

Chapter 1

Getting Familiar with Wrestling Before You Sign Up for the Sport

In This Chapter

- ▶ Uncovering the ins and outs of wrestling
 - ▶ Surveying the moves you'll use in practice and competition
 - ▶ Knowing how to be a successful coach and a supportive parent
 - ▶ Deciding whether wrestling is the right sport for you
 - ▶ Highlighting six points that can help you reach your wrestling potential
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This chapter gives you a quick overview of what you're in for when you sign up to wrestle. But it doesn't just cover the fluff around the sport. It dives into specific details of technique and provides notable tips for how to become a better wrestler. In addition to expert technique instruction, it also provides some helpful information on coaching, parenting, following the rules, and training. In essence, this chapter serves as a jumping-off point to the rest of this book and the world of wrestling.

Knowing What You're Getting into When You Become a Wrestler

Wrestling is a fun sport that allows you to face your opponent one on one. Whoever can use the right combination of tactics, strategy, and strength to outmaneuver his opponent can score a victory or even a pin. But before you even take to the mat, you absolutely must have a basic understanding of what wrestling is and what you need to do before your first match. The following sections give a brief overview. Chapters 2 and 3 provide more thorough insight into wrestling, covering everything from the different styles of wrestling to the equipment you need to get started.

Identifying what wrestling looks like for your club or school team

Depending on your age, experience, and location, you have a plethora of options for how to get started in wrestling. But all those options essentially fall into two categories:

- ✔ **Club teams:** Some communities have *club teams*, or organizations that are affiliated with a regional governing body. Club teams offer limited consistency across the country, so search your area to find out what teams your community offers and how much joining such a team costs. Club teams require a team member fee that can be as high as \$2,500 per year, so be sure to do some investigating before you sign up for anything.
- ✔ **School teams:** Many schools offer wrestling as a sport for both boys and girls as early as fourth grade, but some schools may not offer it until the seventh grade or high school. The benefit of school programs is that participation is usually free or a very low cost. Furthermore, the coaches are approved individuals who have met state fingerprinting and security requirements and who have a good level of wrestling knowledge.

You may have to wait until high school to wrestle if your school doesn't offer a middle school or youth program. In that case, make sure to talk to your school's athletic director or visit your state's athletic association website to find out exactly what opportunities exist in your area or school district.

If club teams and school programs aren't accessible in your area, visit the local recreational facility to see if you can take some wrestling classes to get you started before the school or club programs begin. Chapter 2 shares more helpful information on how to get started in the sport and addresses the differences between Greco-Roman, freestyle, and folkstyle wrestling.

Preparing for the season to start

Before the season begins, you need to get a sports physical from your doctor and acquire the equipment you need for practice and competition. The good news: Wrestling doesn't require a lot of expensive equipment to participate, but it does require a few important items that you must have to compete. Chapter 3 is where you find everything you need to know about doctors' physicals and wrestling equipment.

Being Ready before You Step on the Mat

Before you can hit the mat and start wrestling, you need to do three things:

- ✓ Condition your body for the physical act of wrestling.
- ✓ Understand the rules and basic moves of the sport.
- ✓ Prepare your mind for the mental aspect of wrestling.

Chapters 4 through 7 are great resources to help you establish a strong foundation before you start getting into the specific moves and drills involved in wrestling.

Knowing the rules of competition

To be successful as an athlete, you must have a solid understanding of the rules of play before you enter into your sport. Reaching your full potential as a wrestler is impossible if you don't know what the referee is looking for during your match. Specifically, you absolutely must know the rules, procedures, and policies involved in wrestling before you start competing.

Chapter 4 shows you what happens during a match and helps you understand the different weight classes and categories as well as the role of the official in the match. It also explains how scoring works so you'll know how to win when you get out on the mat.

Staying healthy and getting in shape

Enduring an intense six-minute wrestling match without getting tired takes hard work. Hence, wrestlers go through countless grueling practices during which they prepare their bodies for competition. If you're ready to get started, turn to Chapter 5, which provides a game plan for your physical development as a wrestler. There, I show you how to set up a training program to build your muscles, become more flexible, and develop your cardiovascular fitness level.

Getting the right fuel into your body is just as important as physically working out, so I dedicate a chunk of Chapter 5 to that topic, as well. Many wrestlers,

and athletes in general, ignore the nutritional aspect of preparation, so you'll be ahead of your competitors if you focus on fueling your body the right way before, during, and after your practices and matches. I provide some guidelines for hydration and a suggested eating schedule for you to use as a reference so that you can make sure you're giving your body the nutrients it needs.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is another important aspect of being successful as a wrestler. I provide some examples of exactly what that entails in Chapter 5.

Focusing your mind

Because every wrestling competition is a one-on-one matchup, you need to take some time to focus on the mental aspect of the sport, not just the physical. I discuss mental preparation as it relates to wrestling, provide techniques for mental training, and explain how to develop a positive approach to your match in Chapter 6.

In addition to being mentally prepared for your matches, you need to know how to be a good teammate and a good wrestling student, how to develop a strategy that leads to success on the mat, and how to be a good sport whether you win or lose. I explain all this and more in Chapter 6.

Understanding the basics

Before you can start practicing the more difficult moves in wrestling, you need to know how to do the basic movements and techniques. Lucky for you, I dedicate all of Chapter 7 to helping you master the fundamentals so that you can eventually move on to the more exciting moves that I cover in Part III. The basic fundamentals that I share with you include general principles of movement on the mat, the all-important issue of changing levels, and the penetration step.

Hitting the Mat for Practice and Competition

When you're on the mat ready to face your opponent, you want to be well versed in many moves so that you can keep your opponent on his toes and win the match. Chapters 8 through 12 cover a plethora of moves to help you

do just that. These chapters make this book a resource truly second to none. In them, I walk you step by step through many major moves from the neutral, top, and bottom positions. Coach Bobby Douglas coaches me through each move, and I accompany each one with sequential photos to ensure your understanding. I break down even the most complex moves in an effort to help you understand what you need to know to start working on them in practice.

In addition, Chapter 14 includes drills you can use to practice and develop universal wrestling skills that can help take your mat skills to the next level. The following sections give you a brief overview of what you can find in Chapters 8 through 12.

Starting positions

Chapter 8 shows you the three possible wrestling starting positions: neutral position, top of the referee's starting position, and bottom of the referee's starting position. Each one requires different skills and moves to score points and win the match:

- ✓ The *neutral starting position* is where every match starts. Your main objective from this position is to take your opponent to the mat. Chapter 11 shows you how to perform takedowns.
- ✓ The *top starting position* is all about maintaining control of (or *riding*) your opponent. Your objective from this position is to use a pinning combination to end the match (see Chapter 12 for details).
- ✓ In the *bottom starting position*, your objective is to earn points by using an escape or reversal to get away from your opponent and take control. (See Chapter 9 for details on escapes and Chapter 10 for more on reversals.)

Mastering moves for muscle memory

Because wrestling is a very tiring sport, you're going to experience times in a match when you feel as though you just want to give up. At times like these, you need to be able to rely on your favorite takedowns to help you take down your opponent in the last minute to achieve victory. How can a few favorite moves help you when you're feeling helpless? As with all sports, wrestling requires practice, practice, and more

practice on the basic moves so you can do them with speed and efficiency. By practicing only one or two takedowns every day, you create muscle memory that will help pull you through when you feel like you're too tired to continue. Bottom line: To be a successful wrestler, focus on becoming excellent at one or two takedown moves instead of being average at five or more.

Takedowns

Every great wrestler has a favorite way to get his opponent to the mat. For instance, my favorite is the single-leg takedown. Chapter 11 walks you through low-, mid-, and high-level takedowns, or *attacks* (including my favorite), and shows you how to do them successfully. You don't have to be an expert at all of them, so after you read through all the moves I include in Chapter 11, pick one or two of them to master based on your personal style.

As an added bonus, I dedicate a section of Chapter 11 to showing you how to avoid a takedown from the defensive perspective with counterattack moves like the duck-under and the shrug.

Breakdowns

When you start in the top of the referee's position, you have to use special moves called *breakdowns* to keep control of your opponent and take him to the mat. After all, the last thing you want to do when you start on top is to lose control and let your opponent get away. If he does, he scores points in his favor. Chapter 9 shows you how to execute different moves, such as the cross face, far ankle, and many other breakdown techniques.

Escapes and reversals

Escapes and reversals are two fundamental moves that you must become familiar with because every wrestler likely has to start in the bottom position at some point during the match.

- ✔ You use *escapes* when you're in trouble to get away from your opponent and stand up in the neutral position. Experts at the sit-out and other escape moves are exciting to watch. Plus, you earn one point for every escape you perform. See Chapter 9 for details on escapes.
- ✔ You use *reversals* to go from the bottom position to the top position and gain control over your opponent. These crafty moves may take a while to master, but they're worth two points, so they make good additions to your wrestling arsenal. I show you how to do a couple of reversals in Chapter 10. For instance, I explain how to do the roll series for those of you who are beginning and intermediate wrestlers, and I explain how to do the Granby series for advanced wrestlers.

As with takedowns, you don't have to be an expert at every escape and reversal, so pick a couple of them that you can rely on and do better than your competitors.

Pinning combinations

The main objective in any competition is to defeat your opponent. In wrestling, you do so either by outscoring your opponent or by pinning him. A *pin*, or *fall*, is when you hold any part of both of your opponent's shoulders in contact with the mat for two seconds. The techniques involved in pinning your opponent are the most important of all to master because by the time you're ready to use a pinning combination, you already have your opponent on the mat and you just need to finish him off.

Chapter 12 shows you how to finish off your opponent. In it, I explain how to do three main pinning series, including the half nelson, the arm bar, and the cradle. After you understand how to do each of these moves, try them all in practice and decide which one is your favorite. Then practice, practice, practice until you become an expert at your favorite move.

For Coaches: Leading Your Team to Success

Not only is this book a great resource for beginning wrestlers who want to grasp the basics of wrestling and more advanced wrestlers who want to perfect their techniques and master new moves, it's also a great tool for coaches at all levels who want to improve how they coach and work with their teams.

Chapters 13 and 14 offer special guidance for coaches. They give you everything you need to know as you accept one of the greatest responsibilities imaginable — working with kids. Specifically, they provide tips for creating a year-round plan of attack for competition, training, and conditioning, and they walk you through numerous drills to use at your practices. The following sections give you a quick snapshot of what you, the coach, can find in this book.

Being a leader and a teacher

Being a wrestling coach is an extremely complex job because of the many people you have to communicate with on a daily basis and the many decisions you have to make that relate to both your athletes and the entire program. I dedicate Chapter 13 to helping you work through the complexities of the job. There I provide an outline for how to manage your team, how to develop credibility as a coach, and how to establish team guidelines. I also explain why those guidelines are important and provide a handy checklist for you to evaluate whether or not your team is operating effectively.

Because you have to juggle so many responsibilities as a coach, you need to be aware of exactly what your roles are and whom those roles affect. In Chapter 13, I walk you through your five main roles as a wrestling coach — modeling, inspiring, innovating, encouraging, and evaluating — and explain how to effectively communicate with your three main constituents — players, parents, and officials.

Handling all the other stuff

As a head coach, your attention gets pulled in so many directions that you may feel like your main role is to put out multiple fires all at once. In fact, many head coaches find that true coaching is easier to do as an assistant because they don't have to worry as much about the many administrative functions head coaches have to deal with.

To help you prepare for the many duties you have to perform as a coach, I provide some tips on managing issues like fundraising, team logistics, parents, booster clubs, and volunteers in Chapter 13. After reading that chapter, you'll have the tools you need to be a well-organized, effective coach.

For Parents: Being Supportive

The words *supportive* and *parent* likely stir up different emotions depending on perspective. To athletes, a supportive parent is one who shows up for every match, gets them to practice, and provides the financial commitment they need to compete. To coaches, supportive parents are those who don't question playing time, complain about their kids' experience, or draw attention to themselves during matches.

On the other hand, to you, the parent, support may mean that you advocate for your child, cheer him on, and intervene whenever things aren't going so well. Before you set out to be your own version of a supportive parent, I strongly suggest that you head over to Chapter 15, where I explain everything you need to know about being the best, most supportive parent you can be for both your kid and his coach. The following sections outline what I cover in Chapter 15.

Understanding your role

I outline the major differences between the roles of players, coaches, officials, and parents, and I explain how these differences play out during the wrestling season. If you're a parent who wants to be a coach, go coach. If you want to be an official, get a referee's license. If you want to be a wrestler, join an adult league. Bottom line: You're a parent, not a coach, player, or official, and you must understand exactly what your role is.



Parents can be both a great help and a tremendous hindrance to their athletes. You have a direct effect on their enjoyment of the sport they play. So make sure you actively show your support (and set a good example) by what you do and say in those key times before, during, and after a match.

Adding value to your kid's experience

Wrestling parents help their kids the most by understanding the rules of the sport and by being knowledgeable, well-educated spectators. After you're familiar with the ins and outs of wrestling, you can better help your child deal with the many issues he'll face as a wrestler, including nutrition, rest, and positive encouragement. Chapter 15 breaks down what your child needs from you into three areas: before the match, after the match, and during the match.

Supportive parents can help their wrestlers by making sure they stay healthy; skip to Chapter 15 for a quick overview of nutrition, injury treatment, and injury prevention. That chapter also provides tips for how to deal with conflicts that arise between your child and his teammates and coaches.

Figuring Out Whether Wrestling Is Right for You

One of the great tragedies in life is not having the courage to give something new a try, and wrestling is no different. Keep in mind, though, that everyone's body matures and develops differently, so just because things aren't going well for you early doesn't mean the tide won't turn in a few years when your body fully develops. In case you're wondering whether or not wrestling is right for you, I provide the following list of questions that you can ask yourself to help you determine the answer:

- ✓ **Am I a hard worker who's inspired by wrestling?** Do I have the internal drive to work hard? Do I want to wrestle for myself and not for my parents or coaches? If you're not a hard-working self-starter who truly enjoys wrestling, you may need to find another sport.
- ✓ **Do I have a positive attitude?** Sure, everyone is critical of himself once in a while, but do you have an overall positive outlook? If you're a negative person who's always looking at the down side, this sport may be too mentally demanding on you, and you probably won't find success as a wrestler.

- ✔ **Am I a disciplined person who can live with the monotony of doing the same drills and exercises day in and day out?** You need a lot of discipline to drill and drill until you master the basic fundamentals of wrestling. If you're a one-time Charlie who thinks practice is for the birds, you need to move on to a different, less challenging activity. Wrestling will definitely test your level of discipline.
- ✔ **Am I a confident person?** You're going to be out on the mat in the spotlight for six minutes with an opponent who's main goal is to take you to the ground. You need to be okay with being the center of attention and letting everyone in the gym watch you either succeed or fail. Only a confident person can handle that type of public scrutiny. If you're not comfortable being in the spotlight, you may be better suited for a more team-oriented sport in which you can easily get lost in the action.
- ✔ **Do I hate losing?** I'm not saying you have to lose in an unsportsmanlike manner, but you do need to really enjoy winning and really hate losing. If you're competitive in school and in recreational activities and you have a hard time toning it down in a simple game of checkers, you're in the right sport. Good wrestlers love competing.
- ✔ **Do I have fun in the wrestling environment?** This question is pretty simple, but you're the only one who can answer it accurately. If you have fun on the mat, try to stick with wrestling regardless of how successful you are. But on the flip side, if you aren't having fun, regardless of how successful you are, move along to another interest.

Identifying Six Keys to Reaching Your Wrestling Potential

To reach your potential when wrestling, remember the following six important pointers:

- ✔ **Be inspired.** You must have an internal drive to be a great wrestler. You have to wrestle because you want to succeed, not because your parents, coaches, or friends want you to do so. The way I see it, motivation lasts only so long; to be truly successful, you must be inspired.
- ✔ **Maintain a positive attitude.** Great wrestlers have a positive, no-nonsense mindset; in other words, they take a championship approach to practices and matches every day. Sure, everyone has bad days, but the best wrestlers keep them to a minimum.

- ✔ **Master the basics first.** You can't find a substitute for working hard and drilling the basic fundamentals and skills every day. Expect to spend an entire practice working on just one drill or one move until you get it right; then do it 100 more times to make sure you've got it. Most great wrestlers are great because they love doing drills over and over and over again. Repetition creates *muscle memory*, or your body's ability to automatically react in a certain way based on mass repetition.
- ✔ **Love your style.** If you're new to wrestling, don't expect to know right away what your style is. After a year or two, you'll begin to develop an understanding of how you wrestle and what types of moves work for you. Everyone's body is different, so don't feel like you have to fit into a certain mold to be a great wrestler. Wrestle according to the way your body functions and be confident with your individuality.
- ✔ **Compete.** Don't wait for your first match to get the competitive juices flowing. Take any and every opportunity to pit yourself against someone in a one-on-one matchup to learn more about yourself and to develop a competitive spirit. Great wrestlers welcome competition of any type, and of course, they prefer to finish first.
- ✔ **Have fun.** When you feel as though wrestling is more of a job than it is fun, find a new activity. Only you know whether you truly enjoy the sport, so be your best advocate. Just remember that everyone has days when things don't seem fun or when practices are tough, but if you're consistently not looking forward to wrestling practices or matches, you may need to step away from the sport and find your passion elsewhere.

These six points have helped me a lot in my career, and I'm confident that they can help you. So incorporate them into your wrestling and revisit them often.

