

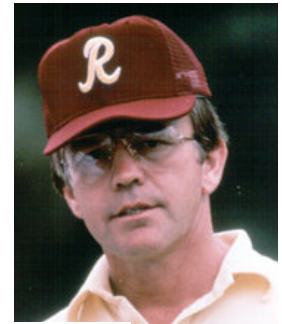
Wrestling

The Foundation of all other sports; football, baseball, basketball, track and more, is wrestling.

Coaches Perspective

“I draft wrestlers because they are tough, I have never had a problem with a wrestler.”

Joe Gibbs, Hall of Fame Football Coach



“I would have all of my Offensive Lineman wrestle if I could.”

John Madden, Hall of Fame Football Coach

The Influence of Wrestling in the NFL

- 10 Hall of Fame Football Players
- 43 Multiple Pro Bowlers
- 60 Individual State Championships
- 13 NCAA Wrestling Championships
- 3 Heisman Trophy winners Wrestled
- 14 1st Round Draft Picks Wrestled
- 23 RB's / 20 LB's / 2 QB's / 66 Lineman / 6 DB's / 12K / 54 NP

“I love wrestlers, they are tough and they make great football players.”

Mike Stoops, National Championship Football Coach
—University of Oklahoma



“Wrestlers make coaching football easy, they have balance, coordination, and as a coaching staff we know they are tough.”

Tom Osborne College Hall of Fame Football Coach
—University of Nebraska

Wrestling as Foundation for All

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Since it works for Football, why not let it work for other sports as well.

I am enjoying the transition of season from summer to football. With the change of season I know that wrestling is not far away.

I help coach my two boys on their Little League Football teams and serve as an officer in our league board of directors. I am fortunate enough to interact with all of the teams and remain constantly amazed at the great help that wrestling brings to athletes in other sports.

I was watching a team of 13-year olds play football last week. The defensive end on our team blitzed the opposing quarter back and ran into a block from the offensive back. The blocking back had very poor technique, stopped moving his feet and dropped his head as he initiated the block.

A good wrestler charging from the defensive end position would have naturally dropped into his own hips, made contact with the blocker using hands and automatically kept his head up and back straight, thus enabling him to see the quarterback. Physical movement like that would be second nature to a wrestler.

The blocking back, because of his own poor technique, removed himself from the play through no effort on our player's part.

Unfortunately, our charging end failed to keep his own head up and dropped his head as poorly as the offensive back and followed the bad block to the ground.

The result was the same as a good block.

Both offensive and defensive players were taken out of the play. I honestly believe it would have been a different outcome had our player been familiar with wrestling workouts.

Three reasons why wrestling creates a foundation for other sports. www.usasports.tv

As athletes work within our wrestling program to develop correct takedown technique, we constantly drill the physical skill of maintaining solid position. We call that same position in football the "hit" position; down in the hips, back straight, head up using quick feet to maintain balance and move while battling to hold a superior position over your opponent through a tackle or a block.

“Hit” position and a good wrestling stance are very similar. Each contributes to the other. As I watched our charging defensive end fall on his face rather than shed a poor block and make contact with the quarterback, I turned to his father and said, “See why he needs to be in the wrestling room?”

His father, already a believer in getting him into my winter workouts, agreed wholeheartedly.

When the athlete came off the field I asked him why he failed to fight the block with his hands, why he left his feet and why he missed the tackle.

He just shrugged and said “I don’t know.”

I said. “You would have done it if you wrestled.”

“I know,” was his reply. He understood what he needed to do but his own muscles betrayed him. He dropped his head to make contact and took him out of the play even though intellectually he wanted to do something else like tackling the quarter back.

I will let you know next year if he shows in the room or not.

I challenge kids every day to be on the mats with us in the winter. I talk to their parents as well and point out the many ways that wrestling can build their bodies for other sports. Let me give

Pro Football Players With Wrestling Backgrounds

Ray Lewis—The Football Player

Seven times Pro Bowler

2 time NFL Defensive Player of the Year

Super Bowl XXXV MVP

Arguably the greatest LB and 1 of the best players in NFL history

Ray Lewis—The Wrestler

Florida State Wrestling Champ

189 lb. Weight class

Credits wrestling as the training ground for his prolific football career.

Stephan Neal—The Football Player

28 years old

Signed with the Patriots as an undrafted free agent

The 6 foot 4 inch , 305 pound offensive lineman has played in 34 career games with 31 starts.

Recorded the longest current consecutive starts streak on the Patriots offensive line.

Stephan Neal—The Wrestler

Did not play football in college but wrestled at Cal State Bakersfield.

Compiled a 156-10 record and won two NCAA Division I titles.

you three great reasons why wrestling is the foundation for all.

Reason #1 Repetition creates muscle memory.

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Muscle memory is created through correctly executing physical motion. In wrestling we call it drilling and spend a lot of time doing so. My experience in football is that most coaches spend more time talking than physically working their athletes.

The physical skills that create athletic movement are developed during practice through patterns of motion. The accuracy of these physical actions is improved through repetition, so that the more an athlete moves through correct motion, the better they become in performing that physical skill.

Muscle memory is the interaction between brain and nervous system. In sport science muscle memory is known as “proprioception,” the ability to sense the position, location, orientation and movement of the body and its parts. Proprioceptors are the nerve endings that tell the brain where our arms, hands, legs, feet, fingers, toes, etc. are located in time and space. Sports science calls this kinesthetic sense of awareness. A person who types without looking at the keyboard exemplifies the proprioceptors at work.

In little league football we rarely execute repetition of skills to make them automatic. It conservatively takes one thousand repetitions to establish a muscle memory. If an athlete practices with poor technique or movement he or she will build poor patterns and can actually see their skills deteriorate. In the case of young athletes, if they originally learn incorrect technique, they will forever be challenged to overcome those bad habits. Just like my football player who could not keep his head up even when the blocker in front of him fell to the ground.

A very common example of poor repetition in youth football comes when coaches teach backs where to run during the execution of a play. More times than I can remember I have seen coaches running entire teams through plays that give the running backs plenty of repetition on hitting the correct hole in the line or running the right passing route. At the same time the linemen are reinforcing poor technique. They go into their stance and then stand straight up while the backs run their assignments. During the next game the first complaint the little league coach has is that his linemen are not “firing out” or “staying low.”

My question is. “Why should they? Their muscles are remembering the exact way you drilled them.”

The linemen are executing the same up down action that coaches allowed to repetitively happen while they were working with running backs.

I hope that coaches put those linemen in wrestling rooms during the off-season so they can get the repetition they need to develop muscle memory for body position, strong hips, quick feet and powerful arms. Especially if they are unable to devote enough time to those critical “hit” positions and are incapable of winning the battle on the line.

College Football players know the value of wrestling.

I recently attended the California State Freestyle wrestling championships. While there I enjoyed talking with a father whose son was wrestling. He told me that he never wrestled but was a four year starting center playing Division I football at Cal Davis. He admitted knowing only two things about wrestling; his son loved it and the longest days of his football career were Saturday afternoons spent facing a nose guard who had wrestled in high school. Wrestlers know how to battle, where their leverage is and how to maintain position.

Lifting weights is not the same thing.

I always tell high school football players who want to lift weights in the off-season rather than wrestle that they can lift all they want but those weights will never fight back. There is plenty of time to lift during the rest of the year and most of the off-season lifting that I see in high school athletes is to get pretty. They mostly work on arms and chest and look in the mirrors and say what a big boy am I. That works for the girls but it does nothing for the guy standing across from you who wants to tear your arms off and hit your quarterback over the head with

More Pro Football Players Who Wrestled in High School

Lincoln “Drew” Hodgdon, Center, Houston Texans—California State Champ
Roddy White, WR, Atlanta Falcons—2X South Carolina State Champion, 1st Round Pick
Mike Patterson, DT, Philadelphia Eagles—1st Round Draft Pick
Rhonde Barber, Strong Safety, -Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Tiki Barber, Running Back-New York Giants
Roger Craig, Running Back– San Francisco 49er’s
Curley Culp, Defensive Lineman, Kansas City Chiefs NCAA Champ
Larry Czonka, Running Back, Miami Dolphins
Carl Edwards, Sand Diego Chargers, 3X Maryland State Champ
Jim Everett, Quarter Back, New Orleans Saints
Bo Jackson, Running Back, Oakland Raiders
Ronnie Lott, Defensive Back, San Francisco 49er’s
Jim Nance, Full Back, New England Patriots, NCAA Champ
Lorenzo Neal, Full Back, Tennessee Titans—NCAA Champ
Chuck Noll, Pittsburgh Steelers, Pennsylvania State Champ
Warren Sapp, Defensive Tackle, Tampa Bay Buccaneers-Florida State Champion
Cory Schlesinger, Linrbacker, Detroit Lions—Nebraska State Champion
Steve Sefter, Defensive Tackle, Philadelphia Eagles-
2X Pennsylvania State Champ and NCAA All American
Bruce Smith, Defensive End, Washington Redskins
Adam Vinatieri, Kicker-New England Patriots
Charles White, Defensive Tackle, Dallas Cowboys
Jim Thorpe, Half Back-New York Giants
Ricky Williams, Running Back-Miami Dolphins

them.

Reason #2 Work Ethic Overcomes Bad Habits

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Wrestling requires effort and work and those are two politically incorrect words. But you will never win sporting championships without athletes who work.

Wrestlers know how to work because the sport requires it. Team sports allow athletes, especially young ones, to hide behind either their talent or lack of it. If a little league kid is fast he is fast. We cannot coach speed. But if a little league athlete is not naturally gifted with speed or size he must develop himself in order to play, compete at higher levels and enjoy the game. The equalizing factor is work. Every coach can cite examples of athletes who worked harder than anyone else and improved their capacity to perform.

If work is the facilitation of change then knowing how to work is its catalyst.

One of the challenges that I see around little league sports is how difficult it is to get kids to work.

Once again, I point to the value of wrestling to move athletes to new levels of performance. In fact, one of the reasons that I constantly hear from kids who will not accept my challenge and join our workout is that they simply do not want to work that hard.

Fortunately, for every athlete who will not work, there is another, or several, who will. Find them and build your teams. You will be surprised how many will follow.

I was talking with a 12 year-old athlete as we stood in the varsity weight room. He told me that he was not going to wrestle. I asked if he wanted to play football in high school.

He replied, "Yes."

"How many pushups are you doing a day?"

"I don't know."

"You better start knowing. If you want to play in high school then you better change this."

I grabbed his bicep.

"Into this."

I grabbed a metal frame holding free weights.

The difference between where you are now and where you want to be is your commitment to getting there. Developing great young athletes requires programs that allow them to work and develop athleticism and physicality. Wrestling does it best.

Just like the tourist in New York who asked how to get to Carnegie Hall. You know the answer right?

“Practice, practice, practice.”

There is no secret here. If you want to play better football in the fall, baseball in the summer or other sports at anytime, then wrestle in the winter. You will learn how to work, how to rebound from defeat, how to battle against a physical presence and how to discipline yourself beyond present comfort levels.

Reason #3 Conditioning Large Muscles is always a Challenge. www.usasports.tv

My final reason for pressing a wrestling agenda is the development that it gives to large muscle conditioning.

At football practice a couple of weeks ago I looked up to see a well-built stud of a kid walking across the field yelling at me. He was in town for a college visit and stopped by to say hello.

He is a good friend of ours. His father officiates wrestling with me. He is a two-time state champion going for his third this year and a Freestyle All American. He stands about five feet tall and weighs 130 pounds. He was shorter than most of our eleven-year old football players but none of them had his physical presence. (The kid is really cut.)

I introduced him to our team as an example of what conditioning can do for them and why wrestling gives them the kind of workout that develops their muscles. I asked him what he did every day.

He shot back. “One hundred pushups, sit-ups and squats.”

I looked at the football team and said. “If you want to look like this. Then you have to do that.” It is the exceptional kid, especially a younger athlete, who gets sufficient levels of exercise to develop large muscles in legs, arms, backs and shoulders.

In an effort to teach the mental game of football, which must be taught, we overlook how much help kids need in developing their personal physicality. If you are challenged in finding time to get that done during football season I suggest that you use the off-season to cross train through wrestling. It doesn't matter the sport; baseball, basketball, football, soccer, track or anything else they are all helped by wrestling.

I run three wrestling programs, K through 6th grade, junior high and high school varsity. I challenge every kid I know to wrestle. I don't even ask for a commitment that they compete in matches. Only that they show up and train with us. The studs will emerge from the pack, the others will get great workouts and I am building athletes for more than one sport.

Football never made a wrestler a better wrestler BUT wrestling makes every football player a better football player!

Many of the positions and skills are absolutely transferable between both sports. Some of those skills include but are not limited to footwork, hand-eye coordination, mental toughness, explosive movements, and balance.

Learning the ability to beat the man in front of you can not be ignored.