

Warm-Up to Wrestle your Best

By Doug Reese

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It is Saturday morning, 8:00 am. Your body is tired from a full week of hard practice. Just yesterday you cut the last five pounds to make weight for today's tournament. As you walk into the gym with your bag slung over your shoulder, you glance across the gym and see the other teams beginning to warm-up. The gym is full of wrestlers. Dressed in their sweats, you can see the athletes jogging around the mat, and others are doing stretching exercises. Some wrestlers are doing light drilling of technique, and there is another group who are just sitting around the mats talking and watching their probable opponents.

Your warm-up is really no different from the rest of the wrestlers on the floor. You see the tournament directors begin posting the bracket sheets. You scramble over to see your first round match up. You notice that you have a fairly tough draw. You start to get a little nervous, and the anxiety begins to build as your thoughts are on your opponents and what techniques he uses. You start getting ready to wrestle. You begin doing some last minute stretching, jump a little rope and hit a couple penetration steps. The referee picks up the bout sheet and calls you to the mat to wrestle.

The whistle blows, and you feel cold and stiff. The butterflies are still pushing on your gut. You finally realize that you are not ready to wrestle...and it is too late to do anything about it.

Why warm-up before competition?

From a physiological standpoint a warm up is critical. The purpose of stretching, low intensity running, and drilling is to elevate muscle temperature and increase blood flow to muscles that will be engaged during wrestling competition. A good warm-up will also reduce the strain on the heart imposed by rapidly engaging in heavy exercise and will reduce the risk of muscle and tendon injuries.

When considering tournament competition, warm-up can play a very important role in activating the body. Too often wrestlers experience their worst performance in the opening round of a tournament. It seems that they wrestle better in each succeeding round. Why is that?

It takes time for the body to get ready for intense activity like wrestling. Most athletes do not like to go hard and intense in the early morning. Just because you are mentally ready to wrestle does not mean that your body is ready as well. What the body needs is a structured, consistent warm-up to prepare for the intense, total body activity that will occur during the day.

Developing a Structured Warm-up Routine

World Champion and Olympic silver medalist Dennis Hall credits a consistent structured warm-up as the biggest thing that helped him in his career. Dennis begins his warm-up one hour before the start of his first match. He begins by jogging and skipping rope. Then Dennis does tumbling

exercises and stretching. Most will agree that this is a pretty typical warm-up, but Dennis does not stop there. He goes into a period of drilling for 10 minutes and begins to build up a sweat. Now he is ready to wrestle his first match.

Dennis Hall's "first match" begins after drilling. It starts with a hard five to seven minute match. In essence, Dennis finishes the equivalent of an entire wrestling match as part of his warm-up routine before he actually steps on the mat in true competition. Why? "The reason I go hard before my first match is because what match is usually your worst match? The first match! I have never seen anybody ever have a good first match. I feel much better getting the first match out of the way before the tournament even starts. I wrestle much better physically after a structured warm-up; now I am ready to wrestle", notes Dennis Hall.

Ten minutes before the start of actual competition Dennis recommends getting a sweat going by drilling. Three to four minutes before the start of a match, continue to keep yourself warm. Then take your sweats off, towel off your body sweat, pull up your singlet, and then get ready to rumble.

Other Benefits of a Consistent Warm-up Routine

Pre-competition routines are very useful in setting athlete's arousal to a level that is comfortable. The pre-competition routine also gives a sense of control and readiness when entering competition. Another benefit that the wrestler can enjoy is maintaining intentional focus to the task at hand, and then they will be able to block out distractions. "I used to prepare for competition without a consistent warm-up. My mind used to wander on me. During my old warm-up I used to think about what my opponent would be coming after me with. Now all I think about is doing my particular warm-up. When I step on the mat now, I am ready to go", says Hall.

Closing

A consistent warm-up will help the wrestler stay focused, keep the pre-match nervousness and anxiety down, and will get the body activated for competition. When developing your own pre-competition routine, remember to perform it the same every time. The key for a particular routine to be effective involves practicing the routine until it becomes automatic and comfortable. Now plug in your new warm-up routine. Think of it as your new training partner that will help you wrestle your best!