

Ten Steps to Greatness

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1. Make the Commitment

“Wrestling isn’t a sport for those that only wish to dream about success. When you are truly ready to take your wrestling to the next level there is only one choice for you. It is time to **make the commitment**. Other wrestlers choose to look at the end of high school season as a vacation from wrestling, but the best wrestlers in America don’t look for an “off-season”. They know that wrestling is a continuous path of growth, and dedication. They aren’t willing to wait to get better; there isn’t any time to waste. What others call the “off-season” is your time to pass the competition. Total commitment is your goal. It’s easy to talk about it, but talk won’t put you at the top of the podium. Make this off-season tougher on yourself than your high school season. Get better technique. Get stronger physically. Get tougher mentally. Get yourself ready so that when next year comes everyone will consider you the bad draw. Don’t let yourself just talk the game of greatness. Commitment is action; it is focused on the fight yet to come. Now is your time to take your wrestling to the next level.”

Cael Sanderson
Olympic Champion

2. Set Your Goals

“Without serious, well thought out goals, a wrestler is rudderless. Making the commitment means that you are ready to do everything it takes to pursue excellence. And, the goals that you set will keep you straight on that path to excellence.

Goal setting works best when you write down your goals and share them with the people that can help you get to where you want to be. Your parents, your teammates, your coaches, your siblings all should be aware of the goals you set, the priorities that you are focused on. Once you set your goals, take an honest look at yourself and decide what you need to do to reach those goals. What things do you most need to improve on? What habits do you have that are getting in the way of your success? Are there times in the day where you are idling away hours that could be used to better yourself? Goal-setting will give you direction and the support network that you develop will help get you to where you want to be.”

Terry Steiner
USA Wrestling
National Coach
Women’s Freestyle

3. Plan Out Your Year

“Get hold of a calendar and mark out all of your commitments that you have between now and the next high school season. Include things that aren’t wrestling related as well. Have a countdown going to the first day of practice by numbering backwards.

Now get to work making your **plan for the year**. Mark in the days of your lifting and running workouts. Write in the times that you are going to get on the mats for a good drill or live wrestling. The best wrestlers get on the mat often. They don’t wait to get better. Then, make a plan to get more matches in this spring, summer, and fall. Find the best USA Wrestling tournaments to really challenge yourself. Locate a strong Greco-Roman or Freestyle club so that you really expand what you know about the sport. The more time you spend on the mat the better you will be! This calendar will serve as your road map to success. Stick to it. Don’t let your commitment waver. If you have a lift scheduled throw yourself into it fully and completely. Don’t worry that you might be missing out on what your buddies are doing. Really, they are just missing out on what you are doing, getting better----getting tougher----making sure that you can win the title.”

Kevin Jackson
USA Wrestling
National Freestyle Coach

4. Get on the Mat

“How can you expect to be a better wrestler, if you aren’t even wrestling? The answer is you can’t. **Get on the Mat!**

Wrestling, like any skill, must be practiced relentlessly. The best wrestlers love their time on the mat. More drilling, more live wrestling---that’s what makes a difference! For real wrestlers there is no such thing as an off-season. There are tournaments year round for the wrestlers that want to be the best to compete in. Stay in shape and be ready to test yourself. Sometimes your teammates might not be able to match your dedication and intensity. Shame on them! Still it isn’t an excuse for you to miss time on the mat. Even when you are left alone to drill by yourself you can make dramatic strides in how good of a wrestler you are. If your buddies aren’t there to push you, push yourself. Drill hip heists till your guts hurt. Hit level changes till your legs quiver. Nail double legs till your knees are raw. And shadow wrestle till your lungs burn. The best wrestlers share one thing. They get on the mat to get better whenever they can.”

Tom Brands
Olympic Champion
Head Coach
Virginia Tech

5. No Time To Waste

“A real wrestler, somebody that really is committed to their goals, knows that there is no time to waste. They don’t sit back and rest on past accomplishments that were yesterday’s news. And, they don’t look for weak-hearted excuses like “I’m feeling burned out”. “What are you going to get done now?, ” that’s a question that always has to be on your mind. The wrestlers that are going to break through and accomplish great things are the ones that feel a sense of urgency in everything they do. They make their plans and they stick to them. They also take a hard look at themselves and decide where they are wasting their time---time that could be used to get better. Now that doesn’t mean that wrestlers should blow off important commitments. School and family are just two very important priorities that wrestlers should keep in mind. But that doesn’t mean mastering the newest video game, or seeing re-runs on TV is good use of your time. You have a lot that you need to get done, and there is **no time to waste**. If you’ve truly made the commitment to reaching the next level and your not just blowing smoke then it is time to get after it. And the only way to do it is to go 100%- --All-Out! Don’t use excuses. Don’t be satisfied with cop-outs. There is no time to waste.”

Sammie Henson
World Champion

6. Build Yourself

“You may be outside of your “normal” wrestling season, but that doesn’t mean you should back-slide and return to bad habits or even the lesser shape you were in before the high school season got started. This is a time to **build yourself**. For a lot of wrestlers when they hear that they think they’ve got to get into the weight room more. There is no-doubt that that is true. There probably isn’t anybody that’s ever wrestled that couldn’t use a little more strength. However, to really build yourself for the upcoming season make things like conditioning, and mental skills a priority as well. Put all three of those things together and make a real effort in each area and you will be on your way to becoming a much tougher opponent. Lay out a program for each and get after it. If you don’t work at it everyday then can you really say that you’ve made the commitment? While you are building yourself, try to be a leader that brings other team members up as well. Set your conditioning workouts as a team and get on guys that miss. When you have time alone, work on taking a look at your wrestling style, watch your past matches and analyze them, or start working on visualization and imagery skills. It’s time to build yourself and you have to be willing to put in the effort, if you want to see results.”

Kerry McCoy
World Silver Medalist
2X Olympian

7. Seek Out the Best

“There is an old adage in the wrestling community that a lot of people are fond of saying. “Iron Sharpens Iron.” When you get right down to it, you pick up a lot of your sense of self from the people you surround yourself with. Iron sharpens iron. It really is something to think about, if you are a wrestler that really wants to reach for accomplishments that right now are beyond your grasp. For the wrestler that really wants to improve and deeply feels the urgency and commitment necessary to get it done, then it is time to **seek out the best**. Find the best coaches and get involved with the toughest and most active wrestling clubs in your area. Look for the most challenging workout partners you can find and get an organized schedule with them so you can bang heads against the best on a regular basis. Find out the schedule for the USA Wrestling meets in your area, and strive to compete in them. Don’t settle for mediocre steps forward this year. Take giant strides forward by seeking out the best. The shy guy won’t necessarily be the best guy next year. Don’t be afraid to approach new people and ask for help. If you’ve never competed in the international styles of Greco-Roman or Freestyle, then this is the year. You won’t be disappointed. Greco-Roman and freestyle will open the doors of the sport even wider to you, and when you are competing with USA Wrestling athletes in the international style tournaments, you will be running with the right crowd. Iron sharpens iron----seek out the best!”

Steve Fraser
Olympic Champion
National Coach
Greco-Roman

8. Take the Initiative

“You are your own leader. Don’t wait for others to tell you what you need to do to succeed. It is time for you to **take the initiative** and fill your days with tremendous energy---energy that will improve every aspect of your wrestling. The difference between an average and great wrestler is very simple. The great wrestler feels the need to do whatever he can to succeed; the average wrestler is someone who will unhappily comfort themselves with the regret of things they should have done. You have the plan to succeed right in your own hands, but you must make the mature decisions to motivate yourself and do everything you can to get better. Are you going to be the guy that would rather sleep a few extra hours each day instead of getting up early and getting a morning conditioning practice in before school? Are you going to bypass after-school lifts so you can hang out with your friends? Are you going to treat the wrestling room like a distant stranger this spring and summer or are you going to get in there and do the hard work to get better? Are you going to rest on excuse after excuse instead of finding the tough freestyle and Greco-Roman tournaments to really challenge yourself? Now is the time for you to light the fire within. Take the initiative on your own to do whatever you have to, to make sure you climb to higher levels of success.”

Rulon Gardner
Olympic Champion

9. Represent Yourself

“The tough thing isn’t knowing the difference between right and wrong; the tough thing is choosing right over wrong. The best wrestlers aren’t willing to sacrifice short-term popularity for the feeling of standing on top of the podium with a gold medal around their neck. Our society has a sick way of pushing kids down the wrong path, aiming them towards alcohol, drugs, sex, and mediocrity. Young wrestlers need to realize one thing quick if they really want to be a well-respected wrestler; they need to learn that everything they do is a reflection on the strength of their character. **They need to learn how to represent themselves.** A lot of time wrestlers get outside their high school season and they fall into the trap of thinking that now is the time to bust loose and party it up. Their grades start to slide; they get hooked in with the wrong environment and the next thing they know they are trying to figure out how they messed up their lives. Wrestlers must come to the realization that they need to make sure that people see the best in them. That they are people of character with strong wills that don’t have to act like fools to fit in. Represent yourself with an inner exuberance that pours through your skin. Let everyone you come across see that you are on a path to greatness.”

Terry Brands
USOC Resident Coach
2X World Champion

10. Compete with Intensity

“One of the best things I ever learned was to look with enthusiasm on the opportunities you get to compete. Take every chance you have to get on the mat and **compete with intensity**. The essence of the sport of wrestling is competition. It is what drives us forward. The more a wrestler takes the step to get in real matches the more motivation he will have to improve. This spring and summer get on the mat and compete. USA Wrestling offers thousands of wrestling events that will give any young wrestler the opportunities he needs to get better by wrestling opponents from across the country. Find these tournaments and compete with intensity in them. Get to your state’s freestyle and Greco-Roman tournaments, be a part of your state dual team, and compete at your USAW regionals. Most importantly make sure that you train and wrestle in the USAW National Championships in Wisconsin for the kids, and Fargo in July for Cadets and Juniors. The best way to really build on your potential is to challenge yourself with tough competition often in these coming months. America’s best wrestlers love to compete on the mats. It is the path that dedicated wrestlers need to follow.”

John Smith
Oklahoma State
Head Coach
2X Olympic Champ
4x World Champ