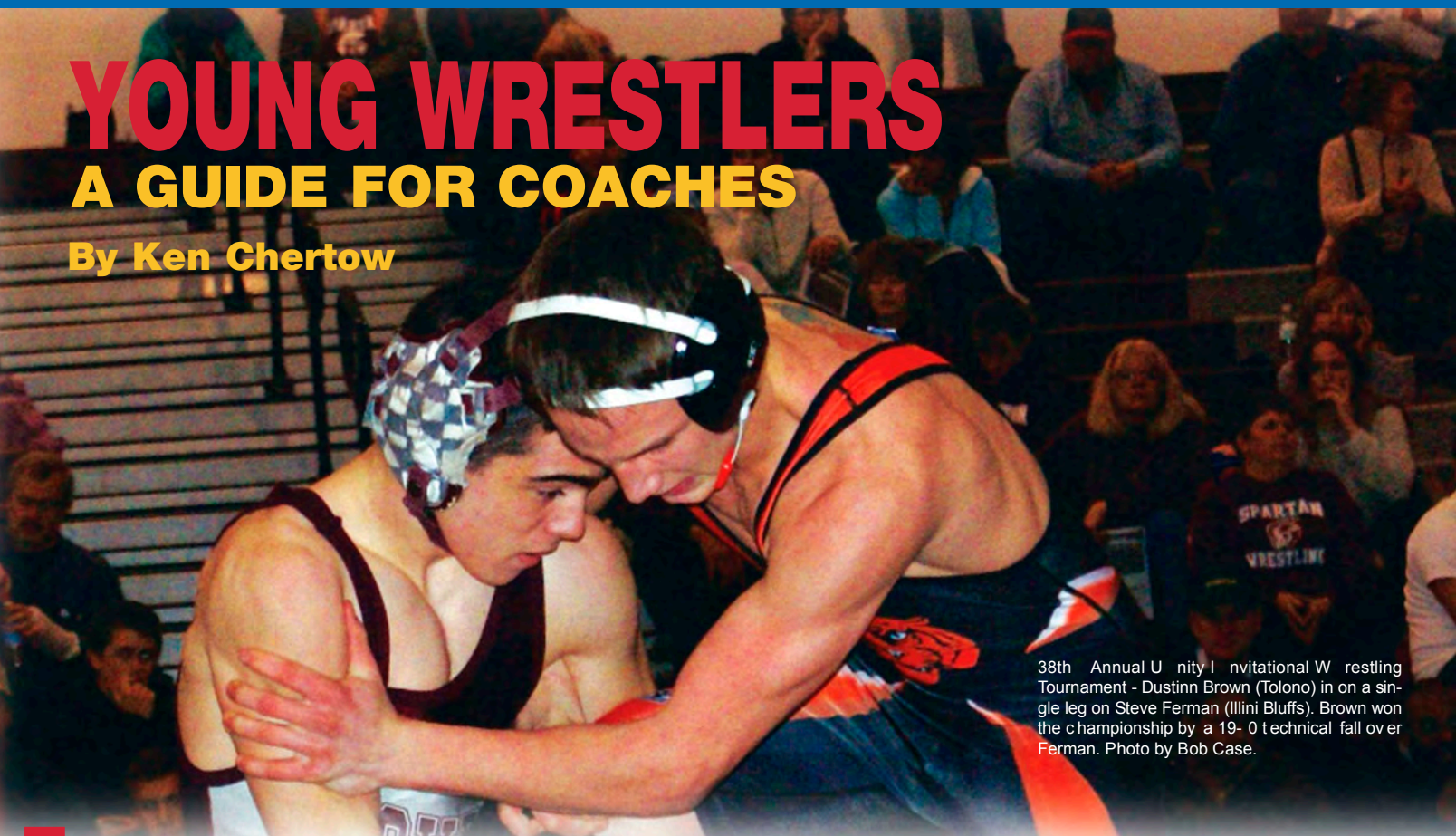
YOUNG WRESTLERS

A GUIDE FOR COACHES

By Ken Chertow



38th Annual U nity I nvitational W restling Tournament - Dustinn Brown (Tolono) in on a single leg on Steve Ferman (Illini Bluffs). Brown won the c hampionship by a 19- 0 t echnical fall ov er Ferman. Photo by Bob Case.

I have been working with young wrestlers throughout my competitive and coaching career.

I spent my summers working with kids of all different age groups, which proved to be very beneficial and rewarding experiences for me. I enjoyed my work with the kids tremendously and saw how much the wrestlers benefited from their time on the mats. I encourage you to organize open mats and day camps in your community during the summer. To the youth coaches -- invite the varsity wrestlers to work with your local kids program. When training young wrestlers, the more f eedback t hey r eceive t he b etter o ff t hey w ill b e. T he v arsity wrestlers can serve as role models for the younger wrestlers and will also benefit from helping the kids.

The following are some basic suggestions for how to get the most out of your kids program.

1. **Emphasize skill development.** Do not rush to teach them more techniques than they need or can remember. Drill the "Basic Skills" on a daily basis. Not only the stance, motion, level changes, etc., but also the Back Arch, Back Step, Hip Lift, Hip Heist, building your base, and more. Use games periodically to incorporate the basic skills into your practice.
2. **Shadow drill frequently.** Kids need to learn to control their own bodies before they can control someone else. Plus, everyone in the room is drilling intensely, simultaneously, rather than half of the guys being partners. This can help you lead into teaching visualization skills. Kids are never too young to dream about becoming a champion.
3. **Be enthusiastic and give positive feedback frequently**. Young wrestlers need your leadership and guidance and thrive on positive feedback when they do something well. Also, give parents positive feedback if their child is doing well. They need to stay motivated as well, and hearing that their child is doing well gives them a big boost.
4. **Encourage parents to get involved.** I welcome and encourage parents to watch my practices. I also welcome them to get on the mats and help. The more personal attention your students receive, the quicker they will improve.
5. **Run a tight ship, but let the kids have fun.** Take your instructional phase of practice seriously but not too serious. Good teachers and coaches make their instruction interesting for the kids, so they pay attention and have fun.
6. **Incorporate live wrestling throughout your practice.** In a traditional practice, most of the live wrestling is done at the end of practice, and some youth programs that I am familiar with do not let the kids do much live wrestling at all.
7. **Utilize videotape for instruction and motivation.** Beginners need to see what it looks like when a move is executed correctly in competition, and edited highlight tapes can prove to be very motivational.
8. **Teach more than just technique.** Emphasize to your wrestlers the value of sportsmanship, poise, goal setting, discipline, work ethic and the other important "lessons of life".. Instill the lessons of life in your students because they will undoubtedly help them in everything they do throughout their lives. Kids look up to you more than you will ever realize.

I left full time college coaching in 1994 to devote more of my time to working with young wrestlers. I expanded my Gold Medal Training Camp System into a year round camp program so I could coach kids full time. I enjoy the challenge of getting kids to learn and develop a passion for our sport. Undoubtedly, the kids who excel when they grow up are the ones who love doing it. Don't get me wrong, my students and I value winning. However, skill development and fun take on equal importance. The trick is to plan and conduct structured, reasonably intense practices, so that your students get good while still enjoying the training. Our Youth Program motto for our youngest wrestlers is **"Work Hard and Have Fun on your way to #1!"** Good Luck on your quest for success!

Ken Chertow conducts wr estling camps for wr estlers throughout the country. His summer camp schedule is now finalized and ther e are technique and training camps for teams and individuals of all ages. T o learn mor e or to r equest a summer camp br ochure please call 814-466-3466, email camps@kenchertow.com. or visit www.kenchertow.com.