

Managing Large Wrestling Tournaments

By Randy Martin

It is a good experience for wrestlers to compete in several large tournaments during a season, in preparation for the end-of-season championships. Quality tournaments are well planned, have a reliable set of volunteers to smoothly run the event, and hopefully the facility site promotes good competition and allows the spectators to enjoy the action without someone blocking their view. For a number of years I managed the ASICS California Classic Tournament with a peak of 107

teams competing, and more recently I have assisted with the ASICS Foothill High School Tournament with 55 competing teams. At this time I would like to share my observations of what enhances a tournament experience.

First, a website is a useful instrument to facilitate the distribution of information. Registration forms may be downloaded online and a general time schedule can be posted, with weigh-ins, competition start and estimated finish times, and if possible,

an estimated start time of quarter final, semi-final, and championship final matches. Recommended hotels should be posted on the website, as well as any restriction the hotels may have on guests. For example, many of the Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, hotels require a 21-year-old or older to be registered for every room rented to a team. Maps can be posted on the website, both with directions to the tournament facility, as well as locations of important hospitals, restaurants, and interesting tourist locations.

One trusted referee should accept the responsibility of obtaining quality referees for the tournament. Reimbursement may be made on an hourly basis or on a daily basis. Rooms need to be rented for out-of-town referees. A referee "challenge" team needs to be designated prior to the tournament and include the tournament director. If tournament t-shirts are given out to the coaches, then a special shirt should be given to each referee. At times the referee organizing his staff will choose to provide a special meal to the regular referee staff, rather than always rely on the coaches lunch. A special smoked turkey does wonders for referee morale!

One person needs to be responsible for obtaining, transporting, and setting up the mats. For a large tournament, this is a tedious, important job. If seventeen mats, for example, need to be located and moved to the facility, that is a full day's work. Commitments to use the mats need to be confirmed at least a month prior to the tournament. For a large tournament, several teams of wrestlers may be needed to help move the mats. Of course, after the tournament, all of the mats need to be returned to their respective schools.

Computer software programs for large tournaments are less than ideal because the demand for them is not great. Know your



ASICS Foothill Tournament. 103 pound Bryan Williams, Oakdale, decisioned Mike Rodriguez, Merced, 3-2. Photo by Randy Martin.

software limitations well, prior to the tournament or choose to manage the tournament by the manual method. Most bottlenecks in tournament competition are related to problems with tournament software. Post brackets often so coaches and wrestlers can identify errors prior to the next round. With tournaments of any significant size, there will always be mistakes in recording results. Errors include but are not limited to: (1) referees circling the wrong wrestler's name as winner, (2) the wrong wrestler signs the bout sheet or the signature cannot be read, and (3) results are entered into the computer incorrectly. Prior to the tournament, the director needs to identify a method of correcting mistakes once they have been brought to the attention of tournament staff. Once a coach has discovered a problem, it needs to be reported immediately in order for the resolution of the problem to be as fair as possible. Ideally, if the right software program is used, tournament results can easily be posted on the Internet.

One person needs to be responsible for obtaining weigh-in scales and running the weigh-in itself. Tentative team line-ups are submitted to the tournament director several days in advance of the event, but unfortunately there will always be changes with some highly ranked wrestler that will create seeding problems just prior to competition. Remember, in the end the tournament staff is trying to do the best job they can. The lone coach that wants the entire tournament rescheduled thirty minutes prior to competition so things can be "perfect" is not realistic and this point needs to be acknowledged in order to reduce staff frustrations. It is important to try to separate wrestlers from the same geographic region into different parts of the bracket.

Media relations is very important for a large tournament. It is useful to identify key contact people for the newspapers, television stations, and radio stations at least one month prior to the tournament. If possible, obtain the necessary fax numbers and e-mail addresses of your contact people. Approximately four weeks prior to the tournament, start sending updated information about the tournament on a weekly basis. If possible, encourage the newspapers to run an article about the tournament either the day prior to the start of competition, or the first day of competition. Distributing information early and often will enhance the visibility of the tournament and increase the number of spectators attending the event. If there is a good wrestling photographer in the area, encourage him/her to attend and provide you with images that you can use to market the event in the future.

If possible, I encourage hosting a "hard luck competition" on the second day of the tournament, for those wrestlers who were 0-

2 on the first day of the event. This extra competition helps improve the skills of the less experienced wrestlers, is welcomed by the coaches, and maintains spectator interest.

The clean-up crew should not be overlooked, because this helps restore the facility to its original condition and helps reduce rental fees/janitorial fees of the host facility.

Any quality tournament should have athletic trainers available for acute injury evaluation. An early decision is whether to have the trainers available only for acute injuries or to also be available for routine taping of athletes. There is a cost difference between the individual athlete/school providing their own taping supplies and the tournament providing supplies. Often the facility requires the use of their own trainers and the trainers have no experience with wrestling, especially the limitations of "match injury time". It is important to review injury time with the trainers prior to competition.

Several weeks prior to the tournament, sit down with administrators from the host facility to determine together how many trainers will be required for the tournament and how those needs change when there is a reduction in the number of mats used for each portion of the tournament. Without this discussion, the facility may hire too many trainers and then the tournament will be required to pay these unforeseen costs. Too few trainers available on site can potentially compromise the health of an injured athlete. It is not recommended to rely solely on the availability of volunteer spectator medical personnel for tournament injury evaluation. The problem of how to address skin infections should be discussed with the tournament director and head referee several days prior to the start of the tournament.

Someone should be responsible for organizing the coaches lunches. The host schools will usually ask parents to help provide pasta, soups, chicken, and desserts. A supply of drinks is also important to organize. Some restaurants will fill large drink coolers with juices for the coaches. It is important to look at the facility where the coaches lunches will be served. Some locations will not allow electric serving pans and warming dishes. At some locations, it is easy to set-up barbecues and serve chicken and steaks to the spectators, wrestlers, and coaches.

In summary, hosting a large tournament requires a reliable, hard-working staff dedicated to looking after details of the event. The selection of the tournament site also impacts the quality of the experience. Most schools cannot host a large tournament under one roof and the alternative venues charge rent and may keep all revenues from concession stands and parking. Ideally I

would recommend creating a partnership with local community officials so everybody agrees on the benefit of bringing quality sporting events to the community, both from image enhancement and revenue brought into a community. In the end, we are all working together to enhance the sport of wrestling and the experience of our athletes.

Randy Martin is a physician, sports photographer, and a former high school wrestling coach. He may be reached by e-mail: wmpphoto@attbi.com.





SUNFLOWER WRESTLING

BUY 14 Get 1 Free Sale
plus Free Sunflower Wrestling
T-Shirt with All Orders!

Adidas Dion Warm-ups
\$65.00 per set



Available in
Youth
Sizes



Adidas Wrestling
Response Singlet
\$37.00







BLACK
ROYAL
GOLD
RED
NAVY

Call Toll Free 1-888-211-1888
www.sunflowerwrestling.com