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"Less is More"...Coaching from Matside

By Scot Davis

Have you ever attended a youth wrestling tournament? Wrestlers, parents, coaches and fans all yelling out instructions to their wrestler/s. How about a junior high meet? Much the same! Finally, the high school meet, there might be several coaches, wrestlers, parents and fans yelling out instructions or cheering them on from matside. With this said, just how much do you think that wrestler hears down on that mat? Have you ever thought about how confused he/she might be, trying to hear one voice alone. Trying to hear one voice is hard enough, but trying to distinguish between several screaming people, along with the other noise in the gym or arena is most difficult. It's also confusing and can often disrupt the thoughts he/she might have in mind for their moves or technique in their match. He/she might even attempt a move that might not be good for that situation, yelled out by somebody not prepped on what that particular wrestler actually has been trained to perform. Wrestling itself is tough enough alone, but combining all this added noise and stress just complicates things for that wrestler out on the mat. With respect to all this, let me suggest that "less is more" when coaching from matside.

I know everyone connected to a particular wrestler means well and has good intentions, thinking they can help, but too many voices causes confusion. My experience is that any coaching instructions should be directed from the Head Coach, or an Assistant Coach, the Head Coach designates. It should be somebody the wrestler is familiar with and has confidence in. Not a parent, fan or several coaches yelling all at one time. If it's not the Head Coach, he can designate a particular coach to coach that wrestler for that match. This is especially true at individual tournaments. No matter what, the Head Coach needs to be the overriding voice who's in control. Why? Because if things don't go well, it's not the assistant, parent, wrestler or fan that will be blamed. It will fall back to the "Head Coach."

When the Head Coach appoints an Assistant Coach to coach a wrestler it is most well served if that particular assistant is one with similar size, similar technique, or even similar personality. Whatever the case, select a coach that has a special connection to that wrestler. This way too, there is never an issue in a wrestler having a coach at matside. I have always tried to designate a particular coach to a specific small group of wrestlers. They form a special bond that relates well during a match. This is not only effective in move selection, but very helpful coaching at individual tournaments. Everybody knows their assignment and wrestlers aren't caught short out on the mat without a coach. Whatever the system used, make sure the wrestler on the mat is presented a better opportunity to more clearly hear coaching instruction and understand those instructions as well. However, don't provide too much information that interferes with his/her thinking process out on the mat. Decisions have to be made quickly, there is little time to think. I have always told our wrestlers that they need to drill their moves so when in competition they don't have to "think," but rather "react." It becomes instinctive in nature!

For individual tournaments, I suggest splitting up your coaching staff and assigning particular wrestlers to assigned coaches. These coaches may work more closely with these wrestlers with some desired technique they have good knowledge of, or maybe they are of similar size to wrestle with that particular wrestler. The bottom line is that wrestler needs to have confidence in what a particular coach is yelling instructions out at them in a match. Again, trying to distinguish between several moves being yelled out by teammates, parents, fans and multiple coaches is difficult to distinguish or clarify and hear.

Another important aspect to consider in this regard is having your wrestlers on the bench getting so involved in their teammates match they actually tire themselves out prior to their own match. Ask a coach how drained he/she is after a meet, and they did not wrestle a single match, physically that is. Sure, we appreciate everyone's concern for their teammate on the mat, but he/she can actually wear him or herself out being so emotionally involved, whether it be coaching, cheering, etc., It would best to be more relaxed and doing what they do to prepare themselves for their own upcoming match. "Let the coaches do the coaching!"

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not against the enthusiasm, good intentions and helpfulness everybody has for that one wrestler on the mat. However, picture yourself out there on the mat. It can be one of the loneliest places on Earth. You are looking up to possibly several hundred people screaming instructions, some good and some bad, and the wrestler has to focus on what to do next. Any move he/she selects could either win or lose that match. Do you think that one person the wrestler listened to will ever receive blame or accept fault? I highly doubt it! With this in mind, as a Head Coach I strongly suggest you put together a plan or system that can be most effective for your wrestler and team. Remember, "hearing one voice is better than trying to hear several at one time."

Wrestling is really a "One on One" sport when it comes right down to it. With this said, why not eliminate confusion and encourage "focus" by limiting "matside coaching" to one person? The few that are most directly involved and have the greatest stakes in the outcome of that match are the ones that should be heard. Let's help our wrestlers in their time of need and create the best environment to help our wrestlers achieve to their fullest capabilities... "less is more!"

There are a lot of moves and technique out there to draw from in the sport of wrestling, but there is usually some specific moves or techniques that can be used for a particular wrestler. Wrestlers come in all shapes and sizes. And not all moves or technique work for everyone against all kinds of opponents. Because of this, I suggest a coach meet with his/her wrestlers and discuss strategy for upcoming opponents. This is where reviewing matches can be of great benefit. Watching yourself can be extremely helpful! A wrestler doesn't always realize how you actually look on the mat. Watching yourself can help you evaluate and make adjustments to improve your wrestling skills. It can show you what can be improved and what has gone well too. Viewing these matches with a coach can be even more helpful too. The coach can help point out things the wrestler may not even been aware of or notice. Obviously time is always scarce, but if matches can be reviewed and discussed it can be extremely helpful in the learning process and go a long ways for more success on the mat. This also helps the coaching staff in helping them know what needs to be worked on in practice, and the skills and knowledge levels

them know what needs to be worked on in practice, and the skills and knowledge levels of their wrestlers.

Finally, I welcome ideas for future topics to write about. Please feel free to send me your suggestions. I will draw on my 48 years of coaching experience as well researching your suggested topic and write about it in future editions. I will cover any topic you send me in regards to wrestling too. Just send your ideas to me at scotdavis9805@gmail.com. And, thank you for your suggestions! By the way, this article's topic came to mind from a discussion with my friend Coach Jim Jackson, the former great coach at Apple Valley and Shakopee High Schools in Minnesota. Jim just recently retired from coaching with an amazing career high school coaching record of 868-64-4 (92.73 Win %) and 18 State Team Titles. He is a 3-time National "Coach of the Year" recipient from the NHSCA, NWCA and Wrestling USA Magazine.

Editor's Note: Scot Davis is entering his 48th year of coaching (42 High School) and he is the winningest coach in amateur wrestling history with a 1173-203-4 career high school coaching record. He is a 2-time National Coach of the Year (1999 NHSCA and 2007 Wrestling USA Magazine, also Runner-Up in 2006); 2009 USA Dream Team Coach; 2009 Master of Wrestling Award; Named a Top Rookie College Coach in 1986 by NCAA News and Amateur Wrestling News; 1986 Bob Dellinger Award for "Outstanding Writer of Wrestling" in the USA; Member of 8 Hall of Fames.