

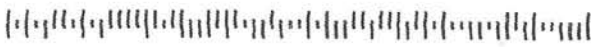
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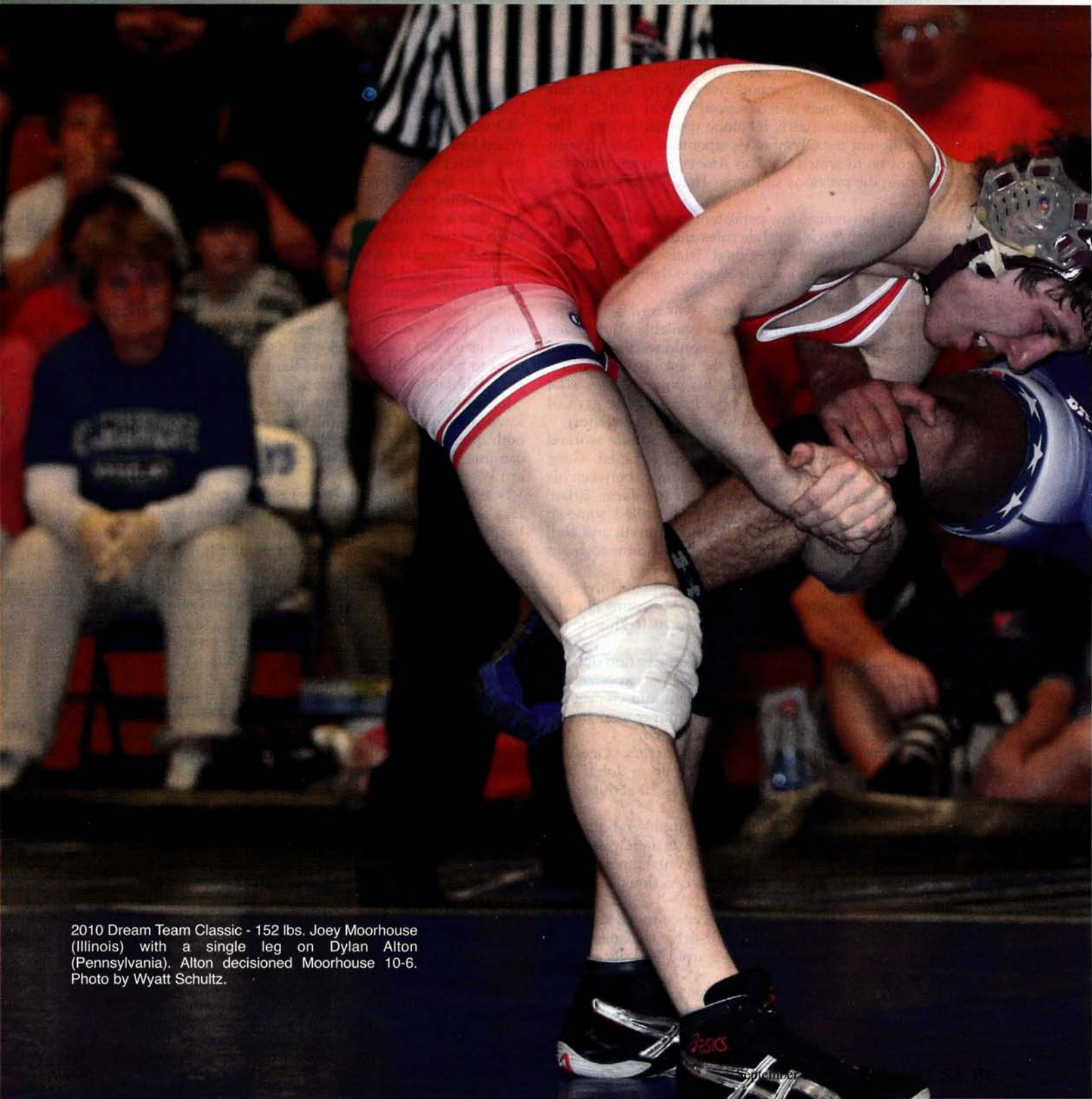
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MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY



2010 Dream Team Classic - 152 lbs. Joey Moorhouse (Illinois) with a single leg on Dylan Alton (Pennsylvania). Alton decided Moorhouse 10-6. Photo by Wyatt Schultz.



By Matt Brzycki



From 1984 to 1990, I was an assistant strength coach at Rutgers University. During my first three years at the school, I supervised the varsity weight room in the College Avenue Gymnasium that was located in New Brunswick. In 1987, we opened a second varsity weight room in the Louis Brown Athletic Center in Piscataway and I was assigned to that facility.

Shaun Brown was hired as an assistant strength coach and put in charge of the weight room on College Avenue. One evening, I dropped by the facility to pay him a visit. It was my first time back to that weight room since I had left and it was pretty much the same. However, I noticed something that he had written on the dry-erase board: "MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY."

WHAT IT IS

Basically, the statement "my way or the highway" – aka "my way or the doorway" – means that athletes have two choices: (1) conform to their coach's directives or (2) leave the team. This "policy" was much more prevalent in the past than in the current era of political correctness but it still exists to varying degrees.

What the message boils down to is expectations. All coaches – even those who might not be described as "authoritative" – expect certain things of their athletes. Naturally, different coaches have different expectations. Nevertheless, some of these expectations are the same or very similar.

Here are 12 general expectations of which all wrestlers should be mindful:

1. Be prepared. This applies to everything that you do in your quest to become a better wrestler. Preparation for wrestling includes strength training, conditioning and practicing along with sensible eating.

Don't show up for the first day of practice in the fall without having done anything of note since the last day of practice in the winter. Don't wait until the first day of practice in the fall to start watching the quality and quantity of the foods that you eat and beverages that you drink.

The focal point of your efforts should relate to wrestling. This may sound obvious but take a look at your strength training, for example. In the off-season, are you in the weight room mostly doing exercises for your chest and biceps? If so, you're not preparing for wrestling season; you're preparing for beach season. You need to train your hips and legs, the most powerful muscles in your body. You need to train your neck, an area that must be strengthened to reduce the potential for catastrophic injury.

2. Practice hard. Many coaches believe that "you play like you practice." In other words, if you practice poorly then you'll wrestle poorly. Practicing with bad technique, little effort and no enthusiasm means that you're learning to wrestle with bad technique, little effort and no enthusiasm. And that's how you'll likely perform on the mat.

No discussion about practice would be complete without

mentioning Allen Iverson. Although he's regarded as one of the best guards who ever played in the National Basketball Association, his lack of effort and motivation during practice are legendary. Equally legendary is his much-publicized tirade about practice.

At a news conference in 2002, when Iverson was questioned by reporters about his practice habits, he responded: "We're sitting here and I'm supposed to be the franchise player and we're talking about practice. I mean listen, we're sitting here talking about practice, not a game, not a game, not a game but we're talking about practice. Not the game that I go out there and die for and play every game like it's my last but we're talking about practice, man. How silly is that?"

Iverson continued his bizarre rant with this: "Now I know that I'm supposed to lead by example and all that but I'm not shoving that aside like it don't mean anything. I know it's important. I honestly do but we're talking about practice. We're talking about practice, man. We're talking about practice. We're talking about practice. We're not talking about the game. We're talking about practice. When you come to the arena and you see me play - you've seen me play, right? - you've seen me give everything I've got but we're talking about practice right now."

There's no question that Allen Iverson was one of the most talented players at his position in the history of professional basketball. But how much better could he have been if he worked hard in practice (in game-like conditions) to hone his skills? And how much better could the team have been if he worked hard in practice (in game-like conditions) to mesh with his teammates?

Bottom line: You'll never reach your athletic potential without working hard in practice.

3. Be dependable. Can your coach and teammates count on you? If your coach needs you to beef up to a higher weight class next year because it will help the team, he's depending on you. If your teammates need you to assist them at a weekend fundraiser, they're depending on you. If another wrestler needs you to stay after practice to help him drill, he's depending on you.

When your coach and teammates are depending on you, can you deliver the goods? Or will you drop the ball?

Along these lines, don't make promises that you cannot keep or don't intend to keep. In fact, don't make promises; make commitments.

4. Demonstrate good sportsmanship. True story: At a recent state wrestling championship, two long-time rivals met in the finals. Both athletes were among the best high-school



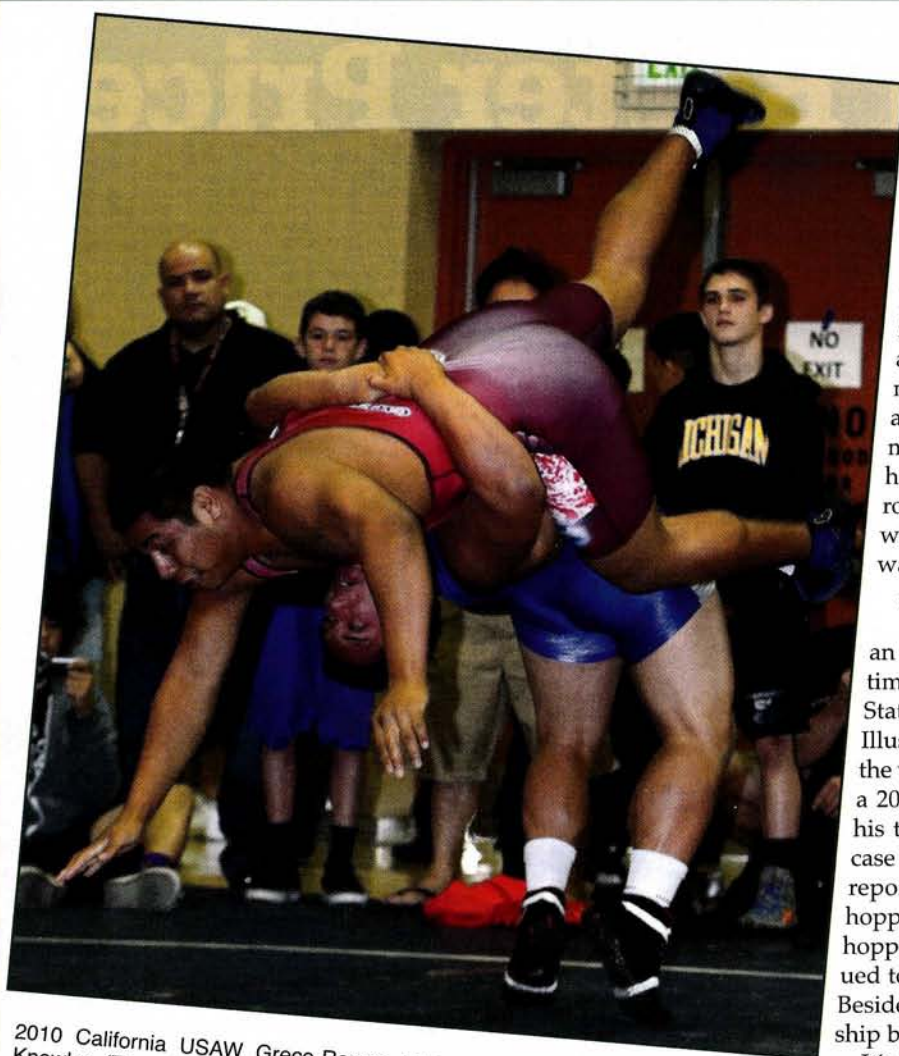
Iowa High School State Wrestling 1A Championship Finals - 152 lbs. Tanner Weatherman (Ballard) with a single leg attack on Taylor Berger (Carroll). Weatherman decided Berger 11-4. Photo By Johnnie Johnson.

wrestlers in their weight class in the country. Early in the third period, one of them was leading by a point. He received a second caution for assuming an incorrect starting position which tied the score. An escape gave him back a one-point lead. Near the end of the third period, he got called twice for stalling which tied the score again and sent the bout to overtime. About halfway through the overtime period, he was taken down at the edge of the mat which gave his opponent the sudden-death victory. Upset by what he felt was a series of bad calls that cost him the match and state championship, the wrestler quickly voiced his opinion to one of the referees which is never a good idea. To make a long story short, he received a flagrant misconduct and wasn't awarded his silver medal. (To his credit, he voluntarily shook his opponent's hand after the match.)

Hey, nobody likes to lose. If you don't mind losing, then you probably shouldn't be wrestling. Sooner or later, with very few exceptions, everyone will taste "the agony of defeat." When you do find yourself on the losing end of the scoreboard, don't behave in an unsportsmanlike manner.

And when you win, don't be a showboat. The legendary Vince Lombardi once said, "Next time you make a touchdown, act like you have been there before." This was exemplified by Barry Sanders and the late Walter Payton, two all-time great running backs in the National Football League. Despite scoring a total of 209 touchdowns, they always acted like they had "been there before."

5. Lead, follow or get out of the way. This saying has been attributed to two individuals: Thomas Paine, one of the



2010 California USAW Greco-Roman State Championship - 215 lbs. William Knowles (Team Thunder) throwing a suplex on Porfirio Sosa (Poway). Knowles decided Sosa 1-0, 4-0. Photo by John Sachs, Tech-Fall.com.

who refereed his matches would come over to the coaching staff and say, "This guy's like a machine." I kid you not.

It's no wonder that he was so relentless and tireless on the mat; his preparation included unbelievably intense efforts. During one workout in the weight room, Shannon trained his hips and legs so hard that his legs buckled and he literally fell to the floor. He pulled himself to his feet, took a step and fell down again. Shannon tried it one more time with the same results. Figuring that after three attempts he wouldn't be able to maintain an upright posture, he crawled on his hands and knees across the floor of the weight room over to his next exercise. Imagine training with so much effort that you literally cannot walk without collapsing.

7. Set a good example. This brings to mind an amazing story about Anthony Robles, a two-time NCAA All-American wrestler at Arizona State University. According to a column in Sport Illustrated, because the team did poorly in a meet, the wrestlers were made to run laps while holding a 20-pound sandbag. Robles did this along with his teammates. What's so special about that? In case you're unaware, Robles has one leg. It was reported that Robles grabbed a sandbag and hopped a few steps before falling. He got up, hopped some more and fell again. Robles continued to do this until the team stopped running laps. Besides demonstrating what's known as "leadership by example," he put forth an incredible effort.

It's especially important for juniors and seniors to set a good example for freshmen and sophomores who are the future of the team. Wrestlers can set a good example for athletes in other sports as well.

8. Be a team player. You should try your best to fit in with your teammates. You don't necessarily need to like everyone but you do need to get along with everyone. Remember, all of you are working toward a common goal and that's to maximize your potential as wrestlers.

A team player doesn't cause dissension or disruption. Maybe you don't agree with everything that's happening but you should still cooperate with your coach and teammates. There's no place for any major drama or quarrelling among teammates. Fighting can easily destroy the fabric of a team from within.

As the saying goes, there's no "I" in "team." Give credit where credit is due. If you're being interviewed by the local newspaper after winning a big match, make sure that you "give props" to your teammates. You could say, "Seeing my teammates wrestle so well got me fired up for my match." Don't forget your coach. You could say, "Our coach had us ready for the meet." And it wouldn't hurt to say something

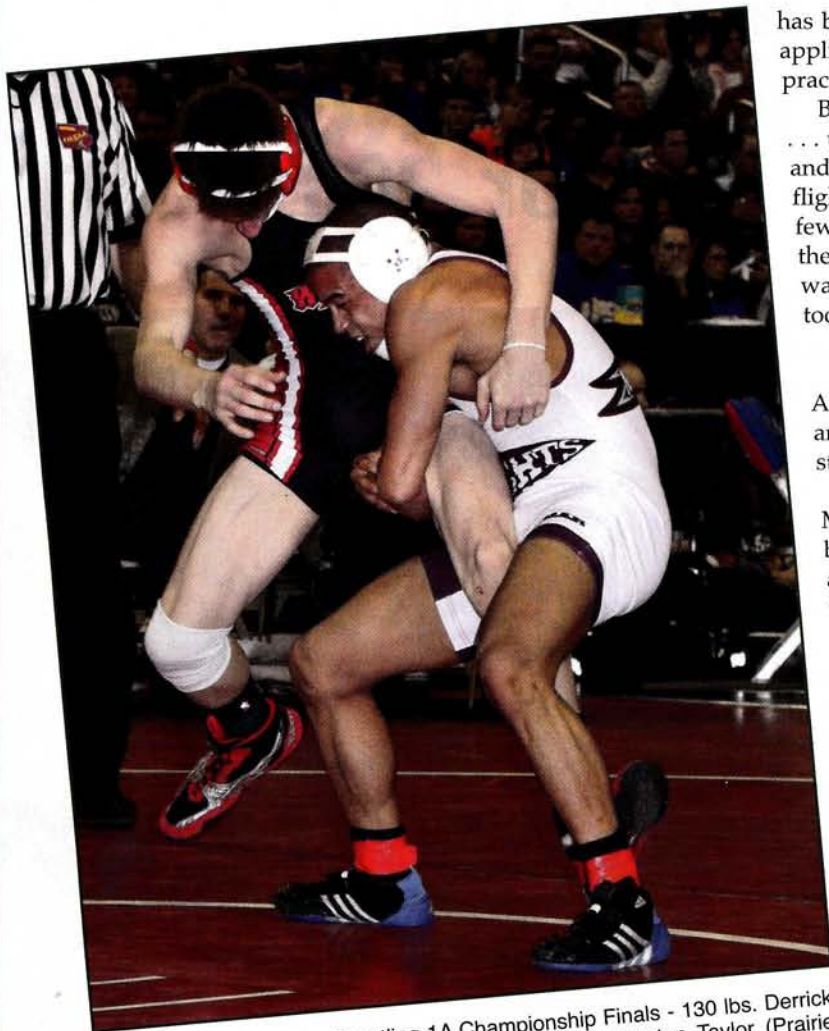
founding fathers of the United States, and General George S. Patton, inarguably one of the greatest leaders in military history.

Effective leaders in government, the military, athletics, business and other aspects of life possess common traits. Many of these traits are the same as the general expectations as outlined in this article.

Let's face it, not everyone is a leader. If you cannot be an effective leader then be an effective follower. By this, I mean don't be a disruptive or divisive force on the team.

6. Give a good effort. Again, this is applicable to everything that you do to improve as a wrestler. Good efforts must be made in strength training, conditioning and practicing.

When I was at Rutgers, we had a 165-pound wrestler named Joe Shannon. He wasn't the most talented guy on the team but he had a tremendous work ethic. And it didn't go unnoticed by others. On several different occasions, those



Iowa High School State Wrestling 1A Championship Finals - 130 lbs. Derrick Thomas (Newman Catholic) in on a single leg on Brayton Taylor (Prairie Valley). Thomas decisioned Taylor 10-8. Photo By Johnnie Johnson.

positive about your opponent. You could say, "He's a very tough competitor and should do well at regions."

9. Stay focused. You need to concentrate on the task at hand. Don't allow your mind to wander. When you're in the classroom, don't think about the wrestling room. When you're in the wrestling room, don't think about the weight room. And when you're in the weight room, don't think about the classroom.

If you're in the weight room and doing an exercise, for instance, concentrate on using proper technique. Have a target number of repetitions in mind and work to achieve it. Don't become distracted or engage in idle conversation with another individual. You'll have plenty of time to "shoot the breeze" with others once you leave the weight room.

10. Arrive on time. Coach Lombardi once stated, "If you're not five minutes early, you're 10 minutes late." This

has become known as "Lombardi Time." Being on time applies to everything: strength training, conditioning, practices and classes.

Being late by a little bit might not seem like a big deal ... until you miss an airplane by several minutes or less and are forced to wait several hours or more for the next flight. If you cannot relate to the friendly skies, being a few minutes late can cost you a ride to an away meet on the team bus. In that case, not only must you find some way to get to the meet but you might also find someone took your spot in the starting line-up.

11. Make no excuses. You know what they say: An excuse is like a butt, everybody has one. An excuse and a butt have something else in common: They both stink.

You need to take responsibility for your actions. Many athletes blame others for their failures. Some blame their coach (saying "he kept me from becoming a good wrestler" instead of "I should have listened when he was trying to teach me") or the referee (saying "he made a bad call that cost me the match" instead of "I made a few mistakes") or their opponent (saying "he got lucky" instead of "I got out-wrestled") or even the environment ("the gym was too cold" instead of "I didn't warm up properly").

12. Avoid disrespecting others. Without getting too philosophical, my opinion is that respect isn't deserved, it's earned. So rather than say "respect others," I'll say "don't disrespect others."

In particular, don't "dis" your family, your coach, your teammates or your opponents. The same goes for the school staff, namely, the teachers, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria personnel, bus drivers and security guards.

Look at it this way: Treat people the way in which you'd like to be treated. If you don't want to be disrespected, then don't disrespect others.

This also means that you should follow rules. If you're supposed to wipe the bottoms of your shoes before stepping onto the mat, then wipe the bottoms of your shoes before stepping onto the mat. If you're supposed to return your dumbbells to the rack when you're finished using them, then return your dumbbells to the rack when you're finished using them.

THE LAST REP

When a coach has a policy of "my way or the highway," you can avoid conflict by meeting the general expectations that have been discussed here.

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.