

# Wrestling SA

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# **OVERTRAINING:** **SIGNS, SYMPTOMS AND SOLUTIONS**

By Matt Brzycki



2010 Kaufman Brand Open -- Venel Rene (Waldorf College) attacks with a single leg on Josh Smith (UN-Kearney) during their 125 lb. Smith decided Rene 8-1. Photo by Mike Smith / MatShots.

**P**reparation for wrestling involves several different types of training. This includes strength training, aerobic training, anaerobic training and skill training (practicing).

One of the most difficult things for many wrestlers to understand is that too much training can be counterproductive. In order for wrestlers to perform at optimal levels, they must achieve balance between their training and recovery. Doing too much training will “tip the scale” so to speak and lead to a decrement in performance on the mat. The idea is to do just the right amount of training without overtraining.

## WHAT IT IS

Overtraining is a condition that results from overstressing the body. Generally speaking, the excessive stress is produced by excessive activity. Here, an athlete’s ability to recover simply cannot cope with the demands from such a large amount of stress.

One type of training can be the root of overtraining. An example would be strength training where a wrestler spends far more time in the weight room than is necessary to improve his muscular strength. In this case, overtraining could result from doing too many exercises, too many sets and/or too many workouts. For the most part, though, overtraining is usually caused by the cumulative stress from the different types of training.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Overtraining doesn’t occur suddenly; rather, it occurs gradually. Therefore, it’s difficult to identify overtraining in its early stage.

Nonetheless, overtraining has many telltale signs and symptoms. These “red flags” may be emotional/psychological as well as physical.

The emotional/psychological signs and symptoms include mood changes, emotional instability, depression and anxiety. In addition, athletes are often angry and irritable. Overtraining leads to insomnia and decreased self-esteem. Athletes also experience a loss of enthusiasm and reduced interest in training.

The physical signs and symptoms include general fatigue, anemia, increased frequency of illness, difficulty in completing normal training and reduced appetite. Moreover, athletes who are overtrained have an elevated resting heart rate and blood pressure. They also have a decreased ability to concentrate and focus on the task at hand. This can cause wrestlers to make a greater number of “mental mistakes” on the mat. Other physical signs and symptoms include decreased muscular size and strength, increased joint and muscle aches, prolonged muscular soreness and lack of energy (feeling “drained” all the time) as well as unexplained and significant weight loss.

The most obvious indicator of overtraining, however, is poor

performance. This manifests itself in training (strength and endurance) and wrestling.

Poor performance in training can be determined by keeping and reviewing records. If a wrestler can no longer improve on the number of repetitions that he can do with a given weight, for instance, he’s likely overtraining. If he does fewer repetitions with the same weight compared to what he had been able to achieve in the past, overtraining is almost a certainty. (This assumes, of course, that an illness or injury isn’t to blame.)

Poor performance in wrestling isn’t as easy to quantify. However, if a wrestler has more difficulty in executing skills than in the past, he’s likely overtraining. Similarly, if a wrestler is less explosive on the mat or gets winded more quickly than in the past, he’s likely overtraining. (Again, this assumes the absence of illness and injury.)

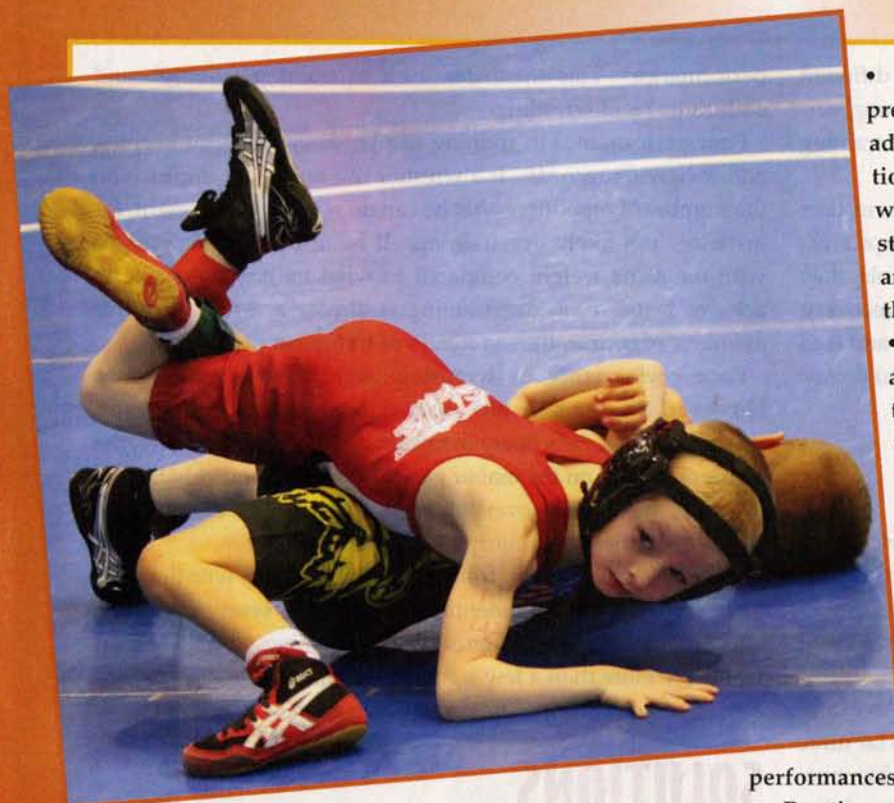
It’s to be expected that, from time to time, many wrestlers will have a few of the aforementioned signs and symptoms. This isn’t necessarily an indication of overtraining. But wrestlers who have more than a few signs and symptoms that linger for a considerable amount of time is an indication of overtraining.

## SOLUTIONS

There are a number of ways to avoid the risk of overtraining. Let’s look at some solutions from the standpoint of coaches and wrestlers.

### What coaches can do:

- **Be on the lookout for the signs and symptoms of overtraining.** If any of these appear, it’s a clear signal for you to take corrective measures.
- **Educate your wrestlers on different aspects of training and nutrition.** Your athletes need to understand that overtraining is a distinct possibility. Inform them of the signs and symptoms of overtraining. Also give them good nutritional advice, especially as it pertains to the consumption of pre- and post-workout foods/fluids.
- **Use variety.** Coaches must ensure that the different types of training don’t become monotonous. One way that this can be accomplished is to keep practices fresh. And in the weight room, have your wrestlers vary their workouts on a regular basis.
- **Plan training properly.** Make sure that you give your wrestlers enough recovery prior to meets and tournaments. Intense workouts that are done too close to a competition will leave them flat.
- **Provide periodic breaks.** Wrestlers should get breatherers from training throughout the year so that they can recharge their batteries. Good times for short breaks are right before the season (practice) begins; right after the season ends; and once or twice during the summer months. The breaks should last at least a few days.



2010 Cliff Keen Kickoff Classic - Sammie Hayes (Illinois) scoring back points with a turk on Drake Ayala (Iowa). Hayes major decisioned Ayala 11-0. Photo by Scott Latham, Fantasy Photography.

- Consider in-season stressors. In comparison to pre- and post-season training, in-season training places additional demands on your wrestlers. Potential emotional/psychological stressors include making the team, winning districts or placing at states; potential physical stressors include making weight, practicing, competing and perhaps even traveling. Overtraining can magnify these in-season stressors and others.
- Account for individual differences. Different athletes will respond in different ways to the same training. Clearly, not everyone can handle the same volume of training; some wrestlers recover more slowly than others. These athletes require more recovery time.

### What athletes can do:

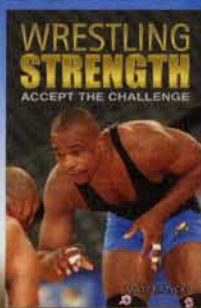
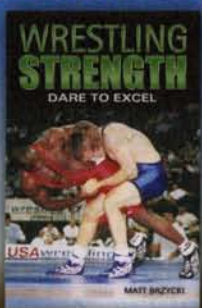
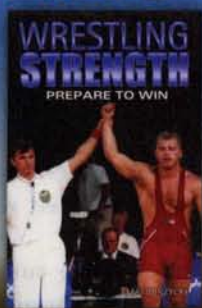
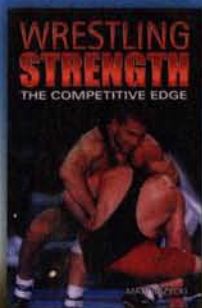
- Keep accurate records. The importance of maintaining and reviewing records has been mentioned earlier. Records are useful in identifying poor performance in training. If you're overtraining, your performances will plateau or be worse than in the past.
- Practice good nutrition. What you eat and drink can either help or hurt your recovery. For example, not eating enough carbohydrates and calories will cause you to feel more exhausted; not drinking adequate fluids will lead to the same result. In particular, it's very critical for you to get sufficient carbohydrates and fluids as soon as possible after a workout in order to expedite your recovery.
- Get sufficient rest. The best cure for overtraining is rest because it allows your body the opportunity to recuperate. This may necessitate reducing the volume of training that you perform (in terms of workouts, exercises and/or sets). Taking breaks from training throughout the year – during times as dictated by your coach – also helps to avoid overtraining.

### THE LAST REP

A wrestler who is underperforming could be overtraining. Overtraining occurs when the volume of training exceeds the ability to recover. Wrestlers need to get just the right amount of training coupled with just the right amount of recovery.

Matt Brzycki has authored, co-authored or edited 17 books on strength and fitness including four that are devoted to wrestling. His latest book is *Youth Fitness: An Action Plan for Shaping America's Kids*.

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