

LOYAL Wrestling Travel Team Information

Many of you may have heard about the “wrestling travel team” at practice or from others. For some of you it may have been old hat, but I suspect for many of you it was a bit confusing, and maybe even overwhelming. To help make sense of it all, I have written this quick guide to going to tournaments, a sort of “what to expect when...” type of thing that I hope answers a lot of questions.

While much of what follows may seem like a hundred reasons not to go to tournaments--(e.g. cost, time spent and other frustrations,) there is one very compelling reason to go to at least one or two tournaments a year: *Inspiration*. More than anything else, tournaments will inspire your child to do their best, not just in matches, but in practice as well. Champions are only crowned at competitions, they are made in practice. The more focused and goal oriented your child is at practice the more he will take away from our program. Imagination and inspiration are key components to youth sports. When I was a kid, every time I touched a baseball I was Robin Yount, and every time I caught a football, I was Steve Largent. Unfortunately, kids can not turn on ESPN and find prepackaged Amateur Wrestling highlights to make them grab a singlet and run to the gym. This sport requires a bit more effort than other sports to achieve that level of inspiration within a child. The tournament is a tremendous opportunity for your child to show off what they have learned, to meet children from other schools and areas with like interests, and maybe earn a trophy. Most kids and quite a few parents fall in love with the size, color and excitement that tournament days offer, and it helps your child set concrete short and long term goals for themselves.

Thanks again, and if you do have any questions for me, please do not hesitate to call me at (716)735-9241.

--Dan Hamner

Unlike other sports, we do not have try outs for travel wrestling. There are no cuts, starters or backups. Any wrestler who wants the added challenge is welcome, and will wrestle at the tournament. At a tournament we can make our team as big as we want it to be none will be turned away.

Tournaments cost around \$15 per entrant, give or take a spectator’s fee of a dollar or two. They are an all day affair. Most require weigh-ins between 7 and 9 a.m., and if it requires a long drive on snowy roads, that will have to be figured in as well. Most tournaments are double elimination, meaning that your wrestler will be expected to wrestle between two and five matches depending on the exact format. If your wrestler loses two matches, or wins out his side of the bracket (more about that later...) he or she is finished for the day. This can be anywhere between noon and five p.m. The better your wrestler does, the longer they have to stay. Most tournaments move pretty quickly and are done around 3 p.m. I have actually seen tournaments finish after dinner, but those are rare. All tournaments offer breakfast and lunch foods at concession stand prices. The quality of such fare varies greatly, so it doesn’t hurt to pack some favorite fruit or cereal bars, or a whole lunch for that matter.

Tournament days follow a basic outline:

- You arrive at the school between 7 and 8 a.m. Make sure your child is well rested, fingernails are trimmed and they have appropriate clothes. We will be making some singlets available for borrowing, and you may purchase one if you like. They are not mandatory, but are preferred. If you do not want to wear a singlet, correctly fitted shorts that have no zippers, buckles, or pockets, plus a snug T-shirt may be worn. Light flexible sneakers, like canvas Chuck Taylor's are better than solid, chunky basketball shoes, and of course, you may choose to buy wrestling shoes, (the Sneaker Barn on 104 actually has a few youth models available, as does Laux in Lockport.) Headgear is not required until high school, but if you are going to a lot of tournaments, it might be a good investment.

- Some tournaments require pre-registration, and honor weigh ins, but most will handle this the day of the tournament. Registration tables will be set up according to your child's birth year. For example, children born in the years 1993/94 will usually be a "Junior" class wrestler, and will wrestle other "Junior" class wrestlers. You will need to have your child's AAU card to register them at most events, and our club will purchase and distribute them soon. Payment is due at registration. All clubs accept cash, a few accept checks, and none accept credit/debit cards.

- The next thing to do is to look for weigh-ins. Each child is weighed so they can be appropriately "bracketed" according to weight, within their age group. So in the end wrestlers are grouped according to age and weight so that they will always wrestle a child born in the same year as themselves, or either the calendar year above or below (93/94 together or 94/95 together) and within at most, 5% of their body weight. In practice, most elementary aged children wrestle kids that are within half a pound to two pounds heavier or lighter, and can not by rule, wrestle someone who exceeds them by 5% of their own weight.

- Keep in mind; at no time do we condone "sucking weight" or dieting to gain a competitive advantage. If your child is on a diet while they are participating in this club, we trust it is done under proper medical supervision, and for appropriate reasons. That being said, we can certainly offer a bit of advice about weighing in. If you postpone breakfast until after weigh-ins, you can save a pound or two, and give your child something to do while the tournament organizes its brackets. Stripping off shoes and extra clothes, and making a last visit to the bathroom can also help ensure that your child is bracketed into the most appropriate weight class.

- After registration and weigh-ins, brackets will be posted outlining who everyone will wrestle. Learning who is on the bracket is not critical, but learning the name of the bracket your child is on is. Brackets will be coded, usually with a letter for the age group like "J" for Junior, or "M" for Midget, and a number which is often just an ordering of the age groups from lightest to heaviest. It will look something like "J-4" or "M-7." To end confusion for the day, I like to write the bracket number on the child's hand, that way they can help keep track of things as well. Mats in the gym are then labeled in a way that allows the tournament officials to call entire brackets to a specific mat. For example "Now wrestling on mat 7, J-3, on deck on mat 7, M-5." As a team we will warm up before the long day begins.

- When called to a mat, take your wrestler to the side of the mat, and wait for a referee to call your child's name. Have a bottle of water handy, and have your wrestler begin to stretch a little. Shortly before, or as they take the mat, have them do some running in place, or deep knee bends to bring up their heart rate. You want their heart rate to come up gradually rather than putting them on the mat cold, or their heart will go from zero to pounding in ten seconds, a sure formula for making them too tired too quick or "gassed." If you are not comfortable with coaching your child, try to look around to find a Medina coach, and let them know when and where your child will be wrestling. Do not let your child begin a match without a coach present. It can be Mr. Gross, Montesanti, Sargent, Hamner or any other experienced Medina coaches, or you may coach the child yourself if you feel comfortable. If your child's name is called and you do not have a coach, inform the referee and they will go to the next match while you find one. This is for instruction, and advocacy if needed, but it is also important for us to understand how effective we have been in practice, and what to plan for next.

- You can figure out how to do this yourself, but I usually have the child eat directly after the second match. It is often close to lunchtime, you will have a good idea how the day is going, and it is the longest break between matches (by rule it has to be forty minutes, but it can be more.) Try to feed your wrestler enough that they will not run out of gas, but do not stuff them so that they slosh out for their third match like its Thanksgiving.

- Your wrestler will compete until they lose two matches or win one side of the bracket sheet. Trophies or awards are given for first second and third, sometimes fourth, and sometimes all participants are given an award, especially in the younger age groups.

A few very important last words:

- Tournament day is a day of extreme ups and downs. In most cases, your child will be very excited, maybe even a bit “hyper” at times. The best thing you can do for your child is to try to keep their motors running a little slower in between matches. Books, coloring books, game boys and headphones can be very useful tools to give your child a chance to relax in between matches.

- “Psyching” up a wrestler before a match can be useful for some of the older kids, but for younger kids, it is a bit self defeating. The last thing most kids need is to be more excited than they already are. Instead try to focus them on the task at hand. Go over your wrestler’s best set ups and takedowns, reassure them that they have practiced hard, and if they think their way through things, they have a good chance to win. Have them tell you, and show you what their first move is going to be. Then have them tell you again, right before they start the match. What is seen as aggression in a wrestler is actually quiet confidence, determination and complete focus on what they are doing. The focused wrestler is the one who will see opportunities and take advantage of them. When you psych up a wrestler with phrases like “Kick some butt...” or “Kill him...” you usually end up with a confused wrestler wondering why they have not drilled the moves “Kick some butt...” or “Kill him...” in practice. They will be caught wasting time and energy, unable to choose moves or recognize good positions. “Kicking butt” should never be a goal for a wrestler, at best, it is an after the match description of what happened when a wrestler continually improved his position one move and technique at a time. Focus them on that first string of moves, and you can go a long way to creating “aggression” in your child’s wrestling.

- For first time parents and wrestlers, be prepared to see more tears than you will probably be comfortable with. Please keep in mind that almost all of these tears will be from frustration, not pain. Referees are very good at keeping the children safe. For young wrestlers, one of the first hurdles is being comfortable in bad positions. Rest assured if a child is screaming “I am being choked,” they are not being choked. Choked people do not scream. Most of all, bear in mind that these *are children and not miniature men and women*. They have not developed the adult ability to deal with the intense feelings of anticipation, disappointment and frustration that can come with the sport of competitive wrestling. That skill has to be learned and practiced like everything else in life, and is one of the best reasons to go to tournaments in the first place.

- Lastly, if it is your child who loses himself and launches into a tearful tirade, they will be in no position to hear and understand what you *say* to them. Instead they will mostly respond to *how* you say it. If you get all fired up and yell at the officials, coaches, or even the child for being upset; your child will absolutely not comprehend your arguments. Whether what you are saying is correct or not, your child is learning that ranting and raving and carrying on is an appropriate response to a difficult situation. You will reinforce their behavior by doing the same thing they just did. Children model themselves after the adults in their life, and if the adults respond with tirades, they think they should too. Instead, recognize their frustration with a simple gesture of condolence, carry your head up high, and reassure them that their effort was terrific. If there is something that has to be discussed in length (such as score, or rules) do so after the child has regained his composure. If you are at the edge of the mat ready to greet your wrestler like a champion, win or lose, they will carry themselves like a champion, win or lose. If you want your child to hold their head up high with pride and sportsmanship, take every opportunity to *show* them how it is done, especially in the most difficult and intense moments.

- Wrestling should be challenging, intense, and competitive, but also fun. Talk to your friends, or make new ones. Watch other matches at other age groups and try to learn something. See a different move? Ask about it at practice. Stay serious during your match and lighthearted afterward. Work hard, but keep your eye on the big picture. For the youngest of our wrestlers, this will be the first of as many as thirteen years of wrestling before they graduate from high school! Steady and consistent participation in an inviting and fun environment as well as a competitive one will sustain them in the long run. They need to learn the sport, but they also need to learn to love the sport.