

True Confidence *Under Pressure*

By Ben Peterson, Olympic Gold Medalist



It's not "that time of the year" anymore – time for the all-important postseason tournaments. Win or lose, advance or be eliminated, every single match can make you or break you. The uncertainty of how it will all turn out can be very stressful. There's a danger of becoming too tense, which can keep you from performing to your potential. How does an athlete face the pressure of these tournaments with confidence and excitement?

Many athletes place their hope in their emotions and how they feel at any given time. If they feel good about themselves at competition time they "feel" confident. But those "feelings" can change so quickly. The foundation for a strong tower of confidence can hardly be built on the shifting sands of our fleeting emotions. There must be a better way.

When wrestlers, coaches and parents ask me about confidence I very often find myself referring to a little flier my brother, John, wrote called, "*Totally Prepared.*" In it, he gives his thoughts just before going out to wrestle for the Olympic gold medal. John tells the story of how emotions almost took his focus off the match at hand, but he also tells how he placed his thoughts on the facts and went on to win the victory. Every competitor faces this issue, even Olympic Champions.

"*Totally Prepared*" has been translated into several languages. John hands them out in his travels as he coaches teams all over the world, and has received good feedback from young wrestlers and experienced champions. Read on and see what you can learn.

Before my final Olympic match in Montreal, I went to a room in the back of the wrestling arena with Ben. We did some warm-up and stretching exercises in preparation for our final competition. As we walked from that exercise area toward the wrestling area, I noticed an overhead television monitor. As I glanced up at it, the announcer said, "In one minute, we will take you to Maurice Richard Arena to watch John Peterson attempt to win an Olympic Gold Medal!" As I listened, I realized that people in many parts of America and even the world would be watching my match. Suddenly, the emotional pressure of that thought hit me. "What if I make all kinds of mistakes? What if I get caught and PINNED!" (I had been pinned in the first period of a match just four months before the Olympics.) Well, right there, I actually began to cry!

"Wait a minute," I thought, "I need to get myself emotionally ready." And so I began to prepare for the match as I had prepared for matches in the past. I thought about the facts. The facts were clear. I was in condition. I had trained, lifted weights and run. I knew the wrestling moves that would work against my opponent. With my thoughts on those facts, I could go out on the mat, confident that I was prepared to give my best.

As I walked onto the wrestling mat and shook my opponent's hand, I forgot about the television and all the people. I was on familiar ground. I had spent many hours on

a wrestling mat. Soon the nervousness left, and I was able to wrestle confidently to the best of my ability.

That could have been false confidence; it could have been cockiness or false pride. If I really had not spent time conditioning my body and learning wrestling moves, no amount of self-confidence would have allowed me to compete in the Olympics. My confidence was important. But even more important were the facts in which I had put my confidence.

As a Christian, I have also learned the importance of trusting the facts. In I John 5:11-13, the Bible says, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ... I put my faith in what Jesus did on the Cross. He died for my sins. Therefore my security is not based on my performance but rather on what Jesus has done for me.

Athletes are often insecure. There are so many unknowns in an athlete's life. Will I make the team? How long will I stay on the team? Will I get injured? Am I prepared for competition? What will my opponent do? Will I win? Will I lose? How will people react if I lose? These are just a few of an athlete's questions.

If an athlete's security comes from himself or from others, he will have a difficult time with the pressure that comes as the questions mentioned above fill his mind. If his security is in God, however, the pressure is much easier to handle.

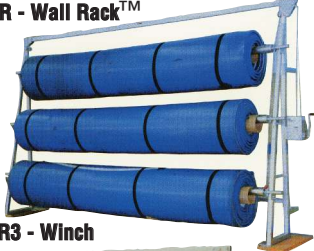
As you deal with confidence and help others with their emotions, remember to focus on the facts. Do all you can to prepare and learn to rely on God in all things. Then you, too, can have true confidence as you face each competition, knowing that you are totally prepared.

If you desire a complete copy of John's pamphlet called "Totally Prepared", send us your mailing address and we will send out as many copies as you request, free of charge.


*Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: ben@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org.

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