uth Dakota - Jordan Reiner
and steps through to score on
) in the 189 lb. match. Reiner
ecision. Photo by Mike Smith

There is no harm in wanting to win. It is natural, even beneficial, to strive to win in competition. All coaches work to achieve championships for their teams and themselves. In fact, it is expected that they try to do so. Such expectations can give the team's efforts purpose and direction. There is little excitement in being mediocre.

One varsity wrestler identifies his focus as an athlete: "I enjoy playing sports with my friends, but I participate for the awards of trophies and medals." A college wrestler adds: "Right now I'm only into it to qualify for Nationals." A middle school wrestler is even more direct: "I want to take first."

Coaches should accommodate the goals of wrestlers like these and try to create championships for both the individual wrestlers and the team as a whole, much like an author composes an award-winning book or an artist paints on a canvas. The coach's best skills, insights, and efforts are required if indeed winning a championship is the goal.

But many coaches feel threatened by the changing environment of sports and the less diligent habits of athletes. The uncertainty they have about dealing with athletes often surfaces in the indecisive way they may manage their teams. Usually, it's the coach's inexperience that is the key factor in his inability to provide satisfactory leadership or create a championship. Indeed, fewer individuals are interested in coaching, and many of those that do coach become so overwhelmed and exhausted by the many duties forced on them that they quit after the first year. This is especially true in wrestling where enthusiasm at the beginning of a season can often lead to frustration at its end for too many coaches. Consequently, they choose to terminate their coaching careers before they even get started. School administrators, then, confront again the difficulty of locating and training a new coach for the team.

Gary Walton, whose research about the coaching profession appears in his book Beyond Winning, understands the administrator's dilemma. "People attracted to these important positions today bring a different array of skills. The importance of leadership and education still exists, but other roles compete for the scarce time available, and there is less time for a coach to provide personal direction to student athletes. And the stress is causing an alarming number of coaches to depart the profession early."