Carbohydrates

By Dr. Glenn Jarrett

Knowledge is a form of power, and power wins wrestling matches! Wrestling is a very mental sport and being smart about the way you train and eat will pay off. Just like gaining physical power, acquiring knowledge power takes effort.

There are few sports where diet and nutrition are as closely tied to success as in wrestling. However, I don't think the words diet and nutrition should refer directly to "making weight"! I would like these two words to make you think first of fuel and building blocks.

Athletes require energy....obviously

Energy requires a fuel source....obviously

Just like a racecar, the type of fuel an athlete uses matters a great deal!

Our bodies can utilize three sources of fuel for energy: carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Calories are the unit of measure for nutritional energy just like gallons of gasoline for a car.

For the training athlete, carbohydrates should provide 60 to 70% of your daily caloric intake. Carbohydrate is converted to glucose and glycogen to be used by working muscle and the brain. Muscle actually stores glycogen for "easy access".

There are many sources of carbohydrate and not all are equivalent. Complex carbohydrates need to be broken down by your digestive system into usable carbon units while simple carbohydrates do not. Both types of "carbs" are important to athletes.

Good sources of carbohydrate:
Grains (cereal, bread, pasta)
Potatoes and rice
Fruits of all types

2009 NJCAA Championship Finals - 133 lb. Billy Murphy (Iowa Central) working to keep control of Tim Thurston (Iowa Lakes). Murphy won by tech fall 17-1 and also went on to win the Outstanding Wrestler Award. Photos by John Johnson.

Milk and legumes (beans) and some vegetables are also good sources of carbohydrate

In my opinion, some energy drinks are also good sources of readily available carbs especially during competition and when recovering from exercise or making weight. There is also a time and place for "sweet stuff" such as honey.

Look for sources of carbohydrate that also contain important vitamins and minerals. This is where candy (which does contain simple carbohydrates) falls down as a source of nutrition…empty calories so to speak.

Don't be fooled by recent "diet advertising" that makes carbohydrates sound like the evil enemy. This type of diet does not apply to training athletes!

A few important thoughts to consider with wrestling and nutrition:

- Think in terms of optimizing your weight, not cutting weight
- Wrestlers should EAT SMART and NOT MISS MEALS
- High school wrestlers are growing athletes
- Wrestlers need to learn as much as they can about sports nutrition

TRAIN SMART TRAIN TOUGH
WRESTLE SMART WRESTLE TOUGH
AND HAVE FUN

Editor's Note: Dr. Jarrett is an orthopedic surgeon of a Bone and Joint facility in Missoula, Montana. He has an undergraduate degree in Exercise Physiology. 1989 NCAA All-American for the University of Orgeon, 4x Pac-10 Finalist – 2x Champion, 1989 National Freestyle All-American, 1988 Western Regional Olympic Trial Champion in Freestyle.