

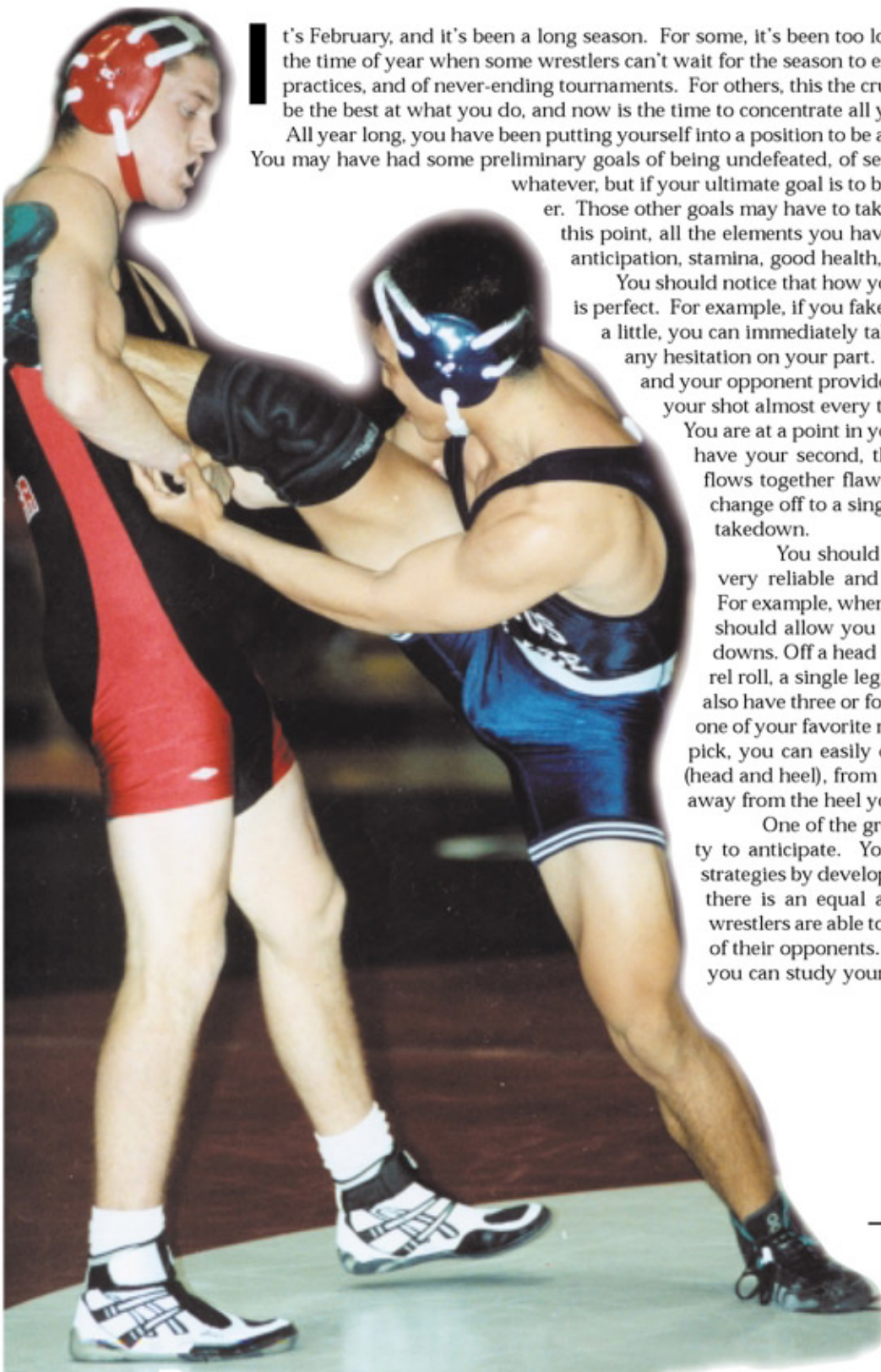


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ADVICE FROM A CHAMPION

Peaking at the Right Time

By Carol and Patrick Milkovich
2x NCAA Champion and
Distinguished Member of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame



It's February, and it's been a long season. For some, it's been too long, but for others, not long enough. This is the time of year when some wrestlers can't wait for the season to end. They are tired of cutting weight, of long practices, and of never-ending tournaments. For others, this is the crucial time. Every year, you get one chance to be the best at what you do, and now is the time to concentrate all your efforts on peaking at the right time.

All year long, you have been putting yourself into a position to be able to reach your peak when it really counts. You may have had some preliminary goals of being undefeated, of setting a record for the most technical falls, or whatever, but if your ultimate goal is to be the best, now is when it must come together. Those other goals may have to take a back seat to your championship goal. At this point, all the elements you have been working on, such as timing, set-ups, anticipation, stamina, good health, weight control, etc. should come together.

You should notice that how you time your shots from reaction type moves is perfect. For example, if you fake a shot left, and he reacts by moving his foot a little, you can immediately take your shot to the right. There is no longer any hesitation on your part. It's ingrained now. You provide a stimulus, and your opponent provides the correct reaction that allows you to take your shot almost every time. Now you should be "chain wrestling."

You are at a point in your wrestling, that if your first shot fails, you have your second, third, or even fourth move ready, and it all flows together flawlessly. For example, you shoot a fireman's, change off to a single, then change off to a double to score your takedown.

You should have perfected a variety of set-ups that are very reliable and interchangeable with different techniques. For example, when you bang your opponent's head, that set-up should allow you to execute at least five to six different takedowns. Off a head bang, you can set up a fireman's carry, a barrel roll, a single leg, a double, duck under, or a high crotch. You also have three or four different set-ups that allow you to execute one of your favorite moves. If one of your favorite moves is a heel pick, you can easily catch it with a two on one, from a head tie (head and heel), from an underhook or an overhook, or by circling away from the heel you want and waiting for him to step.

One of the greatest qualities of any top athlete is his ability to anticipate. You can neutralize many of your opponents' strategies by developing the skill of anticipation. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The most successful wrestlers are able to anticipate the set-ups, actions, and reactions of their opponents. This ability comes from many things. First, you can study your opponents' style or you can watch another

California Community College Wrestling Dual Meet at Palomar College. 165 pound Buck Meredith, Palomar, decisioned Scott Oda, Cerritos, 11-5. Photo by James Brammer.

team's style. Watch their set-ups. Watch which side they like to shoot to most. Observe how they line up on top and bottom and what they do from there. Some teams like to do a lot of upper body throws. Others like to throw legs or use cradles. Throughout the entire season, you should be taking notes about individuals or teams that you will face, and then you must work on anticipating and countering their particular technique or style of wrestling. Another component of anticipation is having that chain-reaction of moves mentioned above.

Your stamina should be excellent. You are scoring points efficiently and effectively by not using a lot of time or energy. You will win many matches by just being able to go longer and harder than your opponents. I have seen many talented and gifted wrestlers beaten by opponents whose only real edge was the fact that they were in much better shape, and by the third period they were still able to pound away and eventually win. Your practices should probably be shorter this time of year, but they should also be more intense. You might be wrestling more matches in practice to prepare you for tournaments. Your running needs to include more sprint-type training as opposed to long-term running.

Every wrestler knows the value of being injury-free, but sometimes injuries happen. What you do have more control over is your health. Obviously, wrestling season coincides with the cold and flu season and all the other respiratory illnesses. So it is very important to maintain healthy routines by dressing warm, keeping hydrated, getting sufficient rest, and maintaining your training routines even at overnight or away meets. This is where a lot of discipline breaks down with many athletes. They treat those longer trips as a vacation, particularly if they are staying in hotels. This is when and where discipline and focus is of paramount importance.

There will always be problems associated with weight control. It doesn't matter how many or what the weight classes are, some wrestlers won't practice the discipline to maintain their optimal performance weight. They make weight by dehydration, starving, throwing up, spitting, etc. only to bounce back up eight to ten pounds afterwards. This takes its toll on the body, especially when you have to make weight two days in a row. This is where a lot of very good wrestlers with poor discipline lose when they shouldn't have. Generally, the wrestlers who maintain a consistent weight and who eat appropriately will perform better throughout the long season.

So are you prepared to peak at the right time? You only get one chance each

year to be the best at what you do out of everyone who does what you do. Are you putting yourself in a position to accomplish this lofty goal? This is the time when even some good wrestlers are thinking more about eating and the season being over than they are about staying focused and maintaining discipline. Those are the wrestlers that you want first or second round of the state tournament because they are thinking about eating popcorn and hot-dogs, and you should be more than willing to help them reach that goal. Those are wrestlers who will be wishing they were in your spot on the podium.

The authors, Carol and Patrick Milkovich, have developed and implemented their L.E.A.D.E.R.S. program, which is a series of leadership, role modeling, and positive decision-making workshops, to more than 4,000 students. If you are interested in bringing this program to your school, please contact them by phone (248) 375-2553, by fax (248) 375-0631, or by email leadersprogram@comcast.net. For more information, you can also visit their website at www.leadersprogram.org.

If L.E.A.D.E.R.S. comes to your school, Patrick would be happy to work with your wrestling team free of charge, if you wish.

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