

## Eight Reasons Why Your Kid Should Wrestle

In the next few months, many children will have the opportunity to participate in wrestling for the first time. Just like the kids, many parents will embrace the opportunity, while others will resist. Because of the timely life lessons wrestling teaches children, I urge everyone to seriously consider trying the sport, if only for one season.

Usually, those who resist wrestling are unfamiliar with the sport. Wrestling can be an intimidating sport, but it's also one with great potential to develop young adults, both physically and mentally.

My own son resisted until seventh grade. "I don't want to roll around with a bunch of sweaty guys," he told me, echoing the popular mantra of basketball players everywhere. My wife, with her medical background, wasn't very supportive either, citing the skin rashes she saw wrestlers bring to her clinic. I had wrestled in high school – I wasn't very good, but I wrestled – and I knew what it could teach kids, so I persisted until both agreed to a one-year trial season.

That was four seasons ago – two in junior high, one on the junior varsity team and last year's varsity season. In that time, he's experienced extreme highs and extreme lows. There were times that he enjoyed wrestling almost as much as football, and there were times that he talked about quitting. There were dominating wins and puzzling losses, weeks when nothing could go wrong and weeks when everything went wrong. More important than all of that are the lessons that have helped him develop into the young man he is today.

1. **There is no entitlement in wrestling.** It doesn't matter where you are ranked or whether or not your coach likes you, your value as a wrestler depends on your most recent performance on the mat. Last year, I watched a wrestler, who spent most of the season ranked #2, lose two tough matches in the district tournament and fail to qualify for the state tournament. He was a senior who had placed at the state tournament the previous year, but that and his ranking didn't matter – only what happened on the mat. In a matter of minutes, his season was over. In wrestling, you must constantly earn what you get.
2. **Wrestling teaches toughness.** I got my first bloody nose in youth boxing at the age of 7, and never forgot it. At first, I wanted to cry and get out of the ring, but something deep inside me brought me back to the fight. Too many kids make it through childhood without a bloody nose. In wrestling, we have "blood time." Wrestlers get their mouths smashed, their noses bloodied, their eyes blackened and their joints twisted. Wrestling teaches athletes how to work through pain and discomfort. Wrestling teaches toughness.
3. **Wrestling teaches discipline.** Because they have to make weight and need to be in superb shape to succeed, successful wrestlers maintain their bodies like finely tuned machines. Even away from practice and competition, they can't forget that they are wrestlers. When their friends are feasting on fast food and sodas or staying up too late, wrestlers have to make decisions that will help them on the mat. They know that slipping on discipline will have negative consequences on the mat.
4. **Wrestling instills confidence.** It takes courage to walk out onto the mat. Once you overcome the fear of competition and the loneliness of being on the mat, everything else in life seems easier. Famous collegiate and Olympic wrestler Dan Gable says that 80% of wrestling matches are decided before the first whistle blows. "One competitor already knows he's going to win, and the other knows he's going to lose before either steps onto

the mat," he says. Once wrestlers develop confidence, they learn how to use it to give themselves a competitive edge.

5. **Wrestling teaches self-reliance.** Too many kids look outward for blame when they experience failure. When you are on the mat, no one is going to come save you. You have to decide how hard you are going to fight to win. If you fail, you have no one else to blame. You can't blame your teammates, your coach's play-calling or officiating. You win or lose on your own.
6. **Wrestlers don't go pro.** Yes, I know that professional wrestling still exists, but very few wrestlers have professional aspirations. Contrast that with other popular sports. Many basketball, baseball and football players believe that they are going to make millions in professional sports, so much so that they plan for it at the expense of education and other preparation. Wrestlers are under no such illusions. They compete for the sake of competition, not fame or money.
7. **Wrestlers come in all shapes and sizes.** Height and weight are large factors for success in several popular sports, like basketball and football, but they don't mean much in wrestling. Wrestling is a sport where small kids or heavy, but relatively short kids can be extremely successful. Where else can a scrawny 106-pound or short 250-pound kid win a state championship?
8. **Wrestlers learn to respect their opponents.** There is a lot of down time at wrestling events, and many wrestlers will compete against each other multiples times in one season. In that down time, they get to know each other, and will even cheer each other on. Not all of them are friends, but they all know what goes into a wrestling season, and they respect each other because of that shared sacrifice.

Even if your child never wins a match, he'll learn a lot about himself and how he fits into the world. While it's true the other sports can teach most of these lessons, the intensity of a wrestling season is hard to match. When you sign your child up for a wrestling season, you give them a competitive edge that will help them succeed in life. Don't miss that opportunity.