. This is followed by some drilling. We can drill from the feet (stance, defense, changing levels) or from the mat (standups, short sit, granby shrug, etc.) What we drill has relevance to where we're developing in the season, or in respect to a specific opponent we're going to face in upcoming competition. Drilling is an excellent way to improve your technique but it also gets your wrestlers focused attention early in practice. Wrestlers must concentrate. This is important not only for learning but to set the tone for the rest of practice. This segment of

practice must be highly organized.

Example: 3:30 to 4:15, or 4:25 P.M. (45 to

55 minutes):

This part of practice utilizes demonstration of technique. This is where smaller groups are advantageous to learning. If you have several coaches who you feel confident in teaching certain technique I suggest you split your team into groups and rotate. When we start the season we have five groups of 8 to 12 wrestlers. They have a designated coach for 60 minutes for two days. The third day they switch to a new group. This maximizes the use of your assistant coaches too. They feel an important part of the program.

After the first two weeks we may reduce demonstration to two or three groups and rotate wrestlers through those groups that day. These sessions are not long, maybe 20 minutes. However, the benefits of a small group are worth it in keeping wrestlers focused, as well as your coaches ability to monitor the involvement of wrestlers in their group. Are they performing the technique properly? If they have questions, there is time to answer them, etc.

(5 minute Break):

After technique we give our wrestlers a few minutes for a restroom break and/or water break.

When they return we have them do some jogging to get their heart rates up again and circulation moving. We are getting ready for the conditioning workout, or full competition.

Example: 4:15 or 4:30 to 4:45 or 5:15 P.M. (30 to 45

minutes):

The conditioning workout starts with a little warm-up by jogging. We then go to hard drilling. Yes, drilling can be a great workout in itself. This is a prelim to full combat. There are a number of things you can drill. Most of our drilling is done with setups and takedowns. Length of time can vary on this depending on the day of the week and period of the

We are then ready for full combat wrestling. This can be done with various methods. You can use 3-ways; one on one matches; timed periods of wrestling from the feet or the down position; position wrestling where one opponent starts with a designated move and the session starts from there; or, the "Shark Bait", where one wrestler is designated and 3 or 4 other wrestlers rotate in on him one at a time. This last routine provides some of your younger and less experienced wrestlers an opportunity to score on a tired more experienced wrestler. Pride becomes a strong factor and motivation for a strong effort which results in better conditioning. Some other methods would include 30 second go's, 6-minute matches, 9-minute matches and situation wrestling.

Example: 4:45 or 5:15 to 5:00 to 5:30 P.M. (15

minutes):

The last segment of practice is where we try to finish our wrestlers conditioning and complete practice with some drills that are intense and leave our wrestlers exhausted. It is this extra conditioning that really promotes high performance conditioning. Wrestlers as a result are able to perform at high levels longer in matches. It simply provides stamina to performance. Here we utilize various types of drills and exercises in doing this. Some of these are what we call “**Winning Edge**” (a combination of up/downs or sprawling; or pushups and “jack knife” sit-ups), **Figure 8’s** (wrestlers on all fours race around circles alternating around one to another across the room); **Circle Drills** (on all fours with one hand outside the circle, wrestlers go as fast as they can one way for 10 seconds then on a whistle reverse their direction around the circle (10 feet in diameter); This is done for one full minute with 6 shifts of 10 seconds each; **Jump Overs** (one wrestler positions himself in a crouched position on all fours on the mat. Another wrestler stands to one side of that wrestler. That wrestler jumps over the top with both feet together. Once landing, that person immediately jumps back over that wrestler). This drill can be done at 30 second or 60 second intervals; **Log or Monkey Rolls** (This is a 3-wrestler drill where wrestlers lie on the mat parallel to each other. The middle wrestler rolls over, belly to back, while the wrestler he rolls towards jumps over that wrestler again rolling belly to back. The outside wrestler always looks to the inside wrestler and jumps back over him). We do these for 60 seconds at a time. The guys hate them, so they must be a good conditioner! **Cat Drill** (This drill emphasizes both the bottom wrestler’s quickness and staying in good position. For the top wrestler mat return is the emphasis. From the referee’s position the bottom wrestler does a standup and the wrestler on top hoists him in the air and returns him to the mat. While in the air the bottom wrestler curls his body in a cat like position with knees bent and up with hands ready to post off the mat. When he is returned to the mat he quickly pushes back off his knees and hands and vertically, pushing back into the top wrestler) This is a great drill to teach both top and bottom positioning for your wrestlers in regards to mat returns. **Wheel Barrow** (one wrestler on his hands with another wrestler holding his legs moving that wrestler forward like a wheelbarrow). **Push Match** (without the use of your arms each wrestler drives and pushes into an opponent). We utilize three ways to **carry a partner**, jogging around a couple pillars in our wrestling room. One is a **horse back** or **buddy carry** position, a **fireman’s carry** position and a **marriage carry** position. These really help improve strength and stamina. **Iso pushups** (wrestlers get in a pushup position around a meet circle (approximately 28 feet in diameter) . They must maintain their pushup position, one wrestler at a time each does a designated number of pushups. Example, one wrestler starts at one pushup and each wrestler in the circle does one going around the circle until it comes to the starting wrestler and he does two, and so forth. We find that going up to 5 and

back down is a great workout. You really feel it in the upper body, chest and arms. If a wrestler does not maintain the pushup position and falls to a knee or more the count starts over. This makes this drill a real challenge and really builds strength; Another great conditioning exercise is **jump rope**. There are a number of routines that can be utilized with the jump rope; **Sprints** are always a good finish. We use our wrestling room, sprinting back and forth and working your way through a line. To keep our wrestlers working to maximum effort we randomly clock an individual on a stop watch and yell the time out for everyone to hear. This can serve as a motivation. It also lets our coaches know how fast they are running. You get your rest while standing in line; **Plate Workout** is a great way to finish practice when wrestlers are tired. Take a plate, possibly a 45 pound plate or lighter if a lighter wrestler. You can do various weight training exercises with this plate. It really builds the grip and forearms. **Low Stance Drill** This is done when wrestlers are tired. They must maintain a low stance moving around the room. This simulates a wrestler being tired late in that 3rd period. They must maintain a good stance for a solid defense on the feet. I recommend the last three drills to be run at the end of your practice. These are just some of the drills we use to put that extra “burn” on your wrestlers at the end of practice.

This is a pretty typical practice for us except the day before a big meet or tournament. If it is a quality opponent or tournament we might have a light practice where the emphasis is our drilling with limited wrestling. Our practice time may be shortened as well. Basically these practices and the typical one I’ve described above must be scheduled and carefully planned throughout the season in a way that your wrestlers don’t get drained mentally. There are days, particularly at mid-season where we go completely away from a typical practice routine and play games. “This is a “fun” practice which our wrestlers love. This helps keep the attitudes positive and promotes the philosophy that “there’s not all work without play”. This puts the wrestler in a good mood and leaving practice happy. A good lift to your wrestlers spirits during the dull doldrums of mid-season.

PRACTICE DESIGN FOR MONDAYS AND WEDNESDAYS:

After the first two weeks of practice where an increased amount of technique is being taught we begin to insert weight training sessions into our practices. We do these sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays because we never have meets scheduled on those days. This way we get some consistency with weight training throughout the season. These sessions are not designed to so much increase much strength but rather to maintain as much as we can as the season progresses. Our in-season weight training exercises have wrestlers pairing with a partner, and they must:

*Partners/Coach and motivate!

*30-40 seconds of continuous work

*Muscle fatigue/Muscle failure

ROUTINE:

1. Towel pull-ups
2. Back hypers
3. Back Squat
4. Plate workout (shoulder press to a tricep extension) platform
5. Step-ups with dumbbell's (platform)
6. Overhead snatch squat
7. Plate workout (frontal chest press)
8. Back squat
9. Back hypers
10. Lat pull-downs
11. Low lat pulls
12. Dip

With weight training we split the team into two groups, lighter weights and heavier weights. We do this so we do not have to make so many adjustments in changing weights on our bars. We aim to get 30 minutes on a timed circuit. While one group is in the weight room (which is next door to our wrestling room) the other group is in the wrestling room for some technique. Having wrestlers paired in approximate sizes helps with our technique session as well. We can focus on some technique unique to lighter weights, or heavier weights. This is so we don't waste our time covering technique not that applicable to that specific group.

With weight training sessions now figured in our schedule our practice looks as follows:

2:50 to 3:00 p.m. – Announcements

3:00 to 3:30 p.m. – One group lifts weights while the other does technique

3:30 to 4:00 p.m. – One group does technique while the other lifts weight

4:00 to 4:05 p.m. – Rest room/water break

4:05 to 4:45 p.m. – Full workout with competitive wrestling/drilling-maximum effort!

4:45 to 5:00 p.m. – Finish practices with drills, etc.

I think it is important to keep lifting throughout the season. Like I mentioned earlier, we do not lift the first two weeks because our wrestler's bodies are so sore from getting back into the practice routine and the strain and physical exertion their bodies are not use to having for several months. So, we begin lifting season the third week and continue through the season until a week before post-season tournaments. At that point we try to taper and avoid injuries.

Practice planning can make or break your season. Well planned practice

can provide the structure that is needed to keep your wrestler focused and learning. However, also keep in mind that a wrestling season gets long and there needs to be some fun figured into practice so all your wrestlers stay positive and having fun. This may just be the key to keeping athletes out and talking positively about your program and sport. Remember, you will be a better coach if you have better athletes! Good luck this year. I hope your practices make a difference in the success of your season.

Additional Morning Run Practice (20 minutes):

In addition to the regular practice sessions we also have “morning runs.” These are done before school, starting one hour before the first bell rings for class. We begin with a jog/run around the gym, running one way for five minutes and reversing the route for another five minutes. We then have wrestlers stretch with varied flexibility exercises. They then do sprints at a designated distance in the gym. These sprints are increased daily. We finish with “Touchdowns or Killers,” or whatever your terminology is for the back and forth sprints at designated marks on the basketball court. Usually end line, free throw line, mid court line and so forth. A wrestler runs to one spot and returns to his starting point as fast as he can! I like to use what I call “Team Sprints” on these where we designate a time everyone has to make it in. If everyone does not make it, we run that one again!

Anyway, we then finish with a one minute run around the gym going as fast as you can. This is totally exhausting for your wrestlers and leaves them gasping for air, and the end of a great “morning run!”

Finally, we use to hold morning run sessions all season long, but we found out that wrestlers were getting mentally drained and tired. Now we do runs the first two weeks of practice and the last three weeks prior to post-season tournaments. Laying off during tournament time helps our wrestlers get their legs back and allows for more sleep.

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