

The Dynamic Sport: Wrestling is a dynamic full contact sport. The positions are ever changing and move from top to bottom to neutral quickly with both wrestlers able to secure points at any point in the match. A good wrestler has technique that flows from one position to the next. Tactics and strategy become a bigger part of a wrestler's thinking as they grow in their understanding of the sport. A wrestler must constantly build their knowledge of technique, their physical conditioning, their strength and agility, and their mental toughness. Dynamic and all-encompassing wrestling will likely be the biggest challenge your child will ever willingly attempt. As famed wrestler and coach, Dan Gable, says "Once you've wrestled, everything else in life is easy."

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Brand New to the Rules of Wrestling? Let's figure this out. The type of wrestling the UIL and other state associations use is called Scholastic or Folkstyle wrestling. Wrestling has three two-minute periods for Varsity High School matches. The first period starts in the neutral position. One wrestler wears a green ankle band the other a red band. This helps the referee signal points. When a wrestler takes control of his/her opponent then this is a takedown worth 2 points. When the wrestlers go out of the circle, but one is in control of the other; the wrestlers are restarted in the top-bottom starting position. A wrestler on bottom can escape control worth 1 point or reverse control worth 2 points. A wrestler on top works to break his opponent down from their base and works to turn the opponent into the back exposed danger position. When a wrestler's back is exposed under control of their opponent the referee will count back points. Holding an opponent on their back for a two count is worth 2 nearfall points. Holding an opponent to the exposed position for a five count is worth 3 points. If a wrestler in control holds their opponent's shoulders/back to the mat for no less than two seconds, then the referee will signal a fall ending the contest and awarding the win to the wrestler who secured the pin.

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The Flip of the Coin: At the end of the first period the referee in a tournament competition will flip a red/green coin. The winner of the flip chooses that period or may defer their choice to the third period. The wrestler chooses neutral (starting on feet, no control). Top position (in control). Bottom (in defense, working to escape or reverse control).

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Potentially Dangerous and Illegal Holds: During a match if a referee deems that a hold of an opponent is in danger of causing harm to a wrestler then the referee will blow their whistle, holding a hand to the back of their head to signal potential danger. The wrestlers are then restarted in the position they were in prior to the holds' danger. This is done to protect athletes from injury. Illegal holds such as bending or grasping

less than three fingers, locking, or utilizing a banned hold such as a full nelson are penalized by giving the opponent 1 point.

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Locked Hands: When a wrestler is in the top or control position, they may not lock their own hands around the long axis of the body. The long axis extends from the chest to the top of the laces on a wrestler's shoes. Locking hands is a penalty where the wrestler's opponent is given a point. (Repeated locked hands or illegal holds can result in the loss of the contest. 1 point, 1 point, after a third illegal hold the wrestler is penalized 2 points, then the loss of the match.)

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The Referee Calls Stalling: Wrestlers are required to continue to wrestle competitively the entire match. A referee will warn a wrestler that they are stalling by holding a fist in the air and pointing to the wrestler to tell them they have to keep engaging their opponent. Wrestlers that only block from bottom to avoid being turned and do not actively build a base and attempt movement to escape can be warned. Wrestlers on top who only try to 'ride' the opponent and not work for a turn get warned. In neutral, a wrestler who backs away, wrestles on the edge, or doesn't work for an offensive attack can be called stalling. The first stall call is just a warning; following stall calls are penalized by awarding the opponent a point.

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The Standup Return: A new fan of the sport might have noticed that locked hands (locking around the long axis; or waist) is not called in one specific instance. When the bottom wrestler has just their feet as supporting points then the top wrestler can lock their hands. The common example is the wrestler on bottom hits a standup, getting only their feet on the ground. When just the feet and no other supporting point (hand, elbow, head, knee) are touching the mat the top wrestler can attempt a mat return with a waist lock. When the bottom wrestler touches any supporting point to the mat the top wrestler must immediately react and unlock their hands, or the referee will award a locked hands penalty point.

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The Victory: a wrestler wins by points or fall. If a wrestler is decisively ahead of their opponent by fifteen points or more then the match is ended by technical fall often referred to as a tech. A pin secures the victory and ends the match and can happen at any point in a match.

Headlocks Legal & Illegal: When we were kids, we all had our heads squeezed by someone in a headlock. Because the rules of wrestling are devised to protect athletes. A straight headlock is illegal and is penalized with a 1 point going to the opponent. To headlock an opponent, a wrestler must have an arm encircled with the lock staying above the elbow, and below the shoulder. If a wrestler has an opponent on their back and the headlock loses a legal lock and becomes illegal, then the match is stopped. Legal headlocks encircle the head and the arm in a lock.

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My Wrestler is on Bottom: When your wrestler is on bottom, what should you be looking for and what phrases you can cheer with? A wrestler on bottom has the goal of defending against giving up nearfall or the pin, while working to secure an escape (1 pt) or a reversal of control (2 pts). A wrestler wants to “build their base” if they have been flattened to the mat. If they get put to their back they need to “**fight it**” and “**bridge and turn**” to their base. Trying to score, they need to get “back pressure” and “hand control”. The wrestler on bottom is always in danger of getting turned, so they have to “**keep wrestling!**”

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My Wrestler is on Top: A wrestler on top is working for nearfall or the pin. They are working to ride their opponent and break them down from their base. Wrestlers on top will know a variety of turns if they can follow the person on bottom and avoid “getting high” --out in front of the bottom person’s arms where they can grab legs and where the top wrestler loses control over the center of their opponent’s core. Wrestlers on top will learn a half, a butcher, a chicken wing, an arm bar, or cradles. There are many different techniques from top that a wrestler can master and use against their opponents.

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My Wrestler is on their Feet (Neutral): A wrestler on their feet is working for takedown and control of their opponent. Keeping their head up and elbows in, they are working to move their hands and feet to set up, tie-up and attack their opponent. Wrestler’s ‘shoot’ takedowns such as singles, doubles, and hi-cs. More advanced wrestlers learn to pummel and roll their arms through an opponent’s defensive posture to secure upper-body attacks, known as throws. When an opponent attacks a wrestler defends by sprawling against the shot, utilizing their head, hands, and hip to stop the attack and then re-attack with counter-offense often called a ‘go-behind’. Along with the main shots, wrestlers will learn duck-unders, arm drags, front-headlocks, and many more offensive and defensive techniques. A wrestler creates their own style of wrestling as they grow in the sport.

Upper Body: In Scholastic wrestling, wrestlers build their “offense”. Attacks on their feet can be lower body leg tackles, often called ‘shots’. Or, a wrestler who is well-practiced can learn upper-body attacks, often called ‘throws’. Skilled athletes can throw their opponent, taking them from their feet to their back in a single arcing movement. Wrestlers can ‘throw’ headlocks, body-locks, arm spins and a variety of other techniques. A wrestler throwing an opponent is an impressive sight. Rules are in place to protect wrestlers from being ‘slammed’. The referee is attuned to upper body position and looks to stop potentially dangerous situations in the case they arise.

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Seven Basic Skills of Wrestling: Coaches constantly reinforce seven basic skills that are applied through all facets of wrestling. The beginning point for neutral wrestling is keeping a strong stance that moves with short choppy steps where an opponent stays low to the ground to protect themselves while avoiding imbalance such as crossing their feet. The second skill of motion is built slowly and applies to both top and bottom wrestling as well. Moving quickly and efficiently while generating power. In the beginning wrestlers learn to not stay on their knees as it reduces their ability to move. When wrestlers attack, they often have to ‘level change’, learning to keep their chest up and maintain balance against an opponent’s weight. To move into an opponent or to ‘penetrate’ through their defenses wrestlers learn penetration steps, which step through the center of the opponent’s stance or to the outside. When into the attack the wrestler has to have the ability to ‘lift’. The skill of ‘lifting’, carrying, or moving their opponent is practiced in all aspects of the sport. The final two basic skills are the ‘back step’ and the back arch. Sometimes people see these as only throwing skills for high level attacks. But turning hips through an opponent—the back step, and arching or twisting to turn—the back arch are part of neutral wrestling as well as bottom and top technique. Often the back step and back arch are seen in bottom wrestling techniques such as the hip-heist and the granby.

~ Ted Witulski