

# Taking Advantage of the Weigh-in/Match Interval

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**T**he 90 to 120-minute interval between weigh-in and match time represents a unique opportunity for wrestlers to ensure they have fueled their muscles for optimum competitive performance. By taking in the right nutrients in the right amounts during this “match-prep window,” you can maximize available energy for your match and, in tournament situations, recover faster after each match and perform better subsequent matches.

Although you can exploit the match-prep window to your benefit, you should also recognize that any measures you take during this time cannot compensate for poor nutritional habits during your training. Much has been written about the performance disadvantages of cutting significant weight prior to a match. However, even moderate weight-cutting measures taken within the final 24 hours prior to a match can stimulate hormones that break down protein, decrease muscle energy stores and increase fatigue. The stimulation of these catabolic hormones will not only impair performance in the upcoming match but will also affect performance in a tournament situation by impairing post-match muscle recovery.

That being said, what can be done during the match-prep interval that can improve muscle performance and recovery? The best analogy is to look at your body as a high performance race engine. You can't completely rebuild an engine to make it faster or more powerful during the final hours before a race. This has to be done in the days and weeks preceding the race. The best you can do is to give the engine a final tune-up and the highest quality fuel to run on. Similarly, you can't build stronger, more fatigue-resistant muscles in the final 90 to 120 minutes before a match. However, you can give your muscles a final tune-up to enable them to run at peak performance. This final tune-up should consist of fluid replenishment and muscle energy restoration.

If you are dehydrated going into a match your performance will suffer. Since fluid restriction is so common among wrestlers prior to a weigh-in, rehydration within the match-prep window is especially impor-

tant. However, this is a situation where more is less. There is a limit on how much fluid can be absorbed by your stomach in a short time period, and if you drink too much you could get sick. You should try to drink 24 to 32 ounces of fluid between weigh-in and your match. This is especially important if you have signs of dehydration.

One of the best indicators of hydration

status is your urine. It should be the color of pale lemonade. If it is not, you are probably dehydrated. Timing is critical in the consumption of fluid. Try and drink half of the 24 to 32 ounce total immediately after your weigh-in and the other half 30 to 40 minutes later. This will give the fluid sufficient time to be absorbed into your system. If you wait until immediately prior to your match you run the risk of having an uncomfortable feeling in your stomach, which certainly won't help your wrestling performance. The best way to restore your fluids is with a sports drink, which provides not just fluid but also sodium and electrolytes to help your body retain the fluid as well as carbohydrates for energy.

The second important objective of match-prep nutrition is to increase your muscle energy stores. Glycogen is the muscles' main source of energy during intense exercise. Mild stress resulting from food and fluid deprivation leading up to the weigh-in stimulates those hormones that deplete your muscle glycogen stores. When muscle glycogen stores are depleted you will fatigue much quicker. By consuming a sports drink during this interval you can partially restore your muscle glycogen.

Carbohydrate sports drinks such as Gatorade are useful for fluid replacement and replenishment of muscle energy stores. However, there is a new class of sports drinks, such as Accelerade, which contain a

small amount of protein and are ideal for

wrestlers. Carbohydrate-protein sports drinks have been shown to be twice as effective as Gatorade in replenishing muscle energy stores within 40 minutes. Again, timing is critical. The carbohydrate-protein sports drink should be consumed immediately after your weigh-in and again 30 to 40 minutes later. This will allow sufficient time for the carbohydrate and protein to be absorbed.

Another advantage of consuming a carbohydrate-protein sports drink such as Accelerade is that it helps blunt the action of those catabolic hormones responsible for glycogen depletion and protein breakdown. Although a product such as Accelerade is ideal for your final nutritional tune-up it also provides significant post-match recovery benefits. Studies have shown that, compared to Gatorade, Accelerade can reduce post-exercise muscle damage by 83% and can even improve endurance performance in a subsequent exercise bout. This is a critical benefit in a tournament situation or during periods of heavy training.

The bottom line is that you can improve your match performance during the match-prep window as long as you have not overstressed your “muscle engine” through severe weight-cutting steps taken prior to your weigh-in. Used properly, protein-enhanced sports drink will help you restore needed fluids during the match-prep interval, as well as replenish vital muscle energy stores and speed the recovery process after your match.

## ***“What can be done during the match-prep interval that can improve muscle performance and recovery?”***