

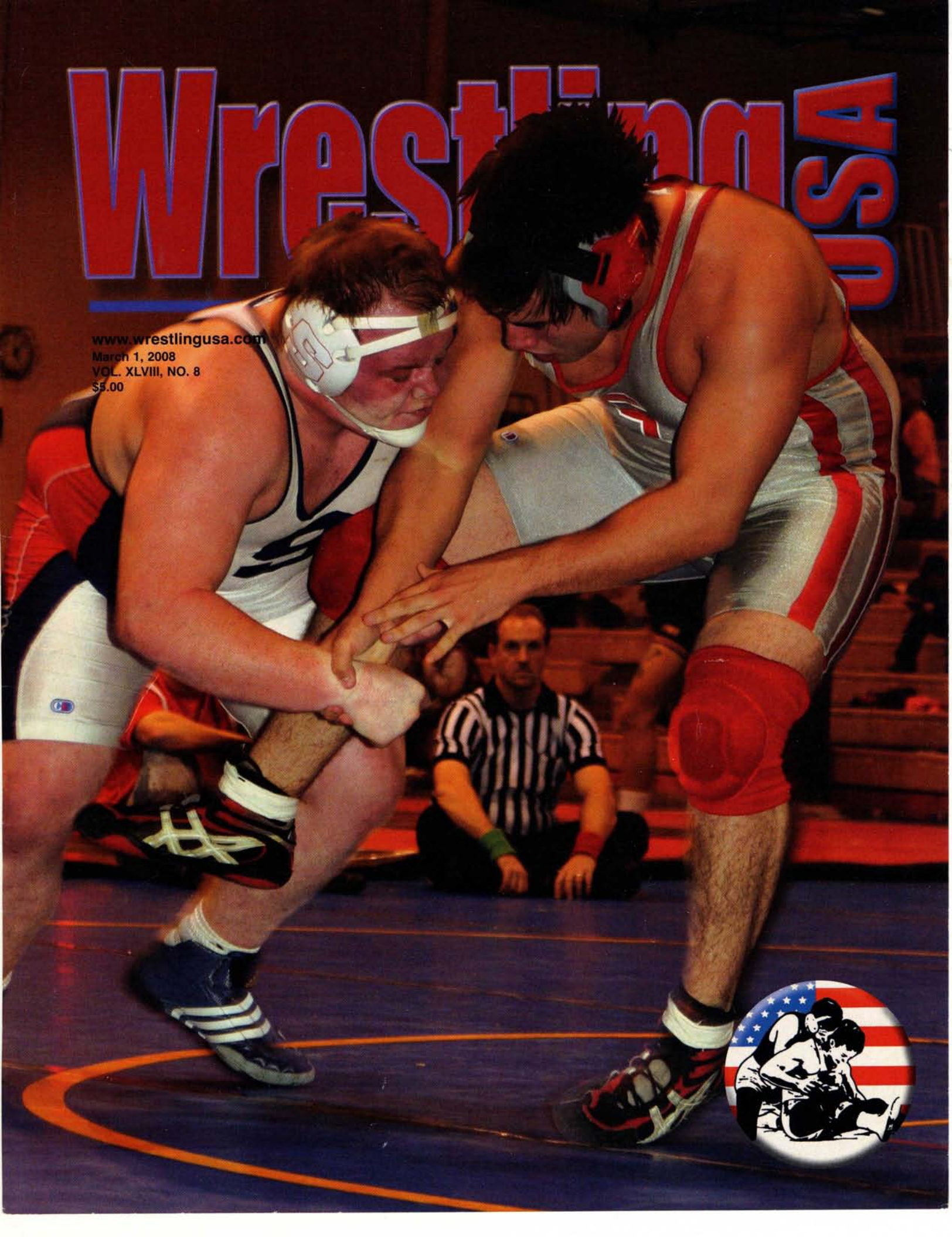
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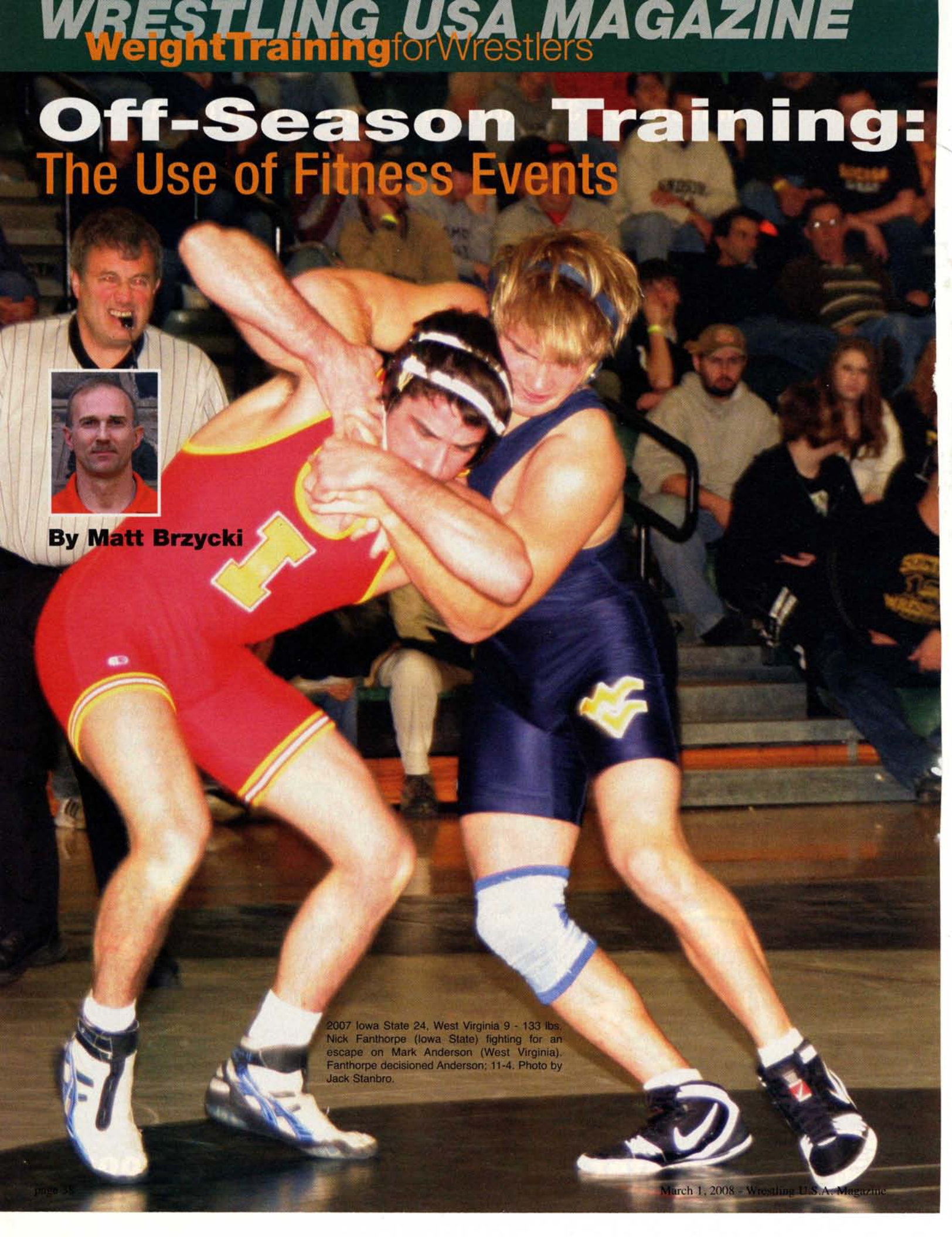
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Off-Season Training: The Use of Fitness Events



By Matt Brzycki

A large action photograph of a wrestling match. Nick Fanthorpe, wearing a red singlet with a yellow 'I' logo, is in a defensive stance, trying to escape from Mark Anderson, who is wearing a blue singlet with a yellow 'WV' logo. A referee in a striped shirt is visible in the background, along with a crowd of spectators in bleachers.

2007 Iowa State 24, West Virginia 9 - 133 lbs.
Nick Fanthorpe (Iowa State) fighting for an
escape on Mark Anderson (West Virginia).
Fanthorpe decisioned Anderson; 11-4. Photo by
Jack Stanbro.



No doubt, preparation largely determines a wrestler's success on the mat. And certainly, being as fit as possible is a critical component of preparation.

One of the many challenges faced by coaches is the need to make training productive while maintaining the interest of their athletes. A great way for you to accomplish this is to involve your wrestlers in fitness events during their off-season training.

SPECIFIC EVENTS

You can incorporate a wide range of fitness events into your off-season program. Fitness events consist of one or more activities. Obviously, the activities that you choose for the events are a function of the facilities and equipment that are available. But remember to pick activities that all of your wrestlers can do. If you have some athletes who cannot swim, for instance, do not use that as an activity in an event.

The activities should be easy to administer and have a minimum amount of rules. Nonetheless, require your athletes to perform all of the activities in a strict manner. Suppose, for example, that you use push-ups as an activity and your rules state that the chest must touch the floor, the arms must be completely extended and the body must remain straight. If so, your wrestlers should not be given credit for any push-ups that fail to meet those criteria. Yeah, you want your wrestlers to enjoy the events but at no time should they use poor technique simply to obtain a better performance.

Here is a look at some events that should prove to be quite popular with your athletes:

Fitness Challenge

The Fitness Challenge is a one-day event that can involve any number of activities. This event lends itself well to team competition.

Teams can be chosen several different ways. One option is to divide your roster into two teams such that each team has a wrestler representing each weight class (provided, of course, that you have enough athletes to do so). After this initial distribution, any other wrestlers who remain can be randomly assigned to the two teams. Another option is to go by academic class. You could pit the freshmen and sophomores against the juniors and seniors or the freshmen and seniors against the sophomores and juniors. A third option is to hold a "draft" in which two event captains are designated to select two teams. If you have a large roster, go with more than two teams. Suggestion: Wait until the teams are chosen before you reveal the activities in the Fitness Challenge. This prevents the captains from loading their teams with individuals who are best suited for certain activities.

Standard-issue activities for the Fitness Challenge include a few aerobic efforts (such as a bike, run and/or row for a specified distance) along with a bar hang (a test of grip strength that is just like it sounds: hang from a chinning bar for as long as possible), bench press (do maximum repetitions – not a one-repetition maximum – using 100% of bodyweight for males and 50% of bodyweight for females) and vertical jump or standing broad jump. You can certainly incorporate other activities as well. So that there is a clear winner without the potential for a tie, use an odd number of activities.

Have each team enter four wrestlers per activity. Then, award points to the top four finishers in each activity. Give five points to the athlete who finishes first, three points for second, two

points for third and one point for fourth. So if one team had the first- and fourth-best performances in an activity, that would be worth six points; and if another team had the second- and third-best performances in the same activity, that would be worth five points. The team that accumulates the highest point total for all of the activities in the Fitness Challenge wins the event.

Fitness Decathlon

An event that is sure to draw a great deal of interest and excitement as well as assess the overall conditioning of your wrestlers is a fitness decathlon. As the name suggests, the decathlon consists of 10 activities. They can be any 10 activities but, as noted earlier, pick ones that are easy to administer and have a minimum amount of rules. Also, try to use a mixture of activities that address such areas as aerobic fitness, muscular endurance, power and flexibility. Note that for aerobic fitness, it is important to use a variety of distances and times so as to target different places along the aerobic spectrum. For example, the decathlon can include a five-mile bike, three-mile run and 2,000-meter row. Although all three of these efforts are aerobic, they require a range of times to complete.

There are two recommended ways to implement the decathlon: One is to do two activities per week for five weeks; another is to do two activities per day for five days which, of course, is far more demanding and really shows you the recovery ability of your wrestlers. Regardless of whether you decide to do the decathlon over the course of five weeks or five days, examples of activity pairings are a (1) bike and bar hang; (2) row and stretch; (3) run and bench press; (4) stairclimb and broad jump; and (5) ladder climb and weight hold. As you can see, each of the pairings has one aerobic activity coupled with another activity that involves a different ingredient of fitness.

If you do not have access to any equipment whatsoever, you can do a bodyweight decathlon. Here, simply pick 10 activities that involve the bodyweight such as push-ups, sit-ups, squat thrusts (aka "bends and thrusts" or "burpees"), a static wall sit (for time), some type of distance run and/or sprint, a vertical jump or broad jump and so on. Not to be overlooked are a few other activities that need very little equipment such as dips, chins/pull-ups and a rope climb.

With 10 activities, how do you determine a victor? A good way to score the Fitness Decathlon is to have the athletes earn points relative to the performances of the other competitors. For each activity, give one point to the wrestler who finishes first, two points to the wrestler who finishes second and so on. If 20 wrestlers compete in an activity, then, the one who finishes last gets 20 points. The wrestler who accumulates the lowest number of points for the 10 activities wins the decathlon.

Fitness Relays

This event is meant specifically for team competition. Teams can be chosen similar to that described for the Fitness Challenge.

From their roster, each event captain selects three- or four-person relay teams for the activities. In a pull-up relay, for example, each relay team member does as many pull-ups as possible. If four members of one team do 12, 8, 5 and 4 pull-ups, they get credit for 29 pull-ups; if four members of another team do 11, 9, 7 and 3 pull-ups, they get credit for 30 pull-ups and would win that relay. The team that captures the most

relays wins the event.

Require the event captains to assign every wrestler on their roster to at least one relay team. However, it is suggested that you limit the number of relays that each wrestler can do. That way, one or two wrestlers won't dominate the event. Finally, have an odd number of activities so that there is a clear winner without the possibility of a tie.

Fitness Triathlon

In a typical triathlon, competitors perform a swim, bike and run of various distances. But there is nothing that says you have to use those same three activities for a fitness triathlon. In fact, you can offer a fitness triathlon made up of any three activities that you prefer. And you could choose activities to emphasize different aspects of fitness. To illustrate, you could have your wrestlers do a run, stairclimb and row to focus on aerobic fitness. Or you could have them do a bench press, bar hang and sit-up to focus on muscular endurance.

With such a myriad of activities from which to choose, you could have a "random" or "pot luck" triathlon. Here, you would simply select three activities at random. You could literally pull the names of three activities out of a hat. Understand, though, that the activities in the Fitness Triathlon must have the same units of measure. In other words, you can use activities that are based on either time or repetitions or distance. But you cannot use different combinations of the three. Think about it: A triathlon of a row, bench press and vertical jump would mean having to add three different types of measurements (namely, the time of effort, number of repetitions and distance of jump). So doing those three activities in a fitness triathlon would make it all but impossible to declare an overall winner.

Your wrestlers can do the Fitness Triathlon as individuals or teams. Remember that if you administer the triathlon as an individual event in the traditional manner, however, the transition time between the three activities is counted in the overall time. So if you want to use bikes, rowers, treadmills and/or any other specialized equipment and have a large number of wrestlers participating, it is extremely difficult to manage the event unless you are blessed with an abundance of time and/or equipment. But for a team competition, you do not have to worry about transition time. Just select three-person teams and have each of the wrestlers do one of the three activities. If you have 30 wrestlers on your roster, then, you would have 10 three-person teams. Suppose that you had a fitness triathlon that is comprised of a three-mile run, 100-floor stairclimb and 2,000-meter row. If Wrestler #1 runs three miles in 21:20, Wrestler #2 climbs 100 floors in 15:15 and Wrestler #3 rows 2,000 meters in 7:30, their combined effort is 44:05.

Fitness Tournament

This event is set-up like a wrestling tournament. The main difference is that each round of the Fitness Tournament is a different activity. The first round might be a five-mile bike, the second round a bar hang, the third round a three-mile run and so on. The winners of the match-ups advance to the next round (although you could allow for "wrestle-backs"). Do a round of the tournament every day or two.

If you have a small roster, randomly place your wrestlers into one bracket; if you have a large roster, go with four designated "regions" similar to the NCAA Basketball Tournament. A nifty

way is to have regions for freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. This guarantees that one wrestler from each of those academic classes are represented in the "Final Four."

YPF Program

An established and recognized fitness event is the United States Marine Corps Youth Physical Fitness (YPF) Program. It is patterned after the Physical Fitness Test that is given to all Marine recruits and active-duty personnel. The YPF Program consists of five activities: sit-ups, push-ups, a standing broad jump, pull-ups and a 300-yard shuttle run (done in that sequence). The participants get three minutes of recovery between activities, making this a relatively quick but highly challenging event.

Many high schools have their own competitions to determine who will represent them against other schools in local, state and regional meets. There is also a national meet that is currently held at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, California.

For a detailed look at the rules and point system for the five activities – or to obtain more information about the YPF Program – go to the U. S. Marines Youth Foundation website www.marineyouthfoundation.org. On the left side of the home page, click on the link for "High School Program." You can also call the organization at 703-207-9690 or 888-USMC-FIT (888-876-2348).

Stand-Alone Events

All of the activities that you employ for any of the previous events can be used as stand-alone events. Try to mix the events so that you are assessing different elements of fitness throughout your off-season training.

THE LAST REP

By no means is this an exhaustive list of events. You can use your imagination to create additional ones.

To stir up school pride and spirit, use your school name and nickname for the team events such as Coughlin High versus the Crusaders. Or use your school colors such as the Red Team versus the Blue Team. And to increase the interest and excitement, post the results of the events in a prominent area of your school. The postings will surely draw attention from not only your wrestlers but curious students as well. While on the subject, do not post or reveal any results until everyone has done a particular activity. It is not fair to those who have completed

the activity if their results are "public knowledge" and, thus, can be used by others as a target.


All of your wrestlers do not necessarily have to participate in an activity at the same time. If specialized equipment is used – such as bikes and stairclimbers – there might not be enough available to accommodate all of your wrestlers thereby prohibiting face-to-face competition. The best way is to let your athletes know what activity is to be done during a certain week or on a certain day, give them the rules for its performance and then task them with completing their assignment. After this has been accomplished, have them report their results directly to you.

Do not try to cram too many events into one off-season. Instead, pick and schedule no more than a handful. Suppose that you have a 10-week period after the state wrestling tournament for off-season conditioning. You might have a fitness triathlon in Week #2, a bike contest in Week #4, a fitness relay in Week #6, a rope-climb contest in Week #8 and culminate your off-season training with a fitness decathlon in Week #10. Naturally, your athletes would continue to do their regular program of strength and conditioning several times per week throughout their off-season training.

Matt Brzycki has authored, co-authored or edited 16 books on strength and fitness including four that are devoted to wrestling. The four are available at all major bookstores or through Cardinal Publishers Group (800-296-0481).


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