The success of your scholastic wrestling program will depend largely on how well you prepare practice sessions from day to day. It is important to realize that your daily practices must evolve with the needs of the athletes participating in the program. For example, if you are working with young and inexperienced wrestlers, you will need to spend more time on the perfection of fundamental techniques. After that, you can begin to move on to more advanced wrestling skills.

Preseason Daily Practice Sessions

Many state high school associations designate dates when participating schools may begin organized wrestling practices. Because a six-week training period is considered ideal in preparing wrestlers for competitive action, it would be to your advantage to schedule wrestling dual meets and tournaments with at least this amount of preseason practice time. Preseason practices should start with conditioning activities and passive to semiactive drill work. In the first two weeks of practice, emphasis should be on preparing the wrestlers for wrestling. Following are some examples of conditioning drills for strength, quickness, agility, endurance, flexibility, balance, and mental toughness that can be implemented during preseason practices:

- Strength: Big 10, weight-room lifting, and rope climbing (chapter 6).
- Quickness, agility, flexibility, and balance: Spin Drill (chapter 1), stretching exercises, shadow wrestling (on feet and bottom), quickness and agility games, hip heist, and rope skipping (chapter 6).
- Endurance and mental toughness: stair running, Ironman Drill, and LOBO round-up (chapter 6).

Always remember, if you begin active wrestling before the participants are properly conditioned, you may find yourself facing an abundance of injury problems. Moreover, when you do begin all-out wrestling in practice, it would be wise to start with mat (or ground) wrestling first and gradually work into active takedown wrestling.

This is also the time of year you will want to iron out your wrestlers' fundamental skills, discuss new rule changes and review healthy weight-management practices. Keeping with this philosophy at the beginning of the year will make for a safer and more rewarding season.

In-Season Daily Practice Sessions

The last two weeks of preseason practice should resemble your in-season practice sessions. At this point in the year, it is suggested that you don't teach any new moves, but stress the perfection of previously taught maneuvers via drills and active wrestling.

The wrestling workout session is the most important phase of practice for two reasons. First, it allows you the opportunity to observe the wrestlers more thoroughly and correct their weak areas. Second, it is the best conditioning activity for preparing your wrestlers for competitive action.

On days before dual meets or tournaments, practice should be very light so the wrestlers get sufficient rest for their matches. A few conditioning exercises and wrestling drills would be adequate. If the dual meet or tournament begins early the next day, a discussion period and pep talk would suffice.

Of course, those wrestlers with weight-management problems may have to do additional work. This would include endurance and cardiovascular activities, such as rope skipping, interval running, or riding the stationary bike to make weight (detailed in chapter 6). However, they should be close to match weight the day before competition. This time should be spent thinking about their opponents and wrestling, not thinking about food and making weight. If a wrestler is constantly dwelling on weight problems, you must step in and sternly suggest that he move up a weight class for his own physical and psychological well-being.

At the start of practice following a dual meet or tournament, point out mistakes made by individual wrestlers. They may need to work on their bridging skills, in which case you would reteach the Half Nelson Bridging Counter With Partner Drill (see chapter 4, pages 144-145). Or if they had trouble countering the double-leg takedown, you might revisit the Double-Leg Reaction Counter Drill (see chapter 2, pages 74-75).

On the flip side, don't forget to praise those team members who had superior performances.

Editor's Note: This excerpt is from The Wrestling Drill Book (Chapter 7: Effective Practices and Off-Season Activities). The book can be purchased at humankinelics.com or Amazon.com.