

Slight modification of:

Wrestle for Your Life

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The saddest sight I ever saw happened last spring. While attending an unnamed state kids Championship, I was watching a classic roller coaster match between two 10-year-old up-and-coming studs for the tournament championship. Watching these two champions going back and forth was both exhilarating and hilarious. You could see and feel their minds struggling with thinking what coach had taught them and trying to make their young bodies do it. That, on top of the unpredictable reactions of their opponent, made for a match that was akin to two young lion cubs frolicking in the grass.

As the final whistle blew, they both looked at each other, not really knowing who won, but with the incomparable feeling of leaving your soul out there on a mat giving it everything you had. The beauty of seeing those two compete and hug in mutual respect almost brought tears to my eyes. I understood that it was not the victory that they would take away, so much as the joy of what their young minds were experiencing, learning, feeling. It should have been a moment remembered for a lifetime... instead, for the child who came up on the short side of the score, it became a nightmare.

"What the hell were you doing out there?," screamed his coach as he violently grasped his wrestlers arm. "You had the match won and threw it away with that last stupid move. Didn't you hear me yelling at you to stay away? You deserved to lose that match the way you wrestled."

Many of us watched in horror at the sight of this 'supposed' coach tearing his athlete apart. As I got fed up with his assinine behavior, I went up to him to put an end to the torment, upon which, I was greeted with: "I don't know who the hell you are, but you better stay out of my business... This is between me and my son!" Trying to hold back his tears and be 'tough' for dad, the little fellow was jerked away from our sight.

Most of us have been around the sport of wrestling either as an athlete, coach, volunteer, or fan realize that our fraternity is not only very exclusive but mad up of a different breed of cat. How many of you

have ever been around people who find out you're a wrestler and immediately start talking about when they went out for their junior high or high school team and though they didn't stick it out realized that it was the hardest thing they had ever done. How many glamour athletes readily admit that though their sport is hard, it isn't anything compared to wrestling. We, my friends, were the baddest athletes on the planet!

What is it about our sport that draws the best out of its participants? I believe it's because wrestling is probably the last pure sport. Think about it. We're not going to be millionaires; we're not on the front page of every newspaper; we don't get a lot of recognition; we can't blame anyone else if we win or lose; we don't have to be athletic freaks of nature to succeed; and during the two most celebrated holidays of the year, (Thanksgiving and Christmas) we can't eat. Enough said!

To be a wrestler forces you to learn all of the characteristics necessary to succeed in any of life's endeavors. Our sport teaches dedication, commitment, perseverance, sacrifice, focus, goal setting, work ethic, mental toughness, and delayed gratification. It is all of these traits that characterize success in every facet of life. Our athletic wins, losses and invincibility are fleeting; records are made to be broken; and fame is a vapor. It is what we learn through our participation that can never be taken away from us. When our lives move forward, these are the weapons we use to fight our daily battles.

If you agree with me at all, then why did that coach get so mad at his son? He was only ten years old and was doing the best he could. If what he could learn from our beautiful sport is so wonderful, do you think treating him like that will keep him in it? The coach was so focused on winning that he forgot what's important. Many parents/coaches think their little Johnny is the next superstar and if they don't push him he won't make it. For those that think success is measured in winning and losing, let's look at some very sobering facts:

• There are 8,900 High Schools and

231,083 high school participants in the United States.

- If you're on a varsity wrestling team, you're in the top 53% of all HS wrestlers
- If you place in the top 8 of your state tourney, you're in the top 6% of wrestlers
- If you're a state champion you're in the top 0.7% of all wrestlers.
- If you're a cadet or Junior National All-American you're in the top 0.1%
- If you're a cadet or Junior National Champion you're in the top 0.02%
- There are 350 Colleges (NCAA I, II, III, NAIA, & JUCO) and 8,700 college student athletes that participate in wrestling.
- If you're on a college team, you're among the top 4% of all HS wrestlers.
- If you get a College Scholarship, you're in the top 0.4% of all HS wrestlers.
- If you're a Collegiate All-American, you're in the top 4.6% of all college wrestlers and 0.2% of all former scholastic wrestlers.
- If you're a Collegiate National Champion, you're in the top 0.5% of all college wrestlers and 0.02% of all former scholastic wrestlers.

The rewards for our sport are not the victories, the championships or the trophies. They are the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat and all that those great teachers reveal to us. The stark reality is that less than 1% of our wrestlers will ever achieve "Success" most parents or coaches think they are driving their kids towards. That means that 99% of our athletes will become the recipients of the gifts of wrestling without the medals, and will be the leaders and productive citizens of our society. This is the greatest victory of all.

The power and influence of a coach is almost unparalleled in the life of our children. With that power becomes the responsibility to be a great student of our discipline and in so doing, becoming a better coach. Why does it matter? Why don't you ask the 10-year-old loser?

