

# GETTING THE EDGE...

by Christine M. Silverstein, RN, MPA, CHT

## How Wrestlers Can Become Mentally Tougher

It was once said by Abraham Lincoln, "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend the first six hours sharpening the ax." Lincoln was referring to the total preparation it takes to achieve a goal.

In wrestling, outstanding performances involve the total athlete - mind and body. Mental and physical preparedness is required for optimum effort, as well as optimum results. Wrestlers, are you preparing properly? It seems that we are over-educated with the physical aspects of the sport and under-educated with the mental aspects. Ninety percent or more of an athlete's training addresses the physical dimension with little time spent on the mental dimension. Still, most coaches and athletes accept the fact that, all things being equal, the team or person best mentally prepared will win.

Great athletes acknowledge that a positive state of mind is the key to success in sports. Dave Schultz, soon after he began wrestling, realized that the fear of losing caused tremendous pressure and drained him of needed energy and concentration. Thus, opportunities to win were wasted. He recognized that focusing on one's ability to perform up to one's potential provided a way to achieve personal excellence. But how does a wrestler learn to reach his true potential?

Many athletes limit themselves by believing that they were not born talented enough or smart enough to succeed, but, in actuality, their future success is more dependent on how they train now, rather than on their genetic gifts at birth. Too often, athletes create negative images in their minds prior to engaging in an event, and this leads to anxiety, low self-image, poor attitudes and expectations, and less than desired behaviors and performances. Is a "winning attitude" enough? Most of the time it is not because it does not help you to concentrate or focus on the moves and skills you need to accomplish your goals. It is a known fact that emotions affect every cell in your body. Mind and body are intertwined. When emotional stress and anxiety grow out of control, your physical performance suffers. Shortness of breath, blurred vision, muscle fatigue, disruptive coordination, and proneness to injury can result. Anxiety can be distracting, can ruin strategy and judgment, can create avoidance, and can halt development. It can also make you too sick to function.

How can one learn to be mentally tough enough to consistently perform toward the upper range of skill and

*A new video tape is now available, entitled "Winning The Mental Battle Within Yourself - A Guide for Wrestling Coaches." The cost is \$32.95, which includes shipping and handling*

talent, regardless of competitive circumstances? A simple and effective approach is available, one that every athlete can learn.

Psychological studies support the idea that "we are what we think about." If an athlete has a poor self-image or holds negative thoughts and images in his mind, poor performances and poor attitudes will result. On the other hand, an athlete with a positive self-image and positive expectation will support positive performances. Eventually a positive cycle of success will lead to a new attitude-

### **YOU EXPECT TO WIN, RATHER THAN HOPE TO WIN.**

With relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, visualization, and hypnosis, one can redirect their negative thinking to positive thinking. Despite popular misconceptions, hypnosis is a tool which allows a person to use more of their mind and to use it more effectively. Hypnosis is for the modern mind and is 100 percent natural. It is relaxed receptivity with increased perception, a state of deep relaxation which quiets the body and opens the mind. When defenses are down, the mind is open to positive suggestions, the type of which is determined by a person's goals and ideals. For the most profound effect, suggestions need to be given while in a very relaxed state to suspend the rational, logical filters in the conscious mind. Hypnosis removes the barriers and limitations we, as individuals, have placed on ourselves or allowed others to place on us.

In several sessions, self-hypnosis, mental rehearsal, and mental recall are taught so that the athlete can use the newly learned techniques, not just with wrestling but with any life challenge that they face in the future. Like a gardener, you plant the specific thought-seeds in the garden of your mind. Hypnosis helps you to care for and nourish the seeds so that they grow and bear fruit. In your subconscious mind these thought-seeds grow into your reality. This garden of your mind is much more fertile than your think. Your growth is unlimited! You alone choose what you are going to plant and reap, and you are the master of your own fate.

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